

# THE SPURGEON SERMON COLLECTION, VOL. 3

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# LOVE'S LOGIC

## SERMON NO. 1008

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***“We love him because he first loved us.” —  1 John 4:19.***

THIS is a great doctrinal truth, and I might with much propriety preach a doctrinal sermon from it, of which the sum and substance would be the sovereign grace of God. God's love is evidently prior to ours: “He first loved us.” It is also clear enough from the text that God's love is the cause of ours, for “We love him because he first loved us.” Therefore, going back to old time, or rather before all time, when we find God loving us with an everlasting love, we gather that the reason of his choice is not because we loved him, but because he willed to love us. His reasons, and he had reasons (for we read of the counsel of his will), are known to himself, but they are not to be found in any inherent goodness in us, or which was foreseen to be in us. We were chosen simply because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. He loved us because he would love us. The gift of his dear Son, which was a close consequent upon his choice of his people, was too great a sacrifice on God's part to have been drawn from him by any goodness in the creature. It was not possible for the highest piety to have deserved so vast a boon as the gift of the Only-begotten; it was not possible for any thing in man to have merited the incarnation and the passion of the Redeemer. Our redemption, like our election, springs from the spontaneous self-originating love of God. And our regeneration, in which we are made actual partakers of the divine blessings in Jesus Christ, was not of us, nor by us. We were not converted because we were already inclined that way, neither were we regenerated because some good thing was in us by nature; but we owe our new birth entirely to his potent love, which dealt with us effectually turning us from death to life, from darkness to light and from the alienation of our mind and the enmity of our

spirit into that delightful path of love, in which we are now travelling to the skies. As believers on Christ's name we "were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The sum and substance of the text is that God's uncaused love, springing up within himself, has been the sole means of bringing us into the condition of loving him. Our love to him is like a trickling rill, speeding its way to the ocean because it first came from the Ocean. All the rivers run into the sea, but their floods first arose from it: the clouds that were exhaled from the mighty main distilled in showers and filled the water-brooks. Here was their first cause and prime origin; and, as if they recognised the obligation, they pay tribute in return to the parent source. The ocean love of God, so broad that even the wing of imagination could not traverse it, sends forth its treasures of the rain of grace, which drop upon our hearts, which are as the pastures of the wilderness; they make our hearts to overflow, and in streams of gratitude the life imparted flows back again to God. All good things are of thee, Great God; thy goodness creates our good; thine infinite love to us draws forth our love to thee.

But, dear friends, I trust after many years of instruction in the doctrines of our holy faith, I need not keep to the beaten doctrinal track, but may lead you in a parallel path, in which the same truth may be from another point. I purpose to preach an experimental sermon, and possibly this will be even more in accordance with the run of the passage and the mind of its writer, than a doctrinal discourse. We shall view the text as a fact which we have tested and proved in our own consciousness. Under this aspect the statement of the text is this: — a sense of the love of God to us is the main cause of our love to him. When we believe, know, and feel that God loves us, we, as a natural result, love him in return; and in proportion as our knowledge increases, our faith strengthens, our conviction deepens that we are really beloved of God; we, from the very constitution of our being, are constrained to yield our hearts to God in return. The discourse of this morning, therefore, will run in that channel. God grant it may be blessed to each of us by his Holy Spirit.

**I.** At the outset we will consider THE INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY OF LOVE TO GOD IN THE HEART.

There are some graces which in their vigor are not absolutely essential to the bare existence of spiritual life, though very important for its healthy growth; but love to God must be in the heart, or else there is no grace there whatever. If any man love not God, he is not a renewed man. Love to God is a mark which is always set upon Christ's sheep, and never set upon any others. In enlarging upon this most important truth, I would all your attention to the connection of the text. You will find in the seventh verse of this chapter, that love to God is set down as being a necessary mark of the new birth. "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." I have no right, therefore, to believe that I am a regenerated person unless my heart truly and sincerely loves God. It is vain for me, if I love not God, to quote the register which records an ecclesiastical ceremony, and say that this regenerated me; it certainly did no such thing, or the sure result would have followed. If I have been regenerated I may not be perfect, but this one thing I can say, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." When by believing we receive the privilege to become the sons of God, we receive also the nature of sons, and with filial love we cry, "Abba, Father." There is no exception to this rule; if a man loves not God, neither is he born of God. Show me a fire without heat, then show me regeneration that does not produce love to God; for as the sun must give forth its light, so must a soul that has been created anew by divine grace display its nature by sincere affection towards God." "Ye must be born again," but ye are not born again unless ye love God. How indispensable, then, is love to God.

In the eighth verse we are told also that love to God is a mark of our knowing God. True knowledge is essential to salvation. God does not save us in the dark. He is our "light and our salvation." We are renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created us. Now, "he that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love." All you have ever been taught from the pulpit, all you have ever studied from the Scriptures, all you have ever gathered from the learned, all you have collected from the libraries, all this is no knowledge of God at all unless you love God; for in true religion, to love and to know God are synonymous terms. Without love you remain in ignorance still, ignorance of the most unhappy and ruinous kind. All attainments are transitory, if love be not as a salt to preserve them; tongues must cease and knowledge must vanish away; love alone abides

for ever. This love you must have or be a fool for ever. All the children of the true Zion are taught of the Lord, but you are not taught of God unless you love God. See then that to be devoid of love to God is to be devoid of all true knowledge of God, and so of all salvation.

Further, the chapter teaches us that love to God is the root of love to others. The eleventh verse says, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” Now no man is a Christian who does not love Christians. He, who, being in the church, is yet not of it heart and soul, is but an intruder in the family. But since love to our brethren springs out of love to our one common father, it is plain that we must have love to that father, or else we shall fail in one of the indispensable marks of the children of God. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren;” but we cannot truly love the brethren unless we love the father; therefore, lacking love to God, we lack love to the church, which is an essential mark of grace.

Again, keeping to the run of the passage, you will find by the eighteenth verse, that love to God is a chief means of that holy peace which is an essential mark of a Christian. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” but where there is no love there is no such peace, for fear, which hath torment, distresses the soul; hence love is the indispensable companion of faith, and when they come together, peace is the result. Where there is fervent love to God there is set up a holy familiarity with God, and from this flow satisfaction, delight, and rest. Love must co-operate with faith and cast out fear, so that the soul may have boldness before God. Oh! Christian, thou canst not have the nature of God implanted within thee by regeneration, it cannot reveal itself in love to the brotherhood, it cannot blossom with the fair flowers of peace and joy, except thine affection be set upon God. Let him then be thine exceeding joy. Delight thyself also in the Lord. O love the Lord ye his saints.

We also see, if we turn again to St. John’s epistle and pursue his observations to the next chapter and the third verse, that love is the spring of true obedience. “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” Now a man who is not obedient to God’s

commandments is evidently not a true believer; for, although good works do not save us, yet, being saved, believers are sure to produce good works. Though the fruit be not the root of the tree, yet a well rooted tree will, in its season, bring forth its fruits. So, though the keeping of the commandments does not make me a child of God, yet, being a child of God, I shall be obedient to my heavenly Father. But this I cannot be unless I love God. A mere external obedience, a decent formal recognition of the laws of God, is not obedience in God's sight. He abhors the sacrifice where not the heart is found. I must obey because I love, or else I have not in spirit and in truth obeyed at all. See then, that to produce the indispensable fruits of saving faith, there must be love to God; for without it, they would be unreal and indeed impossible.

I hope it is not necessary for me to pursue this argument any further. Love to God is as natural to the renewed heart as love to its mother is to a babe. Who needs to reason a child into love? As certainly as you have the life and nature of God in you, you will seek after the Lord. As the spark, because it has in it the nature of fire, ascends aloft to seek the sun, so will your new-born spirit seek her God, from whom she has derived her life. Search yourselves, then, and see whether you love God or no. Put your hands on your hearts, and as in the sight of him, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, answer to him; make him your confessor at this hour; answer this one question: "Lovest thou me?" I trust very many of you will be able to say —

***"Yes, we love thee and adore;  
Oh, for grace to love thee more."***

This much was necessary to bring us to the second step of our discourse. May the Holy Spirit lead us onward.

**II.** You see the indispensable importance of love to God: let us now learn THE SOURCE AND SPRING OF TRUE LOVE TO GOD. "We love him because he first loved us." Love to God, wherever it really exists, has been created in the bosom by a belief of God's love to us. No man loves God till he knows that God loves him; and every believer loves God for this reason first and chiefly, that God loves him. He has seen himself to be unworthy of divine favor, yet he has believed God's love in the gift of his dear Son, and he has accepted the atonement that Christ has made as a proof of

God's love, and now being satisfied of the divine affection towards him, he of necessity loves his God.

Observe, then, that love to God does not begin in the heart from any disinterested admiration of the nature of God. I believe that, after we have loved God because he first loved us, we may so grow in grace as to love God for what he is. I suppose it is possible for us to be the subjects of a state of heart in which our love spends itself upon the loveliness of God in his own person: we may come to love him because he is so wise, so powerful, so good, so patient, so everything that is lovable. This may be produced within us as the ripe fruit of maturity in the divine life, but it is never the first spring and fountain of the grace of love in any man's heart. Even the apostle John, the man who had looked within the veil and seen the excellent glory beyond any other man, and who had leaned his head upon the bosom of the Lord, and had seen the Lord's holiness, and marked the inimitable beauty of the character of the incarnate God, even John does not say, "We love him because we admire him," but "We love him because he first loved us." For see, brethren, if this kind of love which I have mentioned, which is called the love of disinterested admiration, were required of a sinner, I do not see how he could readily render it. There are two gentlemen of equal rank in society, and the one is not at all obliged to the other; now, they, standing on an equality, can easily feel a disinterested admiration of each other's characters, and a consequent disinterested affection; but I, a poor sinner, by nature sunk in the mire, full of everything that is evil, condemned, guilty of death, so that my only desert is to be cast into hell, am under such obligations to my Savior and my God, that it would be idle for me to talk about a disinterested affection for him, since I owe to him my life, my all. Besides, until I catch the gleams of his mercy and his loving-kindness to the guilty, his holy, just, and righteous character are not loveable to me, I dread the purity which condemns my defilement, and shudder at the justice which will consume me for my sin. Do not, O seeker, trouble your heart with nice distinctions about disinterested love, but be you content with the beloved disciple to love Christ because he first loved you.

Again, our love to God does not spring from the self-determining power of the will. I greatly question whether anything does in the world, good or bad. There are some who set up the will as a kind of deity, — it doeth as it

wills with earth and heaven; but in truth the will is not a master but a servant. To the sinner his will is a slave; and in the saint, although the will is set free, it is still blessedly under bonds to God. Men do not will a thing because they will it, but because their affections, their passions, or their judgments influence their wills in that direction. No man can stand up and truly say, "I, unbiassed and unaided, will to love God and I will not to love Satan." Such proud self-assuming language would prove him a liar; the man would be clearly a worshipper of himself. A man can only love God when he has perceived some reasons for so doing; and the first argument for loving God, which influences the intellect so as to turn the affections, is the reason mentioned in the text, "We love him because he first loved us."

Now, having thus set the text in a negative light, let us look at it in a more positive manner.

It is certain, beloved brethren, that faith in the heart always precedes love. We first believe the love of God to us before we love God in return. And, Oh what an encouraging truth this is. I, a sinner, do not believe that God loves me because I feel I love him; but I first believe that he loves me, sinner as I am, and then having believed that gracious fact, I come to love my Benefactor in return. Perhaps some of you seekers are saying to yourselves, "Oh, that we could love God, for then we could hope for mercy." That is not the first step. Your first step is to believe that God loves you, and when that truth is fully fixed in your soul by the Spirit, a fervent love to God will spontaneously issue from your soul, even as flowers willingly pour forth their fragrance under the influence of the dew and the sun. Every man that ever was saved had to come to God not as a lover of God, but as a sinner, and to believe in God's love to him as a sinner. We all wish to take money in our sacks when we go down hungry to this Egypt to buy the bread of life; but it must not be, heaven's bread is given to us freely, and we must accept it freely without money and without price. Do you say, "I do not feel in my heart one good emotion; I do not appear to possess one good thought; I fear I have no love to God at all." Do not remain in unbelief until you feel this love, for if you do, you will never believe at all. You ought to love God, it is true, but you never will till you believe him, and especially believe in his love as revealed in his only begotten Son. If you come to God in Christ, and believe this simple



message. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," you shall find your heart going out after God. "Whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life;" believest thou this? Canst thou now believe in Jesus; that is, trust him? Then, Christ died for thee; Christ the Son of God, in thy stead, suffered for thy guilt. God gave his only Son to die for thee. "Oh," saith one, "if I believed that, how I would love God !" Yes, indeed, thou wouldst, and that is the only consideration which can make thee do so. Thou, a sinner, must take Christ to be thy Savior, and then love to God shall spring up spontaneously in thy soul, as the grass after showers. Love believed is the mother of love returned. The planet reflects light, but first of all it receives it from the sun; the heliotrope turns its face to the orb of day, but first the sunbeams warm and woo it. You shall turn to God, and delight in God, and rejoice in God; but it must be because you first of all believe, and know, and confide in the love of God to you. "Oh," saith one, "it cannot be that God should love an unloving sinner, that the pure One should love the impure, that the Ruler of all should love his enemy." Hear what God saith: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, for the heavens are higher than the earth; so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." You think that God loves men because they are godly, but listen to this: "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Think of his "great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." God has love in his heart towards those who have nothing in them to love. He loves you, poor soul, who feel that you are most unloveable; loves you who mourn over a stony heart, which will not warm or melt with love to him. Thus saith the Lord: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." O that God's gracious voice this morning might so call some of his poor wandering ones that they may come and believe his love to them, and then cast themselves at his feet to be his servants for ever.

Brethren, rest assured that in proportion as we are fully persuaded of God's love to us, we shall be affected with love to him. Do not let the

devil tempt you to believe that God does not love You because your love is feeble; for if he can in any way weaken your belief in God's love to you, he cuts off or diminishes the flow of the streams which feed the sacred grace of love to God. If I lament that I do not love God as I ought, that is a holy regret; but if I, therefore, conclude that God's love to me is the less because of this, I deny the light because my eye is dim, and I deprive myself also of the power to increase in love. Let me rather think more and more of the greatness of God's love to me, as I see more and more my unworthiness of it; the more a sinner I am, let me the more fully see how great must be that love which embraces such a sinner as I am; and then, as I receive a deeper sense of the divine mercy, I shall feel the more bound to gratitude and constrained to affection. O for a great wave of love, to carry us right out into the ocean of love.

Observe, beloved brethren, day by day the deeds of God's love to you in the gift of food and raiment, and in the mercies of this life, and especially in the covenant blessings which God gives you, the peace which he sheds abroad in your hearts, the communion which he vouchsafes to you with himself and his blessed Son, and the answers to prayer which he grants you. Note well these things, and if you consider them carefully, and weigh their value, you will be accumulating the fuel on which love feeds its consecrated flame. In proportion as you see in every good gift a new token of your Father's love, in that proportion will you make progress in the sweet school of love. Oh, it is heavenly living to taste God's love in every morsel of bread we eat; it is blessed living to know that we breathe an atmosphere purified and made fragrant with divine love, that love protects us while we sleep, changing like a silken curtain all around our bed, and love opens the eyelids of the morning to smile upon us when we wake. Ah, even when we are sick, it is love that chastens us; when we are impoverished, love relieves us of a burden; love gives and love takes; love cheers and love smites. We are compassed about with love, above, beneath, around, within, without. If we could but recognize this, we should become as flames of fire, ardent and fervent towards our God. Knowledge and observation are admirable nurses of our infant love.

And, ah, the soul grows rich in love to God when she rests on the bosom of divine lovingkindness. You, who are tossed about with doubts and fears as to whether you are now accepted or shall persevere to the end, you call

scarcely guess the ardors of heart which inflame those saints who have learned to cast themselves wholly upon Jesus, and know beyond a doubt his love immutable. Whether I sink or swim, I have no hope but in Christ, my life, my all.

*“I know that safe with him remains,  
Protected by his power,  
What I’ve committed to his hands  
Till the decisive hour:”*

And in proportion as I am thus scripturally confident, and rest in my Lord, will my love to him engross all my heart, and, consecrate my life to the Redeemer’s glory.

Beloved, I desire to make this very clear, that to feel love to God we must tread along the road of faith. Truly, this is not a hard or perilous way but one prepared by infinite wisdom. It is a road Suitable for sinners, and indeed saints must come that way too. If thou wouldst love God, do not look within thee to see whether this grace or that be as it ought to be, but look to thy God, and read his eternal love his boundless love, his costly love, which gave Christ for thee; then shall thy love drink in fresh life and vigor.

Remember wherever there is love to God in the soul it is an argument that God loves that soul. I recollect meeting once with a Christian woman who said she knew she loved God, but, she was afraid God did not love her. That is a fear so preposterous that it ought never to occur to anybody. You would not love God in deed and in truth unless he had shed abroad his love in your heart in a measure. But on the other hand, our not loving God is not a conclusive argument that God does not love us; else might the sinner be afraid to come to God. O loveless sinner, with heart unquickened and chill, the voice of God calls even thee to Christ. Even to the dead in sin, his voice saith “Live.” Whilst thou art yet polluted in thy blood, cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, the Lord of mercy passes by, and says “live.” His mighty sovereignty comes forth dressed in robes of love, and he touches thee the unloveable, the loveless, the depraved, degraded sinner, at enmity with God, — he touches thee in all thine alienation and he lifts thee out of it and makes thee to love him, not for thine own sake, but for his name sake and for his mercy sake. Thou

hadst no love at all to him, but all the love lay in him alone; and therefore he began to bless thee, and will continue to bless thee world without end, if thou art a believer in Jesus. In the bosom of the Eternal are the deep springs of all love.

**III.** This leads us, in the third place, to consider for a moment THE REVIVAL OF OUR LOVE. It is sadly probable that there are in this house some who once loved God very earnestly, but now they have declined and become grievously indifferent; God's love to us never changes, but ours too often sinks to a low ebb. Perhaps some of you have become so cold in your affections, that it is difficult to be sure that you ever did love God at all. It may be that your life has become lax, so as to deserve the censure of the Church. You are a backslider and you are in a dangerous condition; yet, if there be indeed spiritual life in you, you will wish to return. You have gone astray like a lost sheep, but your prayer is, "seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments." Now, note well, that the cause which originated your love is the same which must restore it. You went to Christ as a sinner at first, and your first act was to believe the love of God to you when there was nothing in you that evidenced it. Go the same way again. Do not stop, my dear brother, to pump up love out of the dry well within yourself! Do not think it possible that love will come at your bidding. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned. Think of the Lord's unchanging grace, and you will feel the spring-time of love returning to your soul. Still doth the Lord reserve mercy for the sinful, still he waiteth to be gracious; he is as willing to receive you now that you have played the prodigal, as he was to have retained you at home in the bosom of his love. Many considerations ought to aid you, a backslider, to believe more in the love of God than ever you did. For think what love it must be that can invite you still to return, you, who after knowing so much have sinned against light and knowledge; you, who after having experienced so much, have given the lie to your profession. He might justly have cut you down, for you have cumbered the ground long enough. Surely, when Israel went astray from God, it was a clear proof to her of Jehovah's love when he graciously said, "They say if a man put away his wife, or she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return to her again?" Why, the answer in every bosom is "No !" Who would love a wife who had so polluted herself? But thus saith

the Lord, "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return unto me." What matchless love is this. Hear yet more of these gracious words, which you will find in the third chapter of Jeremiah's prophecy. "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Can you hear these words without emotion? Backslider! I pray thee take the wings of God's love to fly back to him with. But I hear you enquiring, Will he still receive me? Shall I be once more —

***"To the Father's bosom pressed,  
Once again a child confessed."***

It shall be so. Does he not declare that he is God and changes not, and therefore you are not consumed? Rekindled are the flames of love in the backslider's bosom when he feels all this to be true; he cries, "Behold, we come to thee for thou art the Lord our God." I pray you, then, any of you who are conscious of gross derelictions of duty, and wanderings of heart, do not ask Moses to lead you back to Christ, he knows the way to Sinai's flames, but not to Calvary's pardoning blood. Go to Christ himself at once. If you go to the law and begin to judge yourself, if you get the notion that you are to undergo a sort of spiritual quarantine, that you must pass through a mental purgatory before you may renew your faith in the Savior, you are mistaken. Come just as you are, bad as you are, hardened, cold, dead as you feel yourselves to be, come even so, and believe in the boundless love of God in Christ Jesus. Then shall come the deep repentance; then shall come the brokenness of heart; then shall come the holy jealousy, the sacred hatred of sin, and the refining of the soul from all her dross; then, indeed, all good things shall come to restore your soul, and lead you in the paths of righteousness. Do not look for these first; that would be looking for the effects before the cause. The great cause of love in the restored backslider must still be the love of God to him, to whom he clings with a faith that dares not let go its hold.

“But,” saith one, “I think it is very dangerous to tell the backslider to believe in God’s love, surely it will be gross presumption for him so to believe,” It is never presumptuous for a man to believe the truth: whether a statement be comfortable or uncomfortable, the presumption does not lie in the matter itself: but in its untruthfulness. I say again, it is never presumptuous to believe the truth. And this is the truth, that the Lord loves his prodigal sons still, and his stray sheep still, and he will devise means to bring his banished back again, that they perish not. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Remember here that the motive power which draws back the backslider again, is the cord of love, the band of a man, which makes him feel he must go back to God with weeping and repentance, because God loves him still. What man among you this morning hath a son who has disobeyed him and gone from him, and is living in drunkenness, and in all manner of lust? If you have in anger told him, so that he doubts it not, that you have struck his name out of your family, and will not regard him as a child any longer, do you think that your severity will induce him to return to you in love? Far from it. But suppose instead thereof, you still assure him that you love him; that there is always a place at your table for him, and a bed in your house for him, ay, and better still, a warm place in your heart for him; suppose he sees your tears and hears your prayers for him, will not this draw him? Yes, indeed, if be a son. It is even thus between thy God and thee, O backslider. Hear ye the Lord as he argues thy case within his own heart. “My people are bent to backsliding from me; though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man.” Surely, if anything will draw you back, this will. “Ah !” saith the wandering son, “my dear father loves me still. I will arise and go to him. I will not vex so tender a heart. I will be his loving son again. God does not say to you prodigals, who once professed his name, “I have unchilded you, I have cast you away,” but he says, “I love you still; and for my name’s sake will I restrain my wrath that I cut you not off.” Come to your

offended Father, and you shall find that he has not repented of his love, but will embrace you still.

**IV.** Time fails, but I must speak for a little, time or no time, upon the fourth point — THE PERFECTING OF OUR LOVE TO GOD.

Beloved, there are few of us who know much of the deeps of the love of God; our love is shallow; ah, how shallow! Love to God is like a great mountain. The majority of travelers view it from afar, or traverse the valley at its base: a few climb to a halting place on one of its elevated spurs, whence they see a portion of its sublimities: here and there an adventurous traveler climbs a minor peak, and views glacier and alp at closer range; fewest of all are those who scale the topmost pinnacle and tread the virgin snow. So in the Church of God. Every Christian abides under the shadow of divine love: a few enjoy and return that love to a remarkable degree: but there are few in this age sadly few, who reach to seraphic love, who ascend into the hill of the Lord, to stand where the eagle's eye hath not seen, and walk the path which the lion's welp hath never trodden, the high places of complete consecration and ardent self-consuming love. Now, mark you, it may be difficult to ascend so high, but there is one sure route, and only one, which the man must follow who would gain the sacred elevation. It is not the track of his works, nor the path of his own actions, but this, "We love him because he first loved us." John and the apostles confessed that thus they attained their love. For the highest love that ever glowed in human bosom there was no source but this — God first loved that man. Do you not see how this is? The knowledge that God loves me casts out my tormenting dread of God: and when this is expelled, there is room for abounding love to God. As fear goes out, love comes in at the other door. So the more faith in God the more room there is for soul-filling love.

Again, strong faith in God's love brings great enjoyment; our heart is glad, our soul is satisfied with marrow and fatness when we know that the whole heart of God beats towards us as forcibly as if we were the only creatures he had ever made, and his whole heart were wrapt up in us. This deep enjoyment creates the flaming love of which I have just now spoken.

If the ardent love of some saints often takes the shape of admiration of God, this arises from their familiarity with God, and this familiarity they never would have indulged in, unless they had known that he was their friend. A man could not speak to God as to a friend, unless he knew the love that God hath toward him. The more true his knowledge and the more sure, the more close his fellowship.

Brethren beloved, if you know that God has loved you, then you will feel grateful; every doubt will diminish your gratitude, but every grain of faith will increase it. Then as we advance in grace, love to God in our soul will excite desire after him. Those we love we long to be with; we count the hours that separate us; no place so happy as that in which we enjoy their society. Hence love to God produces a desire to be with him; a desire to be like him, a longing to be with him eternally in heaven, and this breaks us away from worldliness; this keeps us from idolatry, and thus has a most blessedly sanctifying effect upon us, producing that elevated character which is now so rare, but which wherever it exists is powerful for the good of the church and for the glory of God. Oh that we had many in this church who had reached the highest platform of piety. Would God we had a band of men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. It may help those who aspire to mount high in grace, if they keep in mind that every step they climb they must use the ladder which Jacob saw. The love of God to us is the only way to climb to the love of God.

And now I must spend a minute in putting the truth of my text to the test. I want you not to listen to me so much as to listen to your own hearts, and to God's word, a minute, if you are believers. What is it we have been talking about? It is God's love to us. Get the thought into your head a minute: "God loves me — not merely bears with me, thinks of me, feeds me, but loves me. Oh, it is a very sweet thing to feel that we have the love of a dear wife, or a kind husband; and there is much sweetness in the love of a fond child, or a tender mother; but to think that God loves me, this is infinitely better! Who is it that loves you? God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Almighty, All in all, does he love me? Even he? If all men, and all angels, and all the living creatures that are before the throne loved me, it were nothing to this — the Infinite loves me! And who is it that he loves? Me. The text saith, "us." "We love him because he first loved us." But this



is the personal point — he loves me, an insignificant nobody, full of sin — who deserved to be in hell; who loves him so little in return — God loves me. Beloved believer, does not this melt you? Does not this fire your soul? I know it does if it is really believed. It must. And how did he love me? He loved me so that he gave up his only begotten Son for me, to be nailed to the tree, and made to bleed and die. And what will come of it? Why, because he loved me and forgave me, — I am on the way to heaven, and within a few months, perhaps days, I shall see his face and sing his praises. He loved me before I was born; before a star begun to shine he loved me, and he has never ceased to do so all these years. When I have sinned he has loved me; when I have forgotten him he has loved me; and when in the days of my sin I cursed him, yet still he loved me; and he will love me when my knees tremble, and my hair is grey with age, “even to hoar hairs” he will bear and carry his servant; and he will love me when the world is on a blaze, and love me for ever, and for ever. Oh, chew the cud of this blessed thought; roll it under your tongue as a dainty morsel; sit down this afternoon, if you have leisure, and think of nothing but this — his great love wherewith he loves you; and if you do not feel your heart bubbling with a good matter, if you do not feel your soul yearning towards God, and heaving big with strong emotions of love to God, then I am much mistaken. This is so powerful a truth, and you are so constituted as a Christian as to be wrought upon by this truth, that if it be believed and felt, the consequence must be that you will love him because he first loved you. God bless you, brethren and sisters, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  John 4:1-5.

# TRAVAILING FOR SOULS

## SERMON NO. 1009

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
SEPTEMBER 3RD, 1871,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

*“As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.”*

— *2nd* **Isaiah 66:8.**

ISRAEL had fallen into the lowest condition, but an inward yearning of heart was felt in the midst of God's people for the return of the divine blessing; and no sooner had this anxious desire become intense, than God heard the voice of its cry, and the blessing came. It was so at the time of the restoration of the captives from Babylon, and it was most evidently so in the days of our Lord. A faithful company had continued still to expect the coming of the Lord's anointed messenger; they waited till he should suddenly come in his temple; the twelve tribes, represented by an elect remnant, cried day and night unto the Most High, and when at last their prayers reached the fullness of vehemence, and their anxiety wrought in them the deepest agony of spirit, then the Messiah came; the light of the gentiles, and the glory of Israel. Then began the age of blessedness in which the barren woman did keep house and become the joyful mother of children. The Holy Ghost was given, and multitudes were born to the church of God, yea we may say, a nation was born in a day. The wilderness and the solitary place were glad for them, and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose. We are not, however, about to enter into the particular application of our text as Isaiah uttered it: the great declarations of revelation are applicable to all cases, and, once true, they stand fast for ever and ever. Earnestly desiring that God may give a large spiritual blessing to his church this morning, through the subject to which my mind has been directed, I shall first ask you to note that in order to the obtaining of an increase to the church, there must be travail, and that, secondly, this travail is frequently followed by surprising results. I shall

then have to show why both the travail and the result are desirable, and pronounce woe on those who stand back and hinder it, and a blessing on such as shall be moved by God's own Spirit to travail for souls.

**I.** It is clear from the text, "As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children," that THERE MUST BE THE TRAVAIL before there will be the spiritual birth.

Let me first establish this fact from history. Before there has fallen a great benediction upon God's people, it has been preceded by great searchings of heart. Israel was so oppressed in Egypt, that it would have been very easy, and almost a natural thing, for the people to become so utterly crushed in spirit as to submit to be hereditary bond-slaves, making the best they could of their miserable lot; but God would not have it so; he meant to bring them out "with a high hand and an outstretched arm." Before, however, he began to work, he made them begin to cry. Their sighs and cries came up into the ears of God, and he stretched out his hand to deliver them. Doubtless, many a heart-rending appeal was made to heaven by mothers when their babes were torn from their breasts to be cast into the river. With what bitterness did they ask God to look upon his poor people Israel, and avenge them of their oppressors. The young men bowed under the cruel yoke and groaned, while hoary sires, smarting under ignominious lashes from the taskmaster, sighed and wept before the God of Israel. The whole nation cried, "O God visit us; God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, remember thy covenant, and deliver us." This travail brought its result; for the Lord smote the field of Zoan with mighty plagues, and forth from under the bondage of the sons of Misraim, the children of Israel marched with joy.

As we shall not have time to narrate many instances, let us take a long leap in history to the days of David. The era of the son of Jesse was evidently a time of religious revival. God was honored and his service maintained in the midst of Judea's land in the days of the royal bard; but it is clear to readers of the Scriptures that David was the subject of spiritual throes and pangs of the most intense kind. His bosom throbbed and heaved like that of a man made fit to be the leader of a great revival. What yearnings he had! He thirsted after God, after the living God! What petitions he poured forth that God would visit Zion, and make the vine which he had planted

to flourish once again. Even when his own sins pressed heavily upon him, he could not end his personal confession without entreating the Lord to build the walls of Jerusalem, and to do good in his good pleasure unto Zion. Now, David was only the mouth of hundreds of others, who with equal fervency cried unto God that the blessing might rest upon his people. There was much soul-travail in Israel and Judah, and the result was that the Lord was glorified, and true religion flourished.

Remember also the days of Josiah, the king. You know well now the book of the law was found neglected in the temple, and when it was brought before the king, he rent his clothes, for he saw that the nation had revolted, and that wrath must come upon it to the uttermost. The young king's heart, which was tender, for he feared God, was ready to break with anguish to think of the misery that would come upon his people on account of their sins. Then there came a glorious reformation which purged the land of idols, and caused the passover to be observed as never before. Travails of heart among the godly produced the delightful change.

It was the same with the work of Nehemiah. His book begins with a description of the travail of his heart. He was a patriot, a man of nervous, excitable temperament, and keen sensibility for God's honor, and when his soul had felt great bitterness and longing, then he arose to build, and a blessing rested on his efforts.

In the early dawn of Christian history, there was a preparation of the church before it received an increase. Look at the obedient disciples sitting in the upper room, waiting with anxious hope; every heart there had been ploughed with anguish by the death of the Lord, each one was intent to receive the promised boon of the Spirit. There, with one heart and one mind, they tarried, but not without wrestling prayer, and so the Comforter was given, and three thousand souls were given also.

The like living zeal and vehement desire have always been perceptible in the Church of God before any season of refreshing. Think not that Luther was the only man that wrought the Reformation. There were hundreds who sighed and cried in secret in the cottages of the Black Forest, in the homes of Germany, and on the hills of Switzerland. There were hearts breaking for the Lord's appearing in strange places, they might have been found in the palaces of Spain, in the dungeons of the Inquisition, among

the canals of Holland, and the green lanes of England. Women, as they hid their Bibles, lest their lives should be forfeited, cried out in spirit, "O God, how long?" There were pains as of a woman in travail, in secret places there were tears and bitter lamentations, on the high places of the field there were mighty strivings of spirit, and so at length there came that grand revulsion which made the Vatican to rock and reel from its foundation to its pinnacle. There has been evermore in the history of the church, the travail before there has been the result.

And this, dear friends, while it is true on the large scale, is true also in every individual case. A man with no sensibility or compassion for other men's souls, may accidentally be the means of a conversion; the good word which he utters will not cease to be good because the speaker had no right to declare God's statutes. The bread and meat which were brought to Elijah were not less nourishing because the ravens brought them, but the ravens remained ravens still. A hard-hearted man may say a good thing which God will bless, but, as a rule, those who bring souls to Christ are those who first of all have felt an agony of desire that souls should be saved. This is imaged to us in our Master's character. He is the great Savior of men; but before he could save others, he learned in their flesh to sympathize with them. He wept over Jerusalem, he sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane; he was, and is, a high priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. As the Captain of our salvation, in bringing many sons unto glory he was made perfect by sufferings. Even Christ went not forth to preach until he had spent nights in intercessory prayer, and uttered strong cryings and tears for the salvation of his hearers. His ministering servants who have been most useful, have always been eagerly desirous to be so. If any minister can be satisfied without conversions, he shall have no conversions. God will not force usefulness on any man. It is only when our heart breaks to see men saved, that we shall be likely to see sinners' hearts broken. The secret of success lies in all-consuming zeal, all-subduing travail for souls. Read the sermons of Wesley and of Whitfield, and what is there in them? It is no severe criticism to say that they are scarcely worthy to have survived, and yet those sermons wrought marvels, and well they might, for both preachers could truly say —

*“The love of Christ doth me constrain  
To seek the wandering souls of men;  
With cries, entreaties, tears, to save,  
To snatch them from the fiery wave.”*

In order to understand such preaching, you need to see and hear the man, you want his tearful eye, his glowing countenance, his pleading tone, his bursting heart. I have heard of a great preacher who objected to having his sermons printed, “Because,” said he, “you cannot print me.” That observation is very much to the point. A soul-winner throws himself into what he says. As I have sometimes said, we must ram ourselves into our cannons, we must fire ourselves at our hearers, and when we do this, then, by God’s grace, their hearts are often carried by storm. Do any of you desire your children’s conversions? You shall have them saved when you agonize for them. Many a parent who has been privileged to see his son walking in the truth, will tell you that before the blessing came he had spent many hours in prayer and in earnest pleading with God, and then it was that the Lord visited his child and renewed his soul. I have heard of a young man who had grown up and left the parental roof, and through evil influences, had been enticed into holding skeptical views. His father and mother were both earnest Christians, and it almost broke their hearts to see their son so opposed to the Redeemer. On one occasion they induced him to go with them to hear a celebrated minister. He accompanied them simply to please them, and for no higher motive. The sermon happened to be upon the glories of heaven. It was a very extraordinary sermon, and was calculated to make every Christian in the audience to leap for joy. The young man was much gratified with the eloquence of the preacher, but nothing more; he gave him credit for superior oratorical ability, and was interested in the sermon, but felt none of its power. He chanced to look at his father and mother during the discourse, and was surprised to see them weeping. He could not imagine why they, being Christian people, should sit and weep under a sermon which was most jubilant in its strain. When he reached home, he said, “Father, we have had a capital sermon, but I could not understand what could make you sit there and cry, and my mother too?” His father said, “My dear son, I certainly had no reason to weep concerning myself, nor your mother, but I could not help thinking all through the sermon about you, for alas, I have no hope that you will be a partaker in the bright joys which await the righteous. It breaks my heart to

think that you will be shut out of heaven.” His mother said, “The very same thoughts crossed my mind, and the more the preacher spoke of the joys of the saved, the more I sorrowed for my dear boy that he should never know what they were.” That touched the young man’s heart, led him to seek his father’s God, and before long he was at the same communion table, rejoicing in the God and Savior whom his parents worshiped. The travail comes before the bringing forth; the earnest anxiety, the deep emotion within, precede our being made the instruments of the salvation of others.

I think I have established the fact; now for a minute or two let me show you the reason for it. Why is it that there must be this anxiety before desirable results are gained? For answer, it might suffice us to say that God has so appointed it. It is the order of nature. The child is not born into the world without the sorrows of the mother, nor is the bread which sustains life procured from the earth without toil: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,” was a part of the primeval curse. Now, as it is in the natural, so is it in the spiritual; there shall not come the blessing we seek, without first of all the earnest yearning for it. Why, it is so even in ordinary business. We say, “No sweat no sweet,” “no pains no gains,” “No mill no meal.” If there be no labor there shall be no profit. He that would be rich must toil for it; he that would acquire fame must spend and be spent to win it. It is ever so. There must ever be the travail and then the desire cometh. God has so appointed it: let us accept the decree.

But better still, he has ordained this for our good. If souls were given us without any effort, anxiety or prayer it would be our loss to have it so, because the anxieties which throb within a compassionate spirit exercise his graces; they produce grateful love to God; they try his faith in the power of God to save others; they drive him to the mercy-seat; they strengthen his patience and perseverance, and every grace within the man is educated and increased by his travail for souls. As labor is now a blessing, so also is soul-travail; men are fashioned more fully into the likeness of Christ thereby, and the whole church is by the same emotion quickened into energy. The fire of our own spiritual life is fanned by that same breath which our prayers invite to come from the four winds to breath upon the slain. Besides, dear friends, the zeal that God excites within us is often the means of effecting the purpose which we desire.

After all, God does not give conversions to eloquence, but to heart. The power in the hand of God's Spirit for conversions is heart coming in contact with heart. This is God's battle-axe and weapons of war in his crusade. He is pleased to use the yearnings, longings, and sympathies of Christian men, as the means of compelling the careless to think, constraining the hardened to feel, and driving the unbelieving to consider. I have little confidence in elaborate speech and polished sentences, as the means of reaching men's hearts; but I have great faith in that simple-minded Christian woman, who must have souls converted or she will weep her eyes out over them; and in that humble Christian who prays day and night in secret, and then avails himself of every opportunity to address a loving word to sinners. The emotion we feel, and the affection we bear, are the most powerful implements of soul-winning. God the Holy Ghost usually breaks hard hearts by tender hearts.

Besides, the travail qualifies for the proper taking care of the offspring. God does not commit his new-born children to people who do not care to see conversions. If he ever allows them to fall into such hands, they suffer very serious loss thereby. Who is so fit to encourage a new-born believer as the man who first anguished before the Lord for his conversion? Those you have wept over and prayed for you will be sure to encourage and assist. The church that never travailed, should God send her a hundred converts, would be unfit to train them; she would not know what to do with little children, and would leave them to much suffering. Let us thank God, brethren, if he has given us any degree of the earnest anxiety and sympathy, which marked soul-winning men and women, and let us ask to have more for, in proportion as we have it, we shall be qualified to be the instruments in the hand of the Spirit, of nursing and cherishing God's sons and daughters.

Once more, there is a great benefit in the law which makes travail necessary to spiritual birth, because it secures all the glory to God. If you want to be lowered in your own esteem, try to convert a child. I would like those brethren who believe so much in free will, and the natural goodness of the human heart, to try some children that I could bring to them, and see whether they could break their hearts and make them love the Savior. Why, sir, you never think yourself so great a fool as after trying in your own strength to bring a sinner to the Savior. Oh! How often



have I come back defeated from arguing with an awakened person whom I have sought to comfort: I did think I had some measure of skill in handling sorrowful cases, but I have been compelled to say to myself, "What a simpleton I am! God the Holy Ghost must take this case in hand, for I am foiled." When one has tried in a sermon to reach a certain person who is living in sin, you learn afterwards that he enjoyed the sermon which he ought to have smarted under; then, you say, "Ah, now I see what a weak worm I am, and if good be done, God shall have the glory." Your longing, then, that others should be saved, and your vehemence of spirit, shall secure to God all the glory of his own work; and this is what the Lord is aiming at, for his glory he will not give to another, nor his praise to an arm of flesh.

And now, having established the fact, and shown the reasons for it, let us notice how this travail shows itself.

Usually when God intends greatly to bless a church, it will begin in this way: — Two or three persons in it are distressed at the low state of affairs, and become troubled even to anguish. Perhaps they do not speak to one another, or know of their common grief, but they begin to pray with flaming desire and untiring importunity. The passion to see the church revived rules them. They think of it when they go to rest, they dream of it on their bed, they muse on it in the streets. This one thing eats them up. They suffer great heaviness and continual sorrow in heart for perishing sinners; they travail in birth for souls. I have happened to become the center of certain brethren in this church; one of them said to me the other day, "O sir, I pray day and night for God to prosper our church; I long to see greater things; God is blessing us, but we want much more." I saw the deep earnestness of the man's soul, and I thanked him and thanked God heartily, thinking it to be a sure sign of a coming blessing. Sometime after, another friend, who probably now hears me speak, but who did not know any thing about the other, felt the same yearning, and must needs let me know it; he too is anxious, longing, begging, crying, for a revival; and thus from three or four quarters I have had the same message, and I feel hopeful because of these tokens for good. When the sun rises the mountain tops first catch the light, and those who constantly live near to God will be the first to feel the influence of the coming refreshing. The Lord give me a dozen importunate pleaders and lovers of souls, and by his

grace we will shake all London from end to end yet. The work would go on without the mass of you, Christians; many of you only hinder the march of the army; but give us a dozen lion-like, lamb-like men, burning with intense love to Christ and souls, and nothing will be impossible to their faith. The most of us are not worthy to unloose the shoe-latches of ardent saints. I often feel I am not so myself, but I aspire and long to be reckoned among them. Oh, may God give us this first sign of the travail in the earnest ones and twos.

By degrees the individuals are drawn together by sacred affinity, and the prayer-meetings become very different. The brother who talked twenty minutes of what he called prayer, and yet never asked for a single thing, gives up his oration and falls to pleading with many tears and broken sentences: while the friend who used to relate his experience and go through the doctrines of grace, and call that a prayer, forgets that rigmarole and begins agonizing before the throne. And not only this, but little knots here and there come together in their cottages, and in their little rooms cry mightily to God. The result will be that the minister, even if he does not know of the feeling in the hearts of his people, will grow fervent himself. He will preach more evangelically, more tenderly, more earnestly. He will be no longer formal, or cold, or stereotyped; he will be all alive. Meanwhile, not with the preacher only will be the blessing, but with his hearers who love the Lord. One will be trying a plan for getting in the young people; another will be looking after the strangers in the aisles, who come only now and then. One brother will make a vehement attempt to preach the gospel at the corner of the street; another will open a room down a dark court; another will visit lodging-houses and hospitals; all sorts of holy plans will be invented, and zeal will break out in many directions. All this will be spontaneous, nothing will be forced. If you want to get up a revival, as the term is, you can do it, just as you can grow tasteless strawberries in winter, by artificial heat. There are ways and means of doing that kind of thing but the genuine work of God needs no such planning and scheming; it is altogether spontaneous. If you see a snowdrop next February in your garden, you will feel persuaded that spring is on the way; the artificial-flower maker could put as many snow-drops there as you please, but that would be no index of coming spring. So you may get up an apparent zeal which will be no proof of God's

blessing; but when fervor comes of itself, without human direction or control, then is it of the Lord. When men's hearts heave and break, like the mould of the garden under the influence of the reviving life which lay buried there, then in very deed a benediction is on the way. Travail is no mockery, but a real agony of the whole nature. May such be seen in this our church, and throughout the whole Israel of God.

**II.** Now, with great brevity, let us consider that THE RESULT IS OFTEN VERY SURPRISING. It is frequently surprising for rapidity. "As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." God's works are not tied by time. The more spiritual a force is the less it lies within the chains of time. The electric current, which has a greater nearness to the spiritual than the grosser forms of materialism, is inconceivably rapid from that very reason, and by it time is all but annihilated. The influences of the Spirit of God are a force most spiritual, and more quick than any thing beneath the sun. As soon as we agonize in soul the Holy Spirit can, if he pleases, convert the person for whom we have pleaded. While we are yet speaking he hears, and before we call he answers. Some calculate the expected progress of a church by arithmetic; and I think I have heard of arithmetical sermons in which there have been ingenious calculations as to how many missionaries it would take to convert the world, and how much cash would be demanded. Now, there is no room here for the application of mathematics; spiritual forces are not calculable by an arithmetic which is most at home in the material universe. A truth which is calculated to strike the mind of one man to-day may readily enough produce a like effect upon a million minds to-morrow. The preaching which moves one heart needs not be altered to tell upon ten thousand. With God's Spirit our present instrumentalities will suffice to win the world to Jesus; without him, ten thousand times as much apparent force would be only so much weakness. The spread of truth, moreover, is not reckonable by time. During the ten years which ended in 1870, such wondrous changes were wrought throughout the world that no prophet would have been believed had he foretold them. Reforms have been accomplished in England, in the United States, in Germany, in Spain, in Italy, which according to ordinary reckoning, would have occupied at least one hundred years. Things which concern the mind cannot be subjected to those regulations of time which govern steamboats and railways; in such matters God's messengers are

flames of fire. The Spirit of God is able to operate upon the minds of men instantaneously: witness the case of Paul. Between now and to-morrow morning he could excite holy thought in all the minds of all the thousand millions of the sons of Adam; and if prayer were mighty enough, and strong enough, why should it not be done on some bright day? We are not straitened in him, we are straitened in our own bowels. All the fault lies there. Oh for the travail that would produce immediate results.

But the result is surprising, not only for its rapidity, but for the greatness of it. It is said, "Shall a nation be born at once?" As soon as ever Zion was in distress concerning her children, tens of thousands came and built up Jerusalem, and re-established her fallen state. So, in answer to prayer, God not only bestows speedy blessings, but great blessings. There were fervent prayers in that upper room "before the day of Pentecost had fully come," and what a great answer it was when, after Peter's sermon, some three thousand were ready to confess their faith in Christ, and to be baptized. Shall we never see such things again? Is the Spirit straitened? Has his arm waxed short? Nay, verily, but we clog and hinder him. He cannot do any mighty work here because of our unbelief; and, if our unbelief were cast out, and if prayer went up to God with eagerness, and vehemence, and importunity, then would a blessing descend so copious as to amaze us all.

But enough of this, for I must needs pass on to the next point.

**III.** THIS TRAVAIL AND ITS RESULT ARE ABUNDANTLY DESIRABLE; pre-eminently desirable at this hour. The world is perishing for a lack of knowledge. Did any one among us ever lay China on his heart? Your imagination cannot grapple with the population of that mighty empire, without God, without Christ, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. But it is not China alone; there are other vast nations lying in darkness; the great serpent hath coiled himself around the globe, and who shall set the world free from him? Reflect upon this one city with its three millions. What sin the moon sees! What sin the Sabbath sees! Alas for the transgressions of this wicked city. Babylon of old could not have been worse than London is, nor so guilty, for she had not the light that London has received. Brethren, there is no hope for China, no hope for the world, no hope for our own city, while the church is sluggish and lethargic. Through the church the blessing is usually bestowed. Christ multiplies the

bread, and gives it to the disciples; the multitudes can only get it through the disciples. Oh, it is time, it is high time that the churches were awakened to seek the good of dying myriads. Moreover, brethren, the powers of evil are ever active. We may sleep, but Satan sleepeth never. The church's plough lies yonder, rusting in the furrow; do you not see it to your shame? But the plough of Satan goes from end to end of his great field, he leaves no headland, but he ploughs deep while sluggish churches sleep. May we be stirred as we see the awful activity of evil spirits and persons who are under their sway. How industriously pernicious literature is spread abroad, and with what a zeal do men seek for fresh ways of sinning. He is eminent among men who can invent fresh songs to gratify the lascivious tongue, or find new spectacles to delight unclean eyes. O God, are thine enemies awake, and only thy friends asleep? O Sufferer, once bathed in bloody sweat in Gethsemane, is there not one of the twelve awake but Judas? Are they all asleep except the traitor? May God arouse us for his infinite mercy's sake.

Besides this, my brethren, when a church is not serving God, mischief is brewing withing herself. While she is not bringing others in, her own heart is becoming weak in its pulsations, and her entire constitution is a prey to decline. The church must either bring forth children unto God, or else die of consumption: she has no alternative but that. A church must either be fruitful or rot, and of all things, a rotting church is the most offensive. Would God we could bury our dead churches out of our sight, as Abraham buried Sarah, for above ground they breed a pestilence of scepticism; for men say, "Is this religion?" and taking it to be so, they forego true religion altogether.

And then, worst of all is, God is not glorified. If there be no yearning of heart in the church, and no conversions, where is the travail of the Redeemer's soul? Where, Immanuel, where are the trophies of thy terrible conflict? Where are the jewels for thy crown? Thou shalt have thine own, thy Father's will shall not be frustrated; thou shalt be adored; but as yet we see it not. Hard are men's hearts, and they will not love thee; unyielding are their wills, and they will not own thy sovereignty. Oh! weep because Jesus is not honored. The foul oath still curdles our blood as we hear it, and blasphemy usurps the place of grateful song. Oh! by the wounds and bloody sweat, by the cross and nails, and spear, I beseech

you followers of Christ, be in earnest, that Jesus Christ's name may be known and loved through the earnest agonizing endeavors of the Christian church.

**IV.** And now I must come near to a close, by, in the fourth place, noticing THE WOE WHICH WILL SURELY COME TO THOSE WHO HINDER THE TRAVAIL OF THE CHURCH, and so prevent the bringing forth of her children. An earnest spirit cannot complete its exhortations to zeal without pronouncing a denunciation upon the indifferent. What said the heroine of old who had gone forth against the enemies of Israel, when she remembered coward spirits? "Curse ye Meroz, saith the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Some such curse will assuredly come upon every professing Christian who is backward in helping the church in the day on her soul's travail. And who are they that hinder her? I answer, every worldly Christian hinders the progress of the gospel. Every member of a church who is living in secret sin, who is tolerating in his heart any thing that he knows to be wrong, who is not seeking eagerly his own personal sanctification, is to that extent hindering the work of the Spirit of God. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord," for to the extent that we maintain known unholiness, we restrain the Spirit. He cannot work by us as long as any conscious sin is tolerated. It is not over breaking of commandments that I am now speaking of, brethren, but I include worldliness also — a care for carnal things, and a carelessness about spiritual things, having enough grace just to make us hope that you are a Christian, but not enough to prove you are; bearing a shriveled apple here and there on the topmost bough, but not much fruit; this I mean, this partial barrenness, not complete enough to condemn, yet complete enough to restrain the blessing, this robs the treasure of the church, and hinders her progress. O brethren, if any of you are thus described, repent and do your first works; and God help you to be foremost in proportion as you have been behind.

They are also guilty who distract the mind of the church from the subject in hand. Anybody who calls off the thoughts of the church from soul-saving is a mischief maker. I have heard it said of a minister, "He greatly influences the politics of the town." Well, it is a very doubtful good in my mind, a very doubtful good indeed. If the man, keeping to his own calling

of preaching the gospel, happens to influence these meaner things, it is well, but any Christian minister who thinks that he can do two things well, is mistaken. Let him mind soul-winning, and not turn a Christian church into a political club. Let us fight out our politics somewhere else, but not inside the church of God. There our one business is soul-winning, our one banner is the cross, our one leader is the crucified King. Inside the church there may be minor things that take off the thoughts of men from seeking souls, — little things that can be made beneath the eye that is microscopical, to swell into great offenses. Oh, my brethren, let us, while souls are perishing, waive personal differences. “It must need be that offenses come, but woe unto him by whom the offense cometh;” but, after all, what can there be that is worth taking notice of, compared with glorifying Christ. If our Lord and Master would be honored by your being a doormat for his saints to wipe their feet on, you would be honored to be in the position; and if there shall come glory to God by your patient endurance, even of insult and contumely, be glad in your heart that you are permitted to be nothing that Christ may be all in all. We must by no means turn aside to this or that; not even golden apples must tempt us in this race! There lies the mark, and until it is reached, we must never pause, but onward press, for Christ’s cause and crown.

Above all, my brethren, we shall be hindering the travail of the church if we do not share in it. Many church members think that if they do nothing wrong, and make no trouble, then they are all right. Not at all, sir; not at all. Here is a chariot, and we are all engaged to drag it. Some of you do not put out your hands to pull; well, then, the rest of us have to labor so much the more; and the worst of it is we have to draw you also. While you do not add to the strength which draws, you increase the weight that is to be drawn. It is all very well for you to say, “But I do not hinder;” you do hinder, you cannot help hindering. If a man’s leg does not help him in walking, it certainly hinders him. Oh, I cannot bear to think of it. That I should be a hindrance to my own soul’s growth is bad indeed; but that I should stand in the way of the people of God and cool their courage, and damp their ardor — my Master, let it never be! Sooner let me sleep among the clods of the valley, than be a hindrance to the meanest work that is done for thy name.

**V.** And now I shall close, not with this note of woe, but with A WORD OF BLESSING. Depend upon it there shall come a great blessing to any of you who feel the soul travail that brings souls to God. Your own heart will be watered. You know the old illustration, so often used that it is now almost hackneyed, of the two travelers, who passed a man frozen in the snow, and thought to be dead; and the one said, "I have enough to do to keep myself alive, I will hasten on;" but the other said, "I cannot pass a fellow-creature while there is the least breath in him." He stooped down and began to warm the frozen man by rubbing him with great vigor; and at last the poor fellow opened his eyes, came back to life and animation, and walked along with the man who had restored him to life; and what think you was one of the first sights they saw? It was the man who so selfishly took care of himself frozen to death. The good Samaritan had preserved his own life by rubbing the other man; the friction he had given had caused the action of his own blood, and kept him in vigor. You will bless yourselves if you bless others.

Moreover, will it not be a joy to feel that you have done what you could? It is always well on a Sunday evening for a preacher to feel when he gets home, "Well, I may not have preached as I could wish, but I have preached the Lord Jesus, and poured forth all my heart and I could do no more." He sleeps soundly on that. After a day spent in doing all the good you can, even if you have met with no success, you can lean your head on Christ's bosom and fall asleep, feeling that if souls be not gathered, yet you have your reward. If men are lost, it is some satisfaction to us that they were not lost because we failed to tell them the way of salvation. But what a comfort it will be to you supposing you should be successful in bringing some to Christ. Why it will set all the bells of your soul ringing. There is no greater joy except the joy of our own communion with Christ, than this of bringing others to trust the Savior. Oh seek this joy and pant after it. And what if you should see your own children converted? You have long hoped for it, but your hopes have been disappointed; God means to give you that choice blessing when you live more nearly to him yourself. Yes, wife, the husband's heart will be won when your heart is perfectly consecrated. Yes, mother, the girl shall love the Savior when you love him better. Yes, teacher, God means to bless your class, but not until first of all he has made you fit to receive the blessing. Why, now, if your children



were to be converted through your teacher, you would be mightily proud of it: God knows you could not bear such success, and does not mean to give it until he has laid you low at his feet, and emptied you of yourself, and filled you with himself.

And now I ask the prayers of all this church, that God would send us a time of revival. I have not to complain that I have labored in vain, and spent my strength for nought; far from it. I have not even to think that the blessing is withdrawn from the preaching of the word, even in a measure, for I never had so many cases of conversion in my life as I have known since I have been restored from sickness; I have never before received so many letters in so short a time, telling me that the sermons printed have been blest, or the sermons preached here; yet I do not think we ever had so few conversions from the regular congregation. I partly account for it from the fact, that you cannot fish in one pond always and catch as many fish as at first. Perhaps the Lord has saved all of you he means to save; sometimes, I am afraid he has; and then it will be of little use for me to keep on preaching to you, and I had better shift quarters and try somewhere else. It would be a melancholy thought if I believed it: — I do not believe it, I only fear it. Surely it is not always to be true that strangers, who drop in here only once, are converted, and you who are always hearing the gospel remain unaffected. Strange, but may it not be strangely, lamentably true of you? This very day may the anxiety of your Christian friends be excited for you, and then may you be led to be anxious for yourselves, and give your eyes no slumber till you find the Savior. You know the way of salvation; it is simply to come with your sins and rest them on the Savior; it is to rely upon or trust in the atoning blood. Oh that you may be made to trust this morning, to the praise of the glory of his grace. The elders mean to meet together tomorrow evening to have a special hour of prayer; I hope, also, the mothers will meet and have a time wrestling, and that every member of the church will try to set apart a time for supplication this week, that the Lord may visit again his church, and cause us to rejoice in his name. We cannot go back; we dare not go back. We have put our hand to the plough, and the curse will be upon us if we turn back. Remember Lot's wife. It must be onward with us; backward it cannot be. In the name of God the Eternal, let us gird up our loins by the

power of his Spirit, and go onward conquering through the blood of the Lamb. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~2nd~~ Isaiah 66.

Of this sermon, a copy was sent to every Baptist and Congregational minister in Great Britain, and several letters have been received, acknowledging the quickening thereby received. May the like result be far more abundant in the New World.

# THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

## SERMON NO. 1015

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
OCTOBER 15TH, 1871**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

*“But one thing is needful.” — ~~and~~ Luke 10:42.*

WE HAVE no difficulty whatever in deciding what the one thing is. We are not allowed to say that it is the Savior, for he is not a thing; and we are not permitted to say that it is attention to our own salvation, for although that would be true, it is not mentioned in the context. The one thing needful evidently is that which Mary chose — that good part which should not be taken away from her. Very clearly this was to sit at Jesus' feet and hear his word. This and nothing less, this and nothing more.

The mere posture of sitting down and listening to the Savior's word was nothing in itself: it was that which it indicated. It indicated, in Mary's case, a readiness to believe what the Savior taught, to accept and to obey — nay to delight in, the precepts which fell from his lips. And this is the one thing needful — absolutely needful; for no rebel can enter the kingdom of heaven with the weapons of rebellion in his hands. We cannot know Christ while we resist Christ: we must be reconciled to his gentle sway, and confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

To sit at Jesus' feet implies faith as well as submission. Mary believed in what Jesus said, and, therefore, sat there to be taught by him. It is absolutely necessary that we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his power as God and man, in his death as being expiatory, in his crucifixion as being a sacrifice for our sins. We must trust him for time and eternity, in all his relationships as Prophet, Priest, and King. We must rely on him; he must be our hope, our salvation, our all in all. This one thing is absolutely

necessary: without it we are undone. A believing submission, and a submissive faith in Jesus we must have, or perish.

But sitting at Jesus' feet implies, also, that having submitted and believed, we now desire to be his disciples. Discipleship is too often forgotten; it is as needful as faith. We are to go into all the world and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Ghost. A man cannot be saved unless he has become a learner in the school of Christ, and a learner, too, in a practical sense, being willing to practice what he learns. Only when he who does the Master's will knows his doctrines. We are, if we have chosen the good part, sitters at the feet of Jesus, just as Saul of Tarsus sat at the feet of Gamaliel; Christ is to us our great Instructor, and we take the law from his lips. The believer's position is that of a pupil, and the Lord Jesus is his teacher. Except we be converted and become as little children, we can in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven. Sitting at the feet of Jesus indicates the child-like spirit of true discipleship; and this is the one thing needful: there is no salvation apart from it.

It meant, also, service, for though Mary was not apparently engaged in waiting upon Christ as Martha was, yet she was, in very truth, ministering unto him in a deeper and truer sense. No one gives greater joy to a public speaker than an attentive listener; no one serves a teacher better than he who is an apt and attentive scholar. The first duty, indeed, of the student to the tutor is that he be cheerful in accepting, and diligent in retaining, what is taught: in this sense, Mary was really waiting upon Christ in one of his loftiest capacities, namely — that of a teacher and prophet in the midst of Israel. In that same spirit, had the Master only intimated it, she would have risen to wash his feet, or anoint his head, or wait at table, as Martha did; but she would, while she was performing these active duties, have continued spiritually in her first posture; she could not, of course, have continued literally sitting at the feet of the Savior, but her heart would have remained in the condition which that posture indicates. She was in the fittest position for service, for she waited to hear what her Lord would have her to do. We must all be servants, too; as we have been servants of unrighteousness, we must by grace submit ourselves unto the rules of Jesus, and become servants of righteousness, or, else, we miss the one thing that is indispensable for entrance into heaven.

Sitting at the feet of Jesus, also, signifies love. She would not have been sitting there at ease and happy in mind, if she had not loved him. There was a charm in the very tone of his words to her. She knew how he had loved her, and, therefore, each syllable was music to her soul. She looked up again and again, I doubt not, into that dear face, and often caught the meaning of the words more readily as she read his countenance, marked his eyes oftentimes suffused with tears, and ever bright with holy sympathy. Her love to his person made her a willing learner, and we must be the same. We must not learn of Christ like unwilling truant boys, who go to school and must needs have learning flogged into them; we must be eager to learn; we must open our mouth wide that he may fill it, like the thirsty earth when it needs the shower, our soul must break for the longing it hath towards his commandments at all times. We must rejoice in his statutes more than gold, yea, than much fine gold. When we are moved by this spirit, we have found the one thing needful.

Having laid before you the meaning of the text, that to sit at Jesus' feet is the one thing necessary, for a literal translation of the text would be — “of one thing there is a necessity;” let us take the text as it stands and notice in it four things. The first is a word of consideration: the disjunctive conjunction, “but.” The Savior bids us to make a pause. He says, “but one thing is needful.” Then there comes a word of necessity: “one thing is needful.” thirdly, a word of concentration: “one thing is needful;” and then a word of immediateness “one thing is needful — needful now, at once.

**I.** — To begin, then, here is a word of CONSIDERATION, which, as I have already said, is interjected into the middle of our Lord's brief word to Martha. Martha is very busy; she is rather quick tempered also, and so she speaks to the Savior somewhat shortly; and the Mater says, “Martha, Martha,” — very tenderly, kindly, gently, with only the slightest tinge of rebuke in his tone — “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things — but, but, but, but, but, wait a while and hear.” That wise and warning but may be very useful to many here. You are engaged to-day in business; very diligent you are in it. You throw your whole energy into your trading, as you must, if you would succeed. You rise up wearily, and you sit up late. Shall I say a word that should discourage your industry? I will not; but, but is there nothing else? — is this life all? Is making money

everything? Is wealth worth gaining merely for the sake of having it said, "He died worth fifty thousand pounds?" Is it so?

Perhaps, you are a very hard-working man. You have very little rest during the week, and in order to bring up your family comfortably, you strain every nerve; you live as you should, economically, and you work diligently; from morning to night the thought with you is, "How shall I fill these many little mouths? How shall I bring them up properly? How shall I, as a working man, pay my way?" Very right; I wish all working men would be equally thoughtful and economical, and that there were fewer of those foolish spendthrifts who waste their substance when they have it, and who, the moment there is a frost, or they are out of employ, become paupers, loafing upon the charity of others. I commend your industry, but, but, but, at the same time, is that all? Were you made only to be a machine for digging holes, laying bricks, or cutting out pieces of wood? Were you created only to stand at a counter and measure or weight out goods? do you think your God made you for that and that only? Is this the chief end of man — to earn shillings a week, and try to make ends meet therewith? is that all immortal men were made for? As a animal like a dog, nor a machine like a steam engine, can you stand up and look at yourself, and say, "I believe I am perfectly fulfilling my destiny"? I beg this morning to interject that quiet "but," right into the middle of your busy life, and ask from you space for consideration, a pause for the voice of wisdom, that a hearing may be granted her. Business? Labor? Yes, but there is a higher bread to be earned, and there is a higher life to be considered. Hence the Lord puts it, "Labor not for the meat that perisheth," that is to say, not for that first and foremost; "but for that which endureth unto life eternal." God hath made man that he may glorify him; and whatever else man accomplishes, if he fail to reach that end, and make eternal shipwreck, unless he comes to sit a Jesus' feet; there and there only can he learn how to sanctify his business and to consecrate his labor, and so bring forth unto God; through his grace, that which is due to him.

Now, I have spoken thus to the busy, but I might speak, and I should have certainly as good a claim to do so, to those who are lovers of pleasure. they are not cumbered with much serving; rather, they laugh at those who cumber themselves about anything. They are merry as the birds, their life

is as the flight of a butterfly, which lightly floats from flower to flower, according to its own sweet will; with neither comb to make, nor hive to guard. Now, thou gay young man, what doth Solomon say to thee? “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; but” — there comes in a pause, and the cool hand of wisdom is laid upon the hot brow of folly, and the youth is asked to think awhile — “but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgement.” It cannot be that an immortal spirit was made of frivolities; a soul immortal spending all her fires on the playthings of the world, “resembles ocean into tempest toss’d, to waft a feather, or to drown a fly.” So great a thing as an immortal soul could not have been made by God with no higher object than to spend itself upon trifles light as air. Oh, pause a while, thou careless, godless one, and hear the voice that saith unto thee, “but.” There is something more than the fool’s hell; and should not life be? The charms of music, the merriment of the gay assembly, the beauties of art, and the delights of banqueting — there must be something more for thee than these; and something more must be required of thee than that thou shouldst waste from morn to night thy precious time upon nothing but to please thyself. Stop, stop, and let this admonitory “but” sound in thine ears.

I take liberty, moreover, to address the same word to religious people, who, perhaps, need it as much as the others. They will, of course, agree with anything I can say about the mere worldling or the profligate; but, will they listen to me when I say to them, “You are very diligent in your religion, you are attentive to all its outward rites and ceremonies, you believe the articles of your church, you practice the ceremonies ordained by its rulers; but, but, do you know that all this is nothing, unless you sit at Jesus’ feet?” we may do what the church tells us, and never do what Christ tells us, for these may be different things; and the church is not our Savior, but Christ. We may believe what a certain creed tells us, but not believe what Jesus teaches; for our creed and Christ may be two very different things. Ay, and we may believe even what the Bible itself teaches to us, or think we believe it; but, if our heart has never made submission to the Teacher himself, so as to sit at his feet, and receive the truth obediently from him, our religion is altogether vain. Traditional religion is not submission to Christ, but to custom. Obedience to a denomination is

not obedience to Jesus himself. How I wish that all professing Christians would bring themselves to an examination and enquire, “Do I really believe in the person of my Lord, and accept him as my Teacher? Do I study the Word of God to learn the truth from him, and not accept it blindly and at second hand from my minister, or my parents, or the church of the nation, or the creed of my family?” We go to Jesus for teaching, desiring in our hearts to be taught by his book and his Spirit, cheerfully agreeing in all things to shape our faith to his declaration, and our life to his rule. For us, there must be no spiritual law-giver, and no infallible Rabbi, but the Blessed One, whom Magdalene called “Rabboni,” and whom Thomas saluted as, “My Lord and my God.”

Yes, and let me say, even to those of you who can honestly declare that Christ is your sole confidence, it is possible for you to forget the necessity of sitting at his feet. You, dear brethren, are looking to his precious blood alone for your salvation, and his name is sweet to you, and you desire all things to be conformed to his will. So far it is well with you, for in this you have a measure of sitting at his feet; but so had Martha; she loved her Lord, and she knew his word, and she was a saved soul, for “Jesus loved Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus;” but you have not perhaps so much of this needful thing as Mary had, and as you ought to have. You have been very busy this week, and have been drifted from your moorings; you have not lived with your Lord in conscious fellowship; you have been full of care and empty of prayer; you have not committed your sorrows to your loving friend; you have blundered on in duty without asking his guidance or assistance, you have not maintained, in your Christian service, the communion of your spirit with the Well-Beloved, and, if such has been the case, let me say “but” to you, and ask you, as you sit here this morning, to make a little stop in your Sunday-school teaching or your street preaching, or whatever else it is that you are so laudably engaged in, and say to yourself: “To me, as a worker, the one thing needful is to keep near my Lord, and I must not so suffer the watering of others to occupy me, as to neglect my own heart, lest I should have to say ‘woe is me, they made me keeper in the vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept.’” “To the saints, as well as to others, the one thing needful is to sit at Jesus’ feet. WE are to be always learners and lovers of Jesus. Departure from him, and independence of him, let them not once be named among you. It is



weakness, sickness, sin, and sorrow for a believer to leave his Lord and become either his own leader or reliance. We are only safe while we remain humbly and gladly subservient to him. You see, then, that this word “but” suggests a very useful and salutary pause to us all. May God help us to benefit thereby.

**II.** Secondly, our text speaks of NECESSITY — one thing is a necessity. If this be proven, it overrides all other considerations. We are nearly right when we say proverbially, “Necessity has no law.” If a man steal, and it be found that he was dying of hunger, he is always half forgiven, and charity has been known to excuse him altogether. Necessity has been frequently accepted as a good excuse for what else might not have been tolerated; and when a thing is right, and necessity backs it, then indeed the right become imperative, and pushes to the front to force its way. Necessity, like hunger breaks through stone walls. The text claims for sitting at Jesus’ feet that it is the first and only necessity. Now, I see all around me a crowd of things alluring and fascinating. Pleasure calls to me I hear her syren song — but I reply, “I cannot regard thee, for necessity presses upon me to hearken to another voice.” Philosophy and learning charm me, fain would I yield my heart to them; but, while I am yet unsaved, the one thing needful demands my first care, and wisdom bids me give it. Not that we love human learning less, but eternal wisdom more. Pearls? Yes. Emeralds? Yes; but bread, in God’s name — bread at once, when I am starving in the desert! What is the use of ingots of gold, or bars of silver, or caskets of jewels, when food is wanting? If one thing be needful, it devours, like Aaron’s rod, all the matters which are merely pleasurable. All the fascinating things on earth may go, but the needful things we must have. If you are wise, you will evermore prefer the necessary to the dazzling.

About us are a thousand things entangling. This world is very much like the pools we have heard of in India, in which grows a long grass of so clinging a character that, if a man once falls into the water, it is almost certain to be his death, for only with the utmost difficulty could he be rescued from the meshes of the deadly, weedy net, which immediately wraps itself around him. This world is even thus entangling. All the efforts of grace are needed to preserve men from being ensnared with the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of this life. The ledger demands you,

the day-book wants you, the shop requires you, the warehouse bell rings for you; the theater invites, the ball-room calls: you must live, you say, and you must have a little enjoyment, and , consequently, you give your heart to the world. These things, I say, are very entangling; but we must be disentangled from them, for we cannot afford to lose our souls. “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” If a ship is going down, and a passenger has his gold in a bag about him, and he has upon him a costly cloak, see how he acts. Off goes the garment when he knows that he cannot possibly swim with it upon him. No matter though it be lined with miniver and be made of costliest stuff, off he throws it; and, as for his bag of treasure, with many a regret he flings them down upon the deck, for his life is dearer than they. If he may but save his life, he is willing to lose all beside. Oh sirs! for the one thing needful, all entangling things must be give up. You must lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset you, if by any means the one thing needful may be yours.

There are many things very puzzling, and some people have a strange delight in being bewildered. It is astonishing the many letters I receive and interviews I am asked to give, in order to adjust in people’s minds the doctrine of predestination and the fact of free agency; and equally remarkable is the way in which young people, and old people too, will pick out extremely difficult texts, perhaps relating to the Second Advent, or to the battle of Armageddon, and they must needs have these opened up to them before they will believe the gospel. I think it utterly useless to begin upon such things with those who are unsaved. One thing is needful, sir, and that is by no means a puzzling matter; it is plainly this, that thou submit thyself to Jesus Christ and sit at his feet. That is needful: as for the doctrines of election and the second advent, they are important, but they are neither the most essential nor the most pressing. The one thing needful for a seeking soul is that it receives Jesus and become submissive to him, sitting as a disciple at his feet and as a servant doing his will. It is true these is the ninth chapter of Romans in the Bible, and a precious chapter it is: but the seeking sinner should, take care to read first the third chapter of John, and till he has mastered that, he had better let the Romans alone. Go first to the business which concerns your salvation; attend to that, and when all is right with you, then, at Jesus’ feet, you will be in the best

possible position to learn all that can be learned of the higher mysteries and the deeper truths.

Moreover, there is much that is desirable, very desirable — desirable in the highest spiritual sense; but it must be second to that which is needful. If I read the experience of men who have known their own hearts and mourned before the Lord, I wish that I had as deep a sense of sin as they had; or, I read the story of saints who have lived the angelic life, and even here on earth have dwelt with Christ and waled the golden streets in fellowship with him, I wish I could rise to all their heights; but for all that, if my soul is still polluted with sin, for me the one thing needful is cleansing by the Redeemer's blood; I must at once believingly yield to Jesus, for this is of necessity, and the desirable things will come to me afterwards, if I sit down at Jesus' feet. So near the source of all good things, it will be easy to be enriched with all knowledge and grace, but our first business is to get there, and by the Holy Spirit's blessing we may come there without either the deep experience or the elevated feelings we have described; we may come just as we are, all guilty and lost, and submit ourselves to the Savior. Having done that, we are in the best position for spiritual attainments — yea, they shall surely be ours. Let the heart yield itself to our sole reliance and sure confidence, it is well with us: we have all that is needful, and the pledge of all that is desirable.

Tell us it is a necessity, and everything else must give way: necessity overrules all else. Now, what is it that sitting at Jesus' feet is a necessity? It is so, because it is needful for us to have our sins forgiven; but Jesus will never forgive the unhumiliated rebel. If he will not take Jesus to be a Master, the sinner cannot have him to be a Savior. As long as we rebel against him, we cannot be saved by him. Submission, by repentance and faith, we must have, or our transgressions will remain upon us to our everlasting ruin. It is necessary, because we must have our inbred sins overcome; but none can stay corruption in a man but Christ, who has come to destroy the work of the devil, and to save his people from their sins. Jesus, the seed of the woman, is the only power that can crush the serpent's head. Only at the feet of Jesus can the divine power be gained which works in us holiness and sanctifies us practically; therefore, as you must be purified or you cannot enter heaven, you must come to Jesus' feet. Moreover, it is at the feet of Jesus that the soul's ignorance is removed; and since ignorance

concerning ourselves and our God must be taken from us, we must be taught of him. God is “our light and our salvation;” our light first, and our salvation in consequence. We must have the light. The spiritually blind man cannot enter heaven, he must have his eyes opened, but Jesus alone can work that miracle of grace. Neither can we receive true light except from him, for he is “the true light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world;” none are ever enlightened, except by him. “In him is light — all light; and the light is the light of men.” As God is the mind of the world, he who has not God is demented; and as Christ is the light of the world, he that believes not in him abideth in darkness even until now. We must come, then, and yield ourselves unreservedly to Jesus, worshipping him, trusting him, and obeying him — in a word, we must sit at his feet, and hear his word; otherwise, we shall abide in darkness and death.

In order to enter heaven, it is necessary that our nature should become like the nature of Christ. This earth is for those who bear the image of the first Adam; but the new heaven and the new earth are for those who bear the image of the second Adam.. We must, by some means, acquire the nature of the second and heavenly Adam, and this must be wrought in us by regeneration, and developed by acquaintance with him. By sitting at his feet, and beholding him, we become changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord. If we reject the Lord Jesus as our trust, teacher, and exemplar, we have no new life, we are not new creatures in Christ, and we can never be admitted within the holy gates where those alone dwell who are fashioned after his likeness. We must, then, sit at his feet; it is absolutely necessary, and , without it, our whole life will be a complete failure; we may make money, but we shall lose our souls; we may gain honor, but shall have come short of the glory of God; we may enjoy pleasure, but we shall forfeit the pleasure which are at God’s right hand for evermore; we may have done our country some service, but to our God, and the higher country, we shall have rendered no service, for we cannot serve God if we will not obey Christ. “He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent him.” This life is a blank, a long rebellion, to the man who submits not to Jesus, and the life for ever hereafter will be darkness and confusion; as darkness itself, a land of sorrow, and of weeping, and of wailing, and of gnashing of teeth, a land of despair, upon which no star shall ever shine, or sun shall ever

rise. Woe, woe, woe, woe to the Godless, Christless spirit that passeth across the river of death without a hope. Woe, woe, woe, woe eternally to the soul that will not sit at the feet of Jesus! he shall be trodden beneath his feet in his anger, and crushed in his hot displeasure. God grant that may never be our portion. To sit at Jesus' feet is the one thing needful then.

And, brethren, let me just say, and leave this point, it is needful to every one of you. It is not some of us who must be there, but all. The wisest must become fools to learn of him, or fools they are; the most educated and cultured mind must submit to this further culture, or else it is nothing but a barren waste in his sight. One thing is a necessity to you all, high or low, rich or poor, queen or beggar — you must sit at Jesus' feet; and all alike must accept his teaching, or you know nothing that can save you.

Some things in this world are necessary, after a measure, but this is necessary without measure; infinitely needful is it that you sit at Jesus' feet, needful now, needful in life; needful in life for peace, in death for rest, and in eternity for bliss. This is needful always. Many things have their uses for youth, others come not into value till old age; but one thing, the one thing, is needful for childhood, and needful for palsied age; it is needful for the ruddy cheek, and the active limb, and needful everywhere and always. In the highest and most emphatic sense, "one thing is needful."

**III.** Thus much about the necessity, the next word is CONCENTRATION: "One thing is needful." I am glad it says "one thing," because a division of ends and objects is always weakening. A man cannot follow two things well. Our life-flood suffices not to fill two streams or three; there is only enough water, as it were, in our life's brooklet, to turn one wheel. It is a great pity when a man fritters away his energies by being "everything by turns, and nothing long;" trying all things, and mastering nothing. Oh soul, it is well for thee that there is only one thing in this world that is absolutely necessary, give thy whole soul to that. If other things are necessary in a secondary place, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these shall be added unto you."

One thing is needful, and this is well arranged, for we cannot follow two things. If Christ be one of them, we cannot follow another. Is it not

written, “No man can serve two masters, either he will have the one and love the other, or cleave to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Not only would it be very weakening to you to attempt to serve both, but it is absolutely impossible that you should do so. Jesus Christ is a monopolizer of human hearts, he will never accept a portion of our manhood. He bought us altogether, and he will have the whole of our personality. Christ must be everything, or he will be nothing. He does not love Christ who loves anything as well as Christ, neither does he trust him who trusts in anything besides. Christ must reign alone. “Jesus only,” must be the motto of our spirits. It is well for us, therefore, that only one thing is necessary, for only one thing is possible.

It is an unspeakable mercy that the one thing needful is a very simple one. Little child, thou couldst not climb the mountain, but thou canst sit down at Jesus’ feet; thou canst not understand hard doctrine, but thou canst love him who said, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Unlearned man, thou who hast no time to acquire earthly lore, if the one thing needful were something that belonged only to the learned, alas for thee; but if thou canst not teach, it is not needful that thou shouldst, it is only needful that thou shouldst learn. Take the Incarnate Wisdom to be thy Master, and sit as a little child at his feet to learn with all thine heart. That is all he asks of thee. Men will have it that they must do something to be saved they must fret and worry like Martha, but after all, the right way is to end your doing and fretting by sitting down content with Jesus’ doing, satisfied with his righteousness and with the merit of his precious blood. The one thing needful is very easy, except to proud hearts, which cannot brook to accept everything gratis, and to be beholden to sovereign mercy. To the poor in spirit it is not only simple but sweet to sit at Jesus’ feet. I would be nothing but what he makes me, I would have nothing but what he gives me, I would ask nothing but what he promises me, I would trust in nothing but what he has done for me, and I would desire nothing but what he has prepared for me. To sit at Jesus’s feet in humble submission and quiet rest, he the master and I the little child, I the vessel waiting to be filled, and he my fullness, I the mown grass, and he the falling dew, I the rain drop, and he the sun that makes me glisten in life with diamond brilliance, and then exhales me in death to be absorbed in him; this is all in all to me.

Let us remark that, though this is only one thing, and so concentrated, yet it is also comprehensive and contains many things. Imagine not that to sit at Jesus' feet is a very small, unmeaning thing. It means peace, for they who submit to Jesus find peace through his precious blood. It means holiness, for those who learn of Jesus learn no sin, but are instructed in things lovely and of good repute. It means strength, for they that sit with Jesus, and feed upon him, are girded with his, strength; the joy of the Lord is their strength. It means wisdom, for they that learn of the Son of God understand more than the ancients because they keep his statutes. It means zeal, for the love of Christ fires hearts that live upon it, and they that are much with Jesus become like Jesus, so that the zeal of the Lord's house eats them up. If we say that in an army the one thing needful is loyalty to the sovereign, we know what that means; for the loyal soldier will be sure to be obedient to his officers, and if attached to his queen, he will be brave in the day of battle, and do his duty well. If we said that the one thing needful in a family was love, we should not have required a small thing; for love will place husband and wife in their true position; love will produce obedience in children, and diligence in servants. Let love permeate everything, and other virtues will grow out of it, as flowers spring from the soil. So when we say that sitting at Jesus' feet is the one thing needful, we have not uttered a mere truism: it comprehends a world of blessings.

And, here would I address a word to the church of God in this country at this present time. She, too, is as Martha, cumbered with much serving. It were her wisdom, and her strength, if she would become more like Mary, and sit at Jesus' feet. Just now we need revival. Oh that God would send it! Oh for a mighty flood of spiritual influences, that would bear the stranded churches right out into a sea of usefulness. But how can we get revival? We shall have it, brethren, when we commune with Christ. When the saints habitually sit at Jesus' feet they will be revived, and of necessity the revival will spread from them, and the hearts of sinners will be touched.

There is great talk now-a-days of union; the walls of the various churches are to be broken down, and the denominations are to be blended. Think not of it in such a fashion; the only union possible, or desirable, is that we all unite to sit at Jesus' feet. It is not allowable that we concede one truth and you another; that is not natural charity, but common treason to Christ. We

have no right to yield an atom of the truth of God, under the pretense of charity. Truth is no property of ours; we are only God's stewards, and it behooves us to be faithful to our trust. Neither one church nor another has any right to bate its testimony one jot, if it be true. To alter the statute-book of Christ is blasphemy. True union will come when all the churches learn of Christ, for Christ does not teach two things opposed to each other. There are not two baptisms in the Bible; we shall not find two sets of dogmas diametrically opposite to each other. If we give up the various things that are of man, and hold fast each of us only that which is of God, we shall be united in principle and in doctrine; and "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" will once again be emblazoned upon the banners of the church of God. Sit at Jesus' feet, O thou church of Christ, and true unity will come to thee.

We hear a great deal about the necessity of controversy. We ought to be ready to answer all that infidels object, so wise men say. Every absurdity of every fool we are to sit down and reply to, and when this labor of Hercules is accomplished, we are to begin again, for by that time new whimsies will be in men's brains, and new lies will have been begotten. Is this so? Am I to do nothing in winning souls and glorifying God, but to spend all my time in finding wind for the nostrils of the wild asses of the desert? Well, let those do it who please, we believe that the settlement of all controversy in the church and for the church would come from the Lord himself, if we believed more fully in him, and waited more upon him for guidance, and if we preached the gospel more in his own strength, and in his own Spirit.

And, as for missions: we appoint our committees, we amend our plans, and suggest schemes.. All very well and good; but missions will never flourish till the church, with regard to missions, sits at Jesus' feet. She will never convert the heathen in her own way: God will give success only when we work in his way. It may be very useful to make translations, and exceedingly beneficial to keep schools; but if I read my Bible right, it is not Christ's way. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," is the law of Jesus Christ, and when the church everywhere, at home and abroad, takes more earnestly to preaching, when the testimony of the truth is perpetual and incessant, in simple language, and popular speech, then Christ the Lord will look upon the church that, like Mary,



sits at his feet, and say “Thou hast done thy part,” and blessing shall follow. “Thy work is done, and I will give thee thy reward.”

For us all, beloved, saints and sinners, one thing is needful: that we always sit, like Mary, at the Master’s feet.

**IV.** The last word is IMMEDIATENESS, and there is no need that we say much upon it. One thing is a necessity, a necessity not of the future only, but of to-day. It is not written, “it shall be needful,” on certain coming days, to sit at Jesus’s feet; but it is so now. Young man, one thing is necessary to you while yet young; do not postpone it till advanced years. Christian, it is needful for thee to-day to have communion with Christ; do not think of it as indispensable to-morrow or to-night at the communion table; it is needful now. There are dangers thou canst not see, which can only be warded off by present and immediate fellowship with Christ. “One thing is needful.” It is not that it was needful in the past, indeed it was so; but it is needful now. It was needful for me in the days of my sinfulness to submit to Christ, it is equally needful for me now. However much you advance, O believer, you never advance beyond this; whatever your experience, or your information, or your ripeness for glory, it is needful still to sit at Jesus’ feet. You shall never get into a higher class in the school of wisdom than is the class which Christ teaches; his is the infant class in the school, but it is the highest class also. It is always needful, every moment needful, that we sit at Jesus’ feet.

It is needful, I have already said, to the sinner. Life, and health, and peace will come to him when he becomes a disciple of the Crucified. Would God that he might be made so this very morning. There is life in a look at the Crucified One. To depend entirely upon the sinner’s Savior is the sinner’s salvation. God bring you to his feet, dear hearers.

But it is equally needful for the saint. Covered with the fruits of righteousness, his root must still cling to the riven rock. You must never imagine, whatever you have done or whatever you have attained, that you are to leave Mary’s seat; still must you abide there.

It is the one thing needful for the backslider. IF you have fallen never so much, you will rise again if you come to the Master submissively and abide with him. It was the mark of the man who had the devil cast out of

him, that he was clothed and in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus; it shall show that you, too, are restored when you learn of your Lord. A seat at Jesus' feet is the place for all Christians to die in, they shall sleep sweetly with their heads in Jesus' bosom: it is the place for them to live in, for joy and bliss are there.

Beloved, I desire for myself never again to be worried with the cares of this church, but to take them all to my Master, and wait at his feet. I desire not to be troubled about my preaching, nor to be cumbered about anything beneath the sun, but to leave all these, as he would have me leave them, in his hands. You who are working in the classes, in the school, or anywhere else, I pray you look well to your fellowship with Jesus. You cannot slay the enemy by throwing away your sword, and nearness to Christ is your battle-axe and weapons of war; you have lost your power when you have left your Lord. One thing is needful — let the rest go. What if we have not learning? — what if we have not eloquence? If we live near to Christ, we have something better than all these; if we abide in him, and he abides in us, we shall go and bring forth fruit, and our fruit shall remain; if he abides in us, we shall enjoy heaven on earth, and be daily preparing of that eternal heaven which is to be our portion. “One thing is needful.” God grant it to every one of us! — Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon — ~~23101~~ Luke 10.

# PLEADING

## SERMON NO. 1018

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
OCTOBER 29TH, 1871**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

*“But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: Thou art my help  
and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying.” — <sup>Psalm</sup> Psalm 70:5*

YOUNG painters were anxious, in olden times, to study under the great masters. They concluded that they should more easily attain to excellence if they entered the schools of eminent men. Men have paid large premiums that their sons may be apprenticed or articed to those who best understood their trades or professions; now, if any of us would learn the sacred art and mystery of prayer, it is well for us to study the productions of the greatest masters of that science. I am unable to point out one who understood it better than did the psalmist David. So well did he know how to praise, that his psalms have become the language of good men in all ages; and so well did he understand how to pray, that if we catch his spirit, and follow his mode of prayer, we shall have learned to plead with God after the most prevalent sort. Place before you, first of all, David's Son and David's Lord, that most mighty of all intercessors, and, next to Him, you shall find David to be one of the most admirable models for your imitation.

We shall consider our text, then, as one of the productions of a great master in spiritual matters, and we will study it, praying all the while that God will help us to pray after the like fashion.

In our text we have the soul of a successful pleader under four aspects: we view, first, the soul confessing: “I am poor and needy.” You have next, the soul pleading, for he makes a plea out of his poor condition, and adds, “Make haste unto me, O God!” You see, thirdly, a soul in it's urgency, for

he cries, “Make haste,” and he varies the expression but keeps the same idea: “Make no tarrying.” And you have in the fourth and last view, a soul grasping God, for the psalmist puts it thus: “Thou art my help and my deliverer”; thus with both hands he lays hold upon His God, so as not to let Him go till a blessing is obtained.

**I.** To begin with, then, we see in this model of supplication, A SOUL CONFESSING. The wrestler strips before he enters upon the contest, and confession does the like for the man who is about to plead with God. A racer on the plains of prayer cannot hope to win, unless, by confession, repentance, and faith, he lays aside every weight of sin.

Now, let it be ever remembered that confession is absolutely needful to the sinner when he first seeks a Savior. It is not possible for thee, O seeker, to obtain peace for thy troubled heart, till thou shalt have acknowledged thy transgression and thine iniquity before the Lord. Thou mayest do what thou wilt, ay, even attempt to believe in Jesus, but thou shalt find that the faith of God’s elect is not in thee, unless thou art willing to make a full confession of thy transgression, and lay bare thy heart before God. We do not usually think of giving charity to those who do not acknowledge that they need it: the physician does not send his medicine to those who are not sick. The blind man in the gospels had to feel his blindness, and to sit by the wayside begging; if he had entertained a doubt as to whether he were blind or not, the Lord would have passed him by. He opens the eyes of those who confess their blindness, but of others, He says, “Because ye say we see, therefore, your sin remaineth.” He asks of those who are brought to Him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” in order that their need may be publicly avowed. It must be so with all of us: we must offer the confession, or we cannot gain the benediction.

Let me speak especially to you who desire to find peace with God, and salvation through the precious blood: you will do well to make your confession before God very frank, very sincere, very explicit. Surely you have nothing to hide, for there is nothing that you can hide. He knows your guilt already, but He would have you know it, and therefore He bids you confess it. Go into the details of your sin in your secret acknowledgments before God; strip yourself of all excuses, make no apologies; say, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in

thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” Acknowledge the evil of sin, ask God to make you feel it; do not treat it as a trifle, for it is none. To redeem the sinner from the effect of sin Christ Himself must needs die, and unless you be delivered from it you must die eternally. Therefore, play not with sin; do not confess it as though it were some venial fault, which would not have been noticed unless God had been too severe; but labor to see sin as God sees it, as an offense against all that is good, a rebellion against all that is kind; see it to be treason, to be ingratitude, or be a mean and base thing. Do not think that you can improve your condition before God by painting your case in brighter colors than it should be. Blacken it: if it were possible blacken it, but it is not possible. When you feel your sin most you have not half felt it; when you confess it most fully you do not know a tithe of it; but oh, to the utmost of your ability make a clean breast of it, and say, “I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.” Acknowledge the sins of your youth and your manhood, the sins of your body and of your soul, the sins of omission and of commission, sins against the law and offenses against the gospel; acknowledge all; neither for a moment seek to deny one portion of the evil with which God’s law, your own conscience, and his Holy Spirit justly charge you.

And oh, soul, if thou wouldst get peace and approval with God in prayer, confess the ill desert of thy sin. Submit thyself to do whatever divine justice may sentence thee to endure: confess that the deepest hell is thy desert, and confess this not with thy lips only, but with thy soul. Let this be the doleful ditty of thine inmost heart —

*“Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,  
I must pronounce thee just in death  
And, if my soul were sent to hell,  
Thy righteous law approves it well.”*

If thou wilt condemn thyself, God will acquit thee; if thou wilt put the rope about thy neck, and sentence thyself, then he who otherwise would have sentenced thee will say, “I forgive thee, through the merit of my son.” But never expect that the King of heaven will pardon a traitor, if he will not confess and forsake his treason. Even the tenderest father expects that the child should humble himself when he has offended, and will not withdraw his frown from him till with tears he has said, “Father, I have

sinned.” Darest thou expect God to humble Himself to thee, and would it not be so if He did not constrain thee to humble thyself to Him? Wouldst thou have Him connive at thy faults and wink at thy transgressions? He will have mercy, but He must be holy. He is ready to forgive, but not to tolerate sin; and, therefore, He cannot let thee be forgiven if thou huggest thy sins, or if thou presumest to say, “I have not sinned.” Hasten, then, O seeker, hasten I pray thee, to the mercy seat with this upon thy lips: “I am poor and needy, I am sinful, I am lost; have pity on me.” With such an acknowledgment thou beginnest thy prayer well, and through Jesus thou shalt prosper in it.

Beloved hearers, the same principle applies to the church of God. We are praying for a display of the Holy Spirit’s power in this church, and, in order to successful pleading in this matter, it is necessary that we should unanimously make the confession of our text, “I am poor and needy.” We must own that we are powerless in this business. Salvation is of the Lord and we cannot save a single soul. The Spirit of God is treasured up in Christ, and we must seek Him of the great head of the church. We cannot command the Spirit, and yet we can do nothing without Him. He bloweth where He listeth. We must deeply feel and honestly acknowledge this. Will you not heartily assent to it my brethren and sisters at this hour. May I not ask you unanimously to renew the confession this morning? We must also acknowledge that we are not worthy that the Holy Spirit should condescend to work with us and by us. There is no fitness in us for his purposes, except he shall give us that fitness. Our sins might well provoke him to leave us: he has striven with us, he has been tender towards us, but he might well go away and say, “I will no more shine upon that church, and no more bless that ministry.” Let us feel our unworthiness, it will be a good preparation for earnest prayer; for mark you, brethren, God will have His church before He blesses it know that the blessing is altogether from Himself. “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” The career of Gideon was a very remarkable one, and it commenced with two most instructive signs. I think our heavenly Father would have all of us learn the very same lesson which He taught to Gideon, and when we have mastered that lesson, He will use us for His own purposes. You remember Gideon laid a fleece upon the barn floor, and in the morning all round was dry and the fleece alone was wet.

God alone had saturated the fleece so that he could wring it out, and its moisture was not due to its being placed in a favorable situation, for all around was dry. He would have us learn, that, if the dew of His grace fills any one of us with its heavenly moisture, it is not because we lie upon the barn-floor of a ministry which God usually blesses, or because we are in a church which the Lord graciously visits; but we must be made to see that the visitations of His Spirit are fruits of the Lord's sovereign grace, and gifts of His infinite love, and not of the will of man, neither by man. But then the miracle was reversed, for, as old Thomas Fuller says, "God's miracles will bear to be turned inside out and look as glorious one way as another." The next night the fleece was dry and all around was wet. For sceptics might have said, "Yes, but a fleece would naturally attract moisture, and if there were any in the air, it would be likely to be absorbed by the wool." But, lo, on this occasion, the dew is not where it might be expected to be, even though it lies thickly all around. Damp is the stone and dry is the fleece. So God will have us know that He does not give us His grace because of any natural adaptation in us to receive it, and even where He has given a preparedness of heart to receive, He will have us understand that His grace and His Spirit are most free in action, and sovereign in operation: and that He is not bound to work after any rule of our making. If the fleece be wet He bedews it, and that not because it is a fleece, but because He chooses to do so. He will have all the glory of all His grace from first to last. Come then, my brethren, and become disciples to this truth. Consider that from the great Father of lights every good and perfect gift must come. We are His workmanship, he must work all our works in us [<sup>2002</sup>Isaiah 26:12]. Grace is not to be commanded by our position or condition: the wind bloweth where it listeth, the Lord works and no man can hinder; but if He works not, the mightiest and most zealous labor is but in vain.

It is very significant that before Christ fed the thousands, He made the disciples sum up all their provisions. It was well to let them see how low the commissariat had become, for then when the crowds were fed they could not say the basket fed them nor that the lad had done it. God will make us feel how little are our barley loaves, and how small our fishes, and compel us to enquire, "What are they among so many?" When the Savior bade His disciples cast the net on the right side of the ship, and they

dragged such a mighty shoal to land, He did not work the miracle till they had confessed that they had toiled all the night and had taken nothing. They were thus taught that the success of their fishery was dependent upon the Lord, and that it was not their net, nor the way of dragging it, nor their skill and art in handling their vessels, but that altogether and entirely their success came from their Lord. We must get down to this, and the sooner we come to it the better.

Before the ancient Jews kept the passover, observe what they did. The unleavened bread is to be brought in, and the paschal lamb to be eaten; but there shall be no unleavened bread and no paschal lamb, till they have purged out the old leaven. If you have any old strength and self-confidence; if you have anything that is your own, and is, therefore, leavened, it must be swept right out; there must be a bare cupboard before there can come in the heavenly provision, upon which the spiritual passover can be kept. I thank God when He clears us out; I bless His name when He brings us to feel our soul poverty as a church, for then the blessing will be sure to come.

One other illustration will show this, perhaps, more distinctly still. Behold Elijah with the priests of Baal at Carmel. The test appointed to decide Israel's choice was this — the God that answereth by fire let him be God. Baal's priests invoked the heavenly flame in vain. Elijah is confident that it will come upon his sacrifice, but he is also sternly resolved that the false priests and the fickle people shall not imagine that he himself had produced the fire. He determines to make it clear that there is no human contrivance, trickery, or maneuver about the matter. The flame should be seen to be of the Lord, and of the Lord alone. Remember the stern prophet's command, "Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it a second time; and they did it a second time. And he said, Do it a third time; and they did it a third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water." There could be no latent fire there. If there had been any combustibles or chemicals calculated to produce fire after the manner of the cheats of the time, they would all have been damped and spoiled. When no one could imagine that man could burn the sacrifice, then the prophet lifted up his eyes to heaven, and began to plead, and down came the fire of the Lord, which consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood, and



the altar stones and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. Then when all the people saw it they fell on their faces, and they said, “Jehovah is the God; Jehovah is the God.” The Lord in this church, if He means greatly to bless us, may send us trial of pouring on the water once, and twice, and thrice; He may discourage us, grieve us, and try us, and bring us low, till all shall see that it is not of the preacher, it is not of the organization, it is not of man, but altogether of God, the Alpha and the Omega, who worketh all things according to the council of His will.

Thus I have shown you that for a successful season of prayer the best beginning is confession that we are poor and needy.

**II.** Secondly, after the soul has unburdened itself of all weights of merit and self-sufficiency, it proceeds to prayer, and we have before us A SOUL PLEADING. “I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God. Thou art my help and my deliverer: O Lord, make no tarrying.” The careful reader will perceive four pleas in this single verse.

Upon this topic I would remark that it is the habit of faith, when she is praying, to use pleas. Mere prayer sayers, who do not pray at all, forget to argue with God; but those who would prevail bring forth their reasons and their strong arguments and they debate the question with the Lord. They who play at wrestling catch here and there at random, but those who are really wrestling have a certain way of grasping the opponent — a certain mode of throwing, and the like; they work according to order and rule. Faith’s art of wrestling is to plead with God, and say with holy boldness, “Let it be thus and thus, for these reasons.” Hosea tells us of Jacob at Jabbok, “that there he spake with us”; from which I understand that Jacob instructed us by his example. Now, the two pleas which Jacob used were God’s precept and God’s promise. First, he said, “Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred”: as much as if he put it thus: — “Lord, I am in difficulty, but I have come here through obedience to thee. Thou didst tell me to come hither, into the very teeth of my brother Esau, who comes to meet me like a lion, Lord, Thou canst not be so unfaithful as to bring me into danger and then leave me in it.” This was sound reasoning, and it prevailed with God. Then Jacob also urged a promise: “Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.” Among men, it is a masterly way of reasoning when you can challenge your opponent with his

own words: you may quote other authorities, and he may say, “I deny their force” but, when you quote a man against himself, you foil him completely. When you bring a man’s promise to his mind, he must either confess himself to be unfaithful and changeable, or if he holds to being the same, and being true to his word, you have him, and you have won your will of him. Oh brethren, let us learn thus to plead the precepts, the promises, and whatever else may serve our turn; but let us always have something to plead. Do not reckon you have prayed unless you have pleaded, for pleading is the very marrow of prayer. He who pleads well knows the secret of prevailing with God, especially if he pleads the blood of Jesus, for that unlocks the treasury of heaven. Many keys fit many locks, but the master-key is the blood and the name of Him that died but rose again, and ever lives in heaven to save unto the uttermost.

Faith’s pleas are plentiful, and this is well, for faith is placed in diverse positions, and needs them all. She hath many needs, and having a keen eye she perceives that there are pleas to be urged in every case. I will not, therefore, tell you all faith’s pleas, but I will just mention some of them, enough to let you see how abundant they are. Faith will plead all the attributes of God. “Thou art just, therefore spare thou the soul for whom the Savior died. Thou art merciful, blot out my transgressions. Thou art good, reveal thy bounty to thy servant. Thou art immutable — thou hast done thus and thus to others of thy servants, do thus unto me. Thou art faithful, canst thou break thy promise, canst thou turn away from thy covenant?” Rightly viewed, all the perfections of Deity become pleas for faith.

Faith will boldly plead all God’s gracious relationships. She will say to Him, “Art Thou not the creator? Wilt Thou forsake the work of thine own hands? Art Thou not the Redeemer, Thou hast redeemed thy servant, wilt Thou cast me away?” Faith usually delights to lay hold upon the fatherhood of God. This is generally one of her master points: when she brings this into the field she wins the day. “Thou art a Father, and wouldst Thou chasten us [as] though thou wouldst kill? A Father, and hast Thou no sympathy and no bowels of compassion? A Father, and canst Thou deny what Thine own child asks of Thee?” Whenever I am impressed with the divine majesty, and so, perhaps, a little dispirited in prayer, I find the short and sweet remedy is to remember that, although He is a great King,

and infinitely glorious, I am His child, and no matter who the father is, the child may always be bold with his father. Yes, faith can plead any and all of the relationships in which God stands to His chosen.

Faith too, can ply heaven with the Divine Promises. If you were to go to one of the banks in Lombard Street, and see a man go in and out and lay a piece of paper on the tables and take it up again and nothing more; if he did that several times a day, I think there would soon be orders issued to the porter to keep the man out, because he was merely wasting the clerk's time, and doing nothing to purpose. Those city men who come to the bank in earnest present their cheques, they wait till they receive their money and then they go, but not without having transacted real business. They do not put the paper down, speak about the excellent signature and discuss the correctness of the document, but they want their money for it, and they are not content without it. These are the people who are always welcome at the bank, and not the triflers. Alas, a great many people play at praying, it is nothing better. I say they play at praying, they do not expect God to give them an answer, and thus they are mere triflers, who mock the Lord. He who prays in a businesslike way, meaning what he says, honors the Lord. The Lord does not play at promising, Jesus did not sport at confirming the word by His blood, and we must not make a jest of prayer by going about it in a listless unexpecting spirit.

The Holy Spirit is in earnest, and we must be in earnest also. We must go for a blessing, and not be satisfied till we have it; like the hunter, who is not satisfied because he has run so many miles, but is never content till he takes his prey.

Faith, moreover, pleads the performances of God, she looks back on the past and says, "Lord, thou didst deliver me on such and such an occasion; wilt thou fail me now?" She, moreover, takes her life as a whole, and pleads thus: —

*"After so much mercy past,  
Wilt thou let me sink at last?"*

"Hast thou brought me so far that I may be put to shame at the end?" She knows how to bring the ancient mercies of God, and make them arguments

for present favors. But your time would all be gone if I tried to exhibit, even a thousandth part of faith's pleas.

Sometimes, however, faith's pleas are very singular. As in this text, it is by no means according to the proud rule of human nature to plead: "I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God." It is like another prayer of David: "Have mercy upon mine iniquity, for it is great." It is not the manner of men to plead so, they say, "Lord, have mercy on me, for I am not so bad a sinner as some. But faith reads things in a truer light, and bases her pleas on truth. "Lord, because my sin is great, and thou art a great God, let Thy great mercy be magnified in me." You know the story of the Syrophenician woman; that is a grand instance of the ingenuity of faith's reasoning. She came to Christ about her daughter, and He answered her not a word. What do you think her heart said? Why, she said in herself, "It is well, for He has not denied me: since He has not spoken at all, He has not refused me." With this for an encouragement, she began to plead again. Presently Christ spoke to her sharply, and then her brave heart said, "I have gained words from Him at last, I shall have deeds from Him by-and-by." That also cheered her; and then, when He called her a dog. "Ah," she reasoned, "but a dog is a part of the family, it has some connection with the master of the house. Though it does not eat meat from the table, it gets the crumbs under it, and so I have thee now, great Master, dog as I am; the great mercy that I ask of Thee, great as it is to me, is only a crumb to Thee; grant it then I beseech Thee." Could she fail to have her request? Impossible! When faith hath a will, she always finds a way, and she will win the day when all things forebode defeat.

Faith's pleas are singular, but, let me add, faith's pleas are always sound; for after all, it is a very telling plea to urge that we are poor and needy. Is not that the main argument with mercy? Necessity is the very best plea with benevolence, either human or divine. Is not our need the best reason we can urge? If we would have a physician come quickly to a sick man, "Sir," we say, "it is no common case, he is on the point of death, come to him, come quickly!" If we wanted our city firemen to rush to a fire, we should not say to them, "Make haste, for it is only a small fire"; but, on the contrary, we urge that it is an old house full of combustible materials, and there are rumors of petroleum and gunpowder on the premises; besides, it is near a timber yard, hosts of wooden cottages are close by,

and before long we shall have half the city in a blaze.” We put the case as bad as we can. Oh for wisdom to be equally wise in pleading with God, to find arguments everywhere, but especially to find them in our necessities.

They said two centuries ago that the trade of beggary was the easiest one to carry on, but it paid the worst. I am not sure about the last at this time, but certainly the trade of begging with God is a hard one, and undoubtedly it pays the best of anything in the world. It is very noteworthy that beggars with men have usually plenty of pleas on hand. When a man is hardly driven and starving, he can usually find a reason why he should ask aid of every likely person. Suppose it is a person to whom he is already under many obligations, then the poor creature argues, “I may safely ask of him again, for he knows me, and has been always very kind.” If he never asked of the person before, then he says, “I have never worried him before; he cannot say he has already done all he can for me; I will make bold to begin with him.” If it is one of his own kin, then he will say, “Surely you will help me in my distress, for you are a relation”; and if it be a stranger, he says, “I have often found strangers kinder than my own blood, help me, I entreat you.” If he asks of the rich, he pleads that they will never miss what they give; and if he begs of the poor, he urges that they know what want means, and he is sure they will sympathize with him in his great distress. Oh that we were half as much on the alert to fill our mouths with arguments when we are before the Lord. How is it that we are not half awake, and do not seem to have any spiritual senses aroused. May God grant that we may learn the art of pleading with the eternal God, for in that shall rest our prevalence with Him, through the merit of Jesus Christ.

**III.** I must be brief on the next point. It is A SOUL URGENT: “Make haste unto me, O God. O Lord, make no tarrying.” We may well be urgent with God, if as yet we are not saved, for our need is urgent; we are in constant peril, and the peril is of the most tremendous kind. O sinner, within an hour, within a minute, thou mayest be where hope can never visit thee; therefore, cry, “Make haste, O God, to deliver me: make haste to help me, O Lord!” Yours is not a case that can bear lingering: you have not time to procrastinate; therefore, be urgent, for your need is so. And, remember, if you really are under a sense of need, and the Spirit of God is at work with you, you will and must be urgent. An ordinary sinner may be content to

wait, but a quickened sinner wants mercy now. A dead sinner will lie quiet, but a living sinner cannot rest till pardon is sealed home to his soul. If you are urgent this morning, I am glad of it, because your urgency, I trust, arises from the possession of spiritual life. When you cannot live longer without a Savior, the Savior will come to you, and you shall rejoice in Him.

Brethren, members of this church, as I have said on another point, the same truth holds good with you. God will come to bless you, and come speedily, when your sense of need becomes deep and urgent. Oh, how great is this church's need! We shall grow cold, unholy and worldly; there will be no conversions, there will be no additions to our numbers; there will be diminutions, there will be divisions, there will be mischief of all kinds; Satan will rejoice, and Christ will be dishonored, unless we obtain a larger measure of the Holy Spirit. Our need is urgent, and when we feel that need thoroughly, then we shall get the blessing which we want. Does any melancholy spirit say, "We are in so bad a state that we cannot expect a large blessing"? I reply, perhaps if we were worse, we should obtain it all the sooner. I do not mean if we were really so, but if we felt we were worse, we should be nearer the blessing. When we mourn that we are in an ill state, then we cry the more vehemently to God, and the blessing comes. God never refused to go with Gideon because he had not enough valiant men with him; but he paused because the people were too many. He brought them down from thousands to hundreds, and he diminished the hundreds before he gave them victory. When you feel that you must have God's presence, but that you do not deserve it, and when your consciousness of this lays you in the dust, then shall the blessing be vouchsafed.

For my part, brethren and sisters, I desire to feel a spirit of urgency within my soul as I plead with God for the dew of His grace to descend upon this church. I am not bashful in this matter, for I have a license to pray. Mendicancy is forbidden in the streets, but, before the Lord I am a licensed beggar. Jesus has said, "men ought always to pray and not to faint." You land on the shores of a foreign country with the greatest confidence when you carry a passport with you, and God has issued passports to His children, by which they come boldly to His mercy seat; He has invited you, He has encouraged you, He has bidden you come to

Him, and He has promised that whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. Come, then, come urgently, come importunately, come with this plea, "I am poor and needy; make no tarrying, O my God," and a blessing shall surely come; it will not tarry. God grant we may see it, and give Him the glory of it.

**IV.** I am sorry to have been so brief where I had need to have enlarged, but I must close with the fourth point. Here is another part of the art and mystery of prayer — THE SOUL GRASPING GOD. She has pleaded, and she has been urgent, but now she comes to close quarters; she grasps the covenant angel with one hand, "Thou art my help." and with the other, "Thou art my deliverer." Oh, those blessed "my's," those blessed potent "my's." The sweetness of the Bible lies in the possessive pronouns, and he who is taught to use them as the psalmist did, shall come off a conqueror with the eternal God. Now sinner, I pray God thou mayest be helped to say this morning to the blessed Christ of God, "Thou art my help and my deliverer." Perhaps you mourn that you cannot get that length, but, poor soul, hast thou any other help? If thou hast, then thou canst not hold two helpers with the same hand. "Oh, no," say you, "I have no help anywhere. I have no hope except in Christ." Well, then, poor soul, since thy hand is empty, that empty hand was made on purpose to grasp thy Lord with: lay hold on Him! Say to Him, this day, "Lord, I will hang on thee as poor lame Jacob did; now I cannot help myself, I will cleave to Thee: I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." "Ah, it would be too bold," says one. But the Lord loves holy boldness in poor sinners; He would have you be bolder than you think of being. It is an unhallowed bashfulness that dares not trust a crucified Savior. He died on purpose to save such as thou art; let Him have His way with thee, and do thou trust Him. "Oh," saith one, "but I am so unworthy." He came to seek and save the unworthy. He is not the Savior of the self-righteous: He is the sinners' Savior — "friend of sinners" is His name. Unworthy one, lay hold on Him! "Oh," saith one, "but I have no right." Well, since you have no right, your need shall be your claim: it is all the claim you want. Methinks I hear one say, "It is too late for me to plead for grace." It cannot be: it is impossible. While you live and desire mercy, it is not too late to seek it. Notice the parable of the man who wanted three loaves. I will tell you what crossed my mind when I read it: the man went to his friend at

midnight; it could not have been later; for if he had been a little later than midnight, it would have been early in the morning, and so not late at all. It was midnight, and it could not be later; and so, if it is downright midnight with your soul, yet, be of good cheer, Jesus is an out of season Savior; many of His servants are “born out of due time.” Any season is the right season to call upon the name of Jesus; therefore, only do not let the devil tempt thee with the thought that it can be too late. Go to Jesus now, go at once, and lay hold on the horns of the altar by the venturesome faith, and say, “Sacrifice for sinners, Thou art a sacrifice for me. Intercessor for the graceless, Thou art an intercessor for me. Thou Who distributest gifts to the rebellious, distribute gifts to me, for a rebel I have been.” When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. “Such am I, Master; let the power of Thy death be seen in me to save my soul.”

Oh, you that are saved and, therefore love Christ, I want you, dear brethren, as the saints of God, to practice this last part of my subject; and be sure to lay hold upon God in prayer. “Thou art my help and my deliverer.” As a church we throw ourselves upon the strength of God, and we can do nothing without Him; but we do not mean to be without Him, we will hold Him fast. “Thou art my help and my deliverer.” There was a boy at Athens, according to the old story, who used to boast that he ruled all Athens, and when they asked him how, he said, “Why, I rule my mother, my mother rules my father, and my father rules the city.” He who knows how to be master of prayer will rule the heart of Christ, and Christ can and will do all things for His people, for the Father hath committed all things into His hands. You can be omnipotent if you know how to pray, omnipotent in all things which glorify God. What does the Word itself say? “Let him lay hold of my strength.” Prayer moves the arm that moves the world. Oh for grace to grasp Almighty love in this fashion. We want more holdfast prayer; more tugging, and gripping, and wrestling, that saith, “I will not let thee go.” That picture of Jacob at Jabbok shall suffice for us to close with. The covenant angel is there, and Jacob wants a blessing from him: he seems to put him off, but no put-offs will do for Jacob. Then the angel endeavors to escape from him, and tugs and strives; so he may, but no efforts shall make Jacob relax his grasp. At last the angel falls from ordinary wrestling to wounding him in the very seat of his strength; and Jacob will let his thigh go, and all his limbs go, but he will not let the angel



go. The poor man's strength shrivels under the withering touch, but in his weakness he is still strong: he throws his arms about the mysterious man, and holds him as in a death-grip. Then the other says, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." Mark, he did not shake him off, he only said, "Let me go"; the angel will do nothing to force him to relax his hold, he leaves that to his voluntary will. The valiant Jacob cries, "No, I am set on it, I am resolved to win an answer to my prayer. I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Now, when the church begins to pray, it may be, at first, the Lord will make as though he would have gone further [~~224~~ Luke 24:28], and we may fear that no answer will be given. Hold on, dear brethren. Be ye steadfast, unmovable, notwithstanding all. By-and-by, it may be, there will come discouragements where we looked for a flowing success; we shall find brethren hindering, some will be slumbering, and others sinning; backsliders and impenitent souls will abound; but let us not be turned aside. Let us be all the more eager. And if it should so happen that we ourselves become distressed and dispirited, and feel we never were so weak as we are now; never mind, brethren, still hold on, for when the sinew is shrunk the victory is near. Grasp with a tighter clutch than ever. Be this our resolution, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Remember the longer the blessing is coming the richer it will be when it arrives. That which is gained speedily by a single prayer is sometimes only a second rate blessing; but that which is gained after many a desperate tug, and many an awful struggle, is a full weighted and precious blessing. The children of importunity are always fair to look upon. The blessing which costs us the most prayer will be worth the most. Only let us be persevering in supplication, and we shall gain a broad far-reaching benediction for ourselves, the churches, and the world. I wish it were in my power to stir you all to fervent prayer; but I must leave it with the great author of all true supplication, namely, the Holy Spirit. May He work in us mightily, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~224~~ Genesis 32; ~~225~~ Luke 11:1-13.

# THE THRONE OF GRACE

## SERMON NO. 1024

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
NOVEMBER 19TH, 1871,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

*“The throne of grace.”* — ~~5046~~ *Hebrews 4:16*

THESE words are found embedded in that gracious verse, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”; they are a gem in a golden setting. True prayer is an approach of the soul by the Spirit of God to the throne of God. It is not the utterance of words, it is not alone the feeling of desires, but it is the advance of the desires to God, the spiritual approach of our nature towards the Lord our God. True prayer is not a mere mental exercise, nor a vocal performance, but it is deeper far than that — it is spiritual commerce with the Creator of heaven and earth. God is a Spirit unseen of mortal eye, and only to be perceived by the inner man; our spirit within us, begotten by the Holy Ghost at our regeneration, discerns the Great Spirit, communes with him, prefers to him its requests, and receives from him answers of peace. It is a spiritual business from beginning to end; and its aim and object end not with man, but reach to God himself.

In order to such prayer, the work of the Holy Ghost himself is needed. If prayer were of the lips alone, we should only need breath in our nostrils to pray: if prayer were of the desires alone, many excellent desires are easily felt, even by natural men: but when it is the spiritual desire, and the spiritual fellowship of the human spirit with the Great Spirit, then the Holy Ghost himself must be present all through it, to help infirmity, and give life and power, or else true prayer will never be presented, but the thing offered to God will wear the name and have the form, but the inner life of prayer will be far from it.

Moreover, it is clear from the connection of our text, that the interposition of the Lord Jesus Christ is essential to acceptable prayer. As prayer will not be truly prayer without the Spirit of God, so it will not be prevailing prayer without the Son of God. he, the Great High Priest, must go within the veil for us; nay, through his crucified person the veil must be entirely taken away; for, until then, we are shut out from the living God. The man who, despite the teaching of Scripture, tries to pray without a Savior insults the Deity; and he who imagines that his own natural desires, coming up before God, unsprinkled with the precious blood, will be an acceptable sacrifice before God, makes a mistake; he has not brought an offering that God can accept, any more than if he had struck off a dog's neck, or offered an unclean sacrifice. Wrought in us by the Spirit, presented for us by the Christ of God, prayer becomes power before the Most High, but not else.

In order, dear friends, that I may stir you up to prayer this morning, and that your souls may be led to come near to the Throne of Grace, I purpose to take these few words and handle them as God shall give me ability. You have begun to pray; God has begun to answer. This week has been a very memorable one in the history of this church. Larger numbers than ever before at one time have come forward to confess Christ, — as plain an answer to the supplications of God's people, as though the hand of the Most High had been stretched out of heaven handing down to us the blessings for which we asked. Now, let us continue in prayer, yea, let us gather strength in intercession, and the more we succeed, the more earnest let us be to succeed yet more and more. Let us not be straitened in our own bowels, since we are not straitened in our God. This is a good day, and a time of glad tidings, and seeing that we have the King's ear, I am most anxious that we should speak to him for thousands of others; that they also, in answer to our pleadings, may be brought nigh unto Christ.

In trying to speak of the text this morning, I shall take it thus: First, here is a throne; then, secondly, here is grace; then we will put the two together, and we shall see grace on a throne; and putting them together in another order, we shall see sovereignty manifesting itself, and resplendent in grace.

**II.** Our text speaks of A THRONE: — “The Throne of Grace.” God is to be viewed in prayer as our Father; that is the aspect which is dearest to us;

but still we are not to regard him as though he were such as we are; for our Savior has qualified the expression “Our Father,” with the words “who art in heaven”; and close at the heels of that condescending name, in order to remind us that our Father is still infinitely greater than ourselves, he has bidden us say, “Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come”; so that our Father is still to be regarded as a King, and in prayer we come, not only to our Father’s feet, but we come also to the throne of the Great Monarch of the universe. The mercy-seat is a throne, and we must not forget this.

If prayer should always be regarded by us as an entrance into the courts of the royalty of heaven; if we are to behave ourselves as courtiers should in the presence of an illustrious majesty, then we are not at a loss to know the right spirit in which to pray. If in prayer we come to a throne, it is clear that our spirit should, in the first place, be one of lowly reverence. It is expected that the subject in approaching to the king should pay him homage and honor. The pride that will not own the king, the treason which rebels against the sovereign will should, if it be wise, avoid any near approach to the throne. Let pride bite the curb at a distance, let treason lurk in corners, for only lowly reverence may come before the king himself when he sits clothed in his robes of majesty. In our case, the king before whom we come is the highest of all monarchs, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. Emperors are but the shadows of his imperial power. They call themselves kings by right divine, but what divine right have they? Common sense laughs their pretensions to scorn. The Lord alone hath divine right, and to him only doth the kingdom belong. He is the blessed and only potentate. They are but nominal kings, to be set up and put down at the will of men, or the decree of providence, but he is Lord alone, the Prince of the kings of the earth.

*“He sits on no precarious throne,  
Nor borrows leave to be.”*

My heart, be sure that thou prostrate thyself in such a presence. If he be so great, place thy mouth in the dust before him, for he is the most powerful of all kings; his throne hath sway in all worlds; heaven obeys him cheerfully, hell trembles at his frown, and earth is constrained to yield to him homage willingly or unwillingly. His power can make or can destroy. To create or to crush, either is easy enough to him. My soul be

thou sure that when thou drawest nigh to the Omnipotent, who is as a consuming fire, thou put thy shoes from off thy feet, and worship him with lowliest humility.

Besides, he is the most Holy of all kings. His throne is a great white throne, unspotted, and clear as crystal. "The heavens are not pure in his sight, and he charged his angels with folly." And thou, a sinful creature, with what lowliness shouldst thou draw nigh to him. Familiarity there may be, but let it not be unhallowed. Boldness there should be, but let it not be impertinent. Still thou art on earth and he in heaven; still thou art a worm of the dust, a creature crushed before the moth, and he the Everlasting: before the mountains were brought forth, he was God, and if all created things should pass away again, yet still were he the same. My brethren, I am afraid we do not bow as we should before the Eternal Majesty; but, henceforth, let us ask the Spirit of God to put us in a right frame, that every one of our prayers may be a reverential approach to the Infinite Majesty above.

A throne, and therefore, in the second place, to be approached with devout joyfulness. If I find myself favored by divine grace to stand amongst those favored ones who frequent his courts, shall I not feel glad? I might have been in his prison, but I am before his throne: I might have been driven from his presence for ever, but I am permitted to come near to him, even into his royal palace, into his secret chamber of gracious audience, shall I not then be thankful? Shall not my thankfulness ascend into joy, and shall I not feel that I am honored, that I am made the recipient of great favors when I am permitted to pray? Wherefore is thy countenance sad, O suppliant, when thou standest before the throne of grace? If thou wert before the throne of justice to be condemned for thine iniquities, thy hands might well be on thy loins; but now thou art favored to come before the King in his silken robes of love, let thy face shine with sacred delight. If thy sorrows be heavy, tell them unto him, for he can assuage them; if thy sins be multiplied, confess them, for he can forgive them. O ye courtiers in the halls of such a monarch, be ye exceeding glad, and mingle praises with your prayers.

It is a throne, and therefore, in the third place, whenever it is approached, it should be with complete submission. We do not pray to God to instruct

him as to what he ought to do, neither for a moment must we presume to dictate the line of the divine procedure. We are permitted to say unto God, “Thus and thus would we have it,” but we must evermore add, “But, seeing that we are ignorant and may be mistaken — seeing that we are still in the flesh, and, therefore, may be actuated by carnal motives — not as we will, but as thou wilt.” Who shall dictate to the throne? No loyal child of God will for a moment imagine that he is to occupy the place of the King, but he bows before him who has a right to be Lord of all; and though he utters his desire earnestly, vehemently, importunately, and pleads and pleads again, yet it is evermore with this needful reservation: “Thy will be done, my Lord: and, if I ask anything that is not in accordance therewith, my inmost will is that thou wouldst be good enough to deny thy servant; I will take it as a true answer if thou refuse me, if I ask that which seemeth not good in thy sight.” If we constantly remembered this, I think we should be less inclined to push certain suits before the throne, for we should feel, “I am here in seeking my own ease, my own comfort, my own advantage, and peradventure, I may be asking for that which would dishonor God; therefore will I speak with the deepest submission to the divine decrees.”

But, brethren, in the fourth place, if it be a throne, it ought to be approached with enlarged expectations. Well doth our hymn put it:

*“Thou art coming to a king:  
Large petitions with thee bring.”*

We do not come, as it were, in prayer, only to God’s alimony where he dispenses his favors to the poor, nor do we come to the back-door of the house of mercy to receive the broken scraps, though that were more than we deserve; to eat the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table is more than we could claim; but, when we pray, we are standing in the palace, on the glittering floor of the great King’s own reception room, and thus we are placed upon a vantage ground. In prayer we stand where angels bow with veiled faces; there, even there, the cherubim and seraphim adore, before that selfsame throne to which our prayers ascend. And shall we come there with stunted requests, and narrow and contracted faith? Nay, it becomes not a King to be giving away pence and groats, he distributes pieces of broad gold; he scatters not as poor men must, scraps of bread

and broken meat, but he makes a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. When Alexander's soldier was told to ask what he would, he did not ask stintedly after the nature of his own merits, but he made such a heavy demand, that the royal treasurer refused to pay it, and put the case to Alexander, and Alexander in right kingly sort replied: "He knows how great Alexander is, and he has asked as from a king; let him have what he requests." Take heed of imagining that God's thoughts are as thy thoughts, and his ways as thy ways. Do not bring before God stinted petitions and narrow desires, and say, "Lord, do according to these," but, remember, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his ways above your ways, and his thoughts above your thoughts, and ask, therefore, after a God-like sort, ask for great things, for you are before the throne of grace, for then he would do for us exceeding abundantly above what we ask or even think.

And, beloved, I may add, in the fifth place, that the right spirit in which to approach the throne of grace, is that of unstaggering confidence. Who shall doubt the King? Who dares impugn the Imperial word? It was well said that if integrity were banished from the hearts of all mankind besides, it ought still to dwell in the hearts of kings. Shame on a king if he can lie. The veriest beggar in the streets is dishonored by a broken promise, but what shall we say of a king if his word cannot be depended upon? Oh, shame upon us, if we are unbelieving before the throne of the King of heaven and earth. With our God before us in all his glory, sitting on the throne of grace, will our hearts dare to say we mistrust him? Shall we imagine either that he cannot, or will not, keep his promise? Banished be such blasphemous thoughts, and if they must come, let them come upon us when we are somewhere in the outskirts of his dominions, if such a place there be, but not in prayer, when we are in his immediate presence, and behold him in all the glory of his throne of grace. There, surely, is the place for the child to trust its Father, for the loyal subject to trust his monarch; and, therefore, far from it be all wavering or suspicion. Unstaggering faith should be predominant before the mercy-seat.

Only one other remark upon this point, and that is, that if prayer be a coming before the throne of God, it ought always to be conducted with the deepest sincerity, and in the spirit which makes everything real. If you are disloyal enough to despise the King, at least, for your own sake, do not

mock him to his face, and when he is upon his throne. If anywhere you dare repeat holy words without heart, let it not be in Jehovah's palace. If a person should ask for audience with royalty, and then should say, "I scarce know why I have come, I do not know that I have anything very particular to ask; I have no very urgent suit to press;" would he not be guilty both of folly and baseness? As for our great King, when we venture into his presence, let us have an errand there. As I said the other Sabbath, let us beware of playing at praying. It is insolence toward God. If I am called upon to pray in public, I must not dare to use words that are intended to please the ears of my fellow-worshippers, but I must realize that I am speaking to God himself, and that I have business to transact with the great Lord. And, in my private prayer, if, when I rise from my bed in the morning, I bow my knee and repeat certain words, or when I retire to rest at night go through the same regular form, I rather sin than do anything that is good, unless my very soul doth speak unto the Most High. Dost thou think that the King of heaven is delighted to hear thee pronounce words with a frivolous tongue, and a thoughtless mind? Thou knowest him not. He is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. If thou hast any empty forms to prate, go and pour them out into the ears of fools like thyself, but not before the Lord of Hosts. If thou hast certain words to utter, to which thou dost attach a superstitious reverence, go and say them in the bedizened courts of the harlot Rome, but not before the glorious Lord of Zion. The spiritual God seeks spiritual worshipers, and such he will accept, and only such; but the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord, and only a sincere prayer is his delight.

Beloved, the gathering up of all our remarks is just this, — prayer is no trifle. It is an eminent and elevated act. It is a high and wondrous privilege. Under the old Persian Empire a few of the nobility were permitted at any time to come in unto the king, and this was thought to be the highest privilege possessed by mortals. You and I, the people of God, have a permit, a passport to come before the throne of heaven at any time we will, and we are encouraged to come there with great boldness; but still let us not forget that it is no mean thing to be a courtier in the courts of heaven and earth, to worship him who made us and sustains us in being. Truly, when we attempt to pray, we may hear the voice saying out of the



excellent glory: “Bow the knee.” From all the spirits that behold the face of our Father who is in heaven, even now, I hear a voice which saith, “Oh, come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; fear before him all the earth.”

**II.** Lest the glow and brilliance of the word “throne” should be too much for mortal vision, our text now presents us with the soft, gentle radiance of that delightful word — “GRACE.” We are called to the throne of grace, not to the throne of law. Rocky Sinai once was the throne of law, when God came to Paran with ten thousand of his holy ones. Who desired to draw near to that throne? Even Israel might not. Bounds were set about the mount, and if but a beast touched the mount, it was stoned or thrust through with a dart. O ye self-righteous ones who hope that you can obey the law, and think that you can be saved by it, look to the flames that Moses saw, and shrink, and tremble, and despair. To that throne we do not come now, for through Jesus the case is changed. To a conscience purged by the precious blood there is no anger upon the divine throne, though to our troubled minds —

*“Once ‘twas a seat of burning wrath,  
And shot devouring flame;  
Our God appeared consuming fire,  
And jealous was his name.”*

And, blessed be God, we are not this morning to speak of the throne of ultimate justice. Before that we shall all come, and as many of us as have believed will find it to be a throne of grace as well as of justice; for, he who sits upon that throne shall pronounce no sentence of condemnation against the man who is justified by faith. But I have not to call you this morning to the place from whence the resurrection-trumpet shall ring out so shrill and clear. Nor yet do we see the angels with their vengeful swords come forth to smite the foes of God; not yet are the great doors of the pit opened to swallow up the enemies who would not have the Son of God to reign over them. We are still on praying ground and pleading terms with God, and the throne to which we are bidden to come, and of which we speak at this time, is the throne of grace. It is a throne set up on purpose for the dispensation of grace; a throne from which every utterance is an

utterance of grace; the scepter that is stretched out from it is the silver scepter of grace; the decrees proclaimed from it are purposes of grace; the gifts that are scattered down its golden steps are gifts of grace; and he that sits upon the throne is grace itself. It is the throne of grace to which we approach when we pray; and let us for a moment or two think this over, by way of consolatory encouragement to those who are beginning to pray; indeed, to all of us who are praying men and women.

If in prayer I come before a throne of grace, then the faults of my prayer will be overlooked. In beginning to pray, dear friends, you feel as if you did not pray. The groanings of your spirit, when you rise from your knees are such that you think there is nothing in them. What a blotted, blurred, smeared prayer it is. Never mind; you are not come to the throne of justice, else when God perceived the fault in the prayer he would spurn it, — your broken words, your gaspings, and stammerings are before a throne of grace. When any one of us has presented his best prayer before God, if he saw it as God sees it, there is no doubt he would make great lamentation over it; for there is enough sin in the best prayer that was ever prayed to secure its being cast away from God. But it is not a throne of justice I say again, and here is the hope for our lame, limping supplications. Our condescending King does not maintain a stately etiquette in his court like that which has been observed by princes among men, where a little mistake or a flaw would secure the petitioner's being dismissed with disgrace. Oh, no; the faulty cries of his children are not severely criticized by him. The Lord High Chamberlain of the palace above, our Lord Jesus Christ, takes care to alter and amend every prayer before he presents it, and he makes the prayer perfect with his perfection, and prevalent with His own merits. God looks upon the prayer, as presented through Christ, and forgives all its own inherent faultiness. How this ought to encourage any of us who feel ourselves to be feeble, wandering, and unskillful in prayer. If you cannot plead with God as sometimes you did in years gone by, if you feel as if somehow or other you had grown rusty in the work of supplication, never give over, but come still, yea and come oftener, for it is not a throne of severe criticism, it is a throne of grace to which you come.

Then, further, inasmuch as it is a throne of grace, the faults of the petitioner himself shall not prevent the success of his prayer. Oh, what

faults there are in us! To come before a throne how unfit we are — we, that are all defiled with sin within and without! Dare any of you think of praying were it not that God's throne is a throne of grace? If you could, I confess that I could not. An absolute God, infinitely holy and just, could not in consistency with his divine nature answer any prayer from such a sinner as I am, were it not that he has arranged a plan by which my prayer comes up no longer to a throne of absolute justice, but to a throne which is also the mercy-seat, the propitiation, the place where God meets sinners, through Jesus Christ. Ah, I could not say to you, "Pray," not even to you saints, unless it were a throne of grace, much less could I talk of prayer to you sinners; but now I will say this to every sinner here, though he should think himself to be the worst sinner that ever lived, cry unto the Lord and seek him while he may be found. A throne of grace is a place fitted for you: go to your knees; by simple faith go to your Savior, for he, he it is who is the throne of grace. It is in him that God is able to dispense grace unto the most guilty of mankind. Blessed be God, neither the faults of the prayer nor yet of the suppliant shall shut out our petitions from the God who delights in broken and contrite hearts.

If it be a throne of grace, then the desires of the pleader will be interpreted. If I cannot find words in which to utter my desires, God in his grace will read my desires without the words. He takes the meaning of his saints, the meaning of their groans. A throne that was not gracious would not trouble itself to make out our petitions; but God, the infinitely gracious One, will dive into the soul of our desires, and he will read there what we cannot speak with the tongue. Have you never seen the parent, when his child is trying to say something to him, and he knows very well what it is the little one has got to say, help him over the words and utter the syllables for him, and if the little one has half-forgotten what he would say, you have seen the father suggest the word: and so the ever-blessed Spirit, from the throne of grace, will help us and teach us words, nay, write in our hearts the desires themselves. We have in Scripture instances where God puts words into sinners' mouths. "Take with you words," saith he, "and say unto him, Receive us graciously and love us freely." He will put the desires, and put the expression of those desires into your spirit by his grace; he will direct your desires to the things which you ought to seek for; he will teach you your wants, though as yet you know them not; he will

suggest to you his promises that you may be able to plead them; he will, in fact, be Alpha and Omega to your prayer, just as he is to your salvation; for as salvation is from first to last of grace, so the sinner's approach to the throne of grace is of grace from first to last. What comfort is this. Will we not, my dear friends, with the greater boldness draw near to this throne, as we suck out the sweet meaning of this precious word, "the throne of grace"?

If it be a throne of grace, then all the wants of those who come to it will be supplied. The King from off such a throne will not say, "Thou must bring to Me gifts, thou must offer to Me sacrifices." It is not a throne for receiving tribute; it is a throne for dispensing gifts. Come, then, ye who are poor as poverty itself; come ye that have no merits and are destitute of virtues, come ye that are reduced to a beggarly bankruptcy by Adam's fall and by your own transgressions; this is not the throne of majesty which supports itself by the taxation of its subjects, but a throne which glorifies itself by streaming forth like a fountain with floods of good things. Come ye, now, and receive the wine and milk which are freely given, yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. All the petitioner's wants shall be supplied, because it is a throne of grace.

And so, all the petitioner's miseries shall be compassionated. Suppose I come to the throne of grace with the burden of my sins; there is one on the throne who felt the burden of sin in ages long gone by, and has not forgotten its weight. Suppose I come loaded with sorrow; there is One there who knows all the sorrows to which humanity can be subjected. Am I depressed and distressed? Do I fear that God himself has forsaken me? There is One upon the throne who said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is a throne from which grace delights to look upon the miseries of mankind with tender eye, to consider them and to relieve them. Come, then; come, then; come, then, ye that are not only poor, but wretched, whose miseries make you long for death, and yet dread it. Ye captive ones, come in your chains; ye slaves, come with the irons upon your souls; ye who sit in darkness, come forth all blindfold as you are. The throne of grace will look on you if you cannot look on it, and will give to you, though you have nothing to give in return, and will deliver you, though you cannot raise a finger to deliver yourself.

“The throne of grace.” The word grows as I turn it over in my mind, and to me it is a most delightful reflection that if I come to the throne of God in prayer, I may feel a thousand defects, but yet there is hope. I usually feel more dissatisfied with my prayers than with anything else I do. I do not believe that it is an easy thing to pray in public so as to conduct the devotions of a large congregation aright. We sometimes hear persons commended for preaching well, but if any shall be enabled to pray well, there will be an equal gift and a higher grace in it. But, brethren, suppose in our prayers there should be defects of knowledge: it is a throne of grace, and our Father knoweth that we have need of these things. Suppose there should be defects of faith: he sees our little faith and still doth not reject it, small as it is. He doth not in every case measure out his gifts by the degree of our faith, but by the sincerity and trueness of faith. And if there should be grave defects in our spirit even, and failures in the fervency or in the humility of the prayer, still, though these should not be there and are much to be deplored; grace overlooks all this, forgives all this, and still its merciful hand is stretched out to enrich us according to our needs. Surely this ought to induce many to pray who have not prayed, and should make us who have been long accustomed to use the consecrated art of prayer, to draw near with greater boldness than ever to the throne of grace.

**III.** But, now regarding our text as a whole, it conveys to us the idea of GRACE ENTHRONED. It is a throne, and who sits on it? It is grace personified that is here installed in dignity. And, truly, to-day grace is on a throne. In the gospel of Jesus Christ grace is the most predominant attribute of God. How comes it to be so exalted? We reply, well, grace has a throne by conquest. Grace came down to earth in the form of the Well-beloved, and it met with sin. Long and sharp was the struggle, and grace appeared to be trampled under foot of sin; but grace at last seized sin, threw it on its own shoulders, and, though all but crushed beneath the burden, grace carried sin up to the cross and nailed it there, slew it there, put it to death for ever, and triumphed gloriously. For this cause at this hour grace sits on a throne, because it has conquered human sin, has borne the penalty of human guilt, and overthrown all its enemies.

Grace, moreover, sits on the throne because it has established itself there by right. There is no injustice in the grace of God. God is as just when he forgives a believer as when he casts a sinner into hell. I believe in my own

soul that there is as much and as pure a justice in the acceptance of a soul that believes in Christ as there will be in the rejection of those souls who die impenitent, and are banished from Jehovah's presence. The sacrifice of Christ has enabled God to be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth. He who knows the word "substitution," and can spell its meaning aright, will see that there is nothing due to punitive justice from any believer, seeing that Jesus Christ has paid all the believer's debts, and now God would be unjust if he did not save those for whom Christ vicariously suffered, for whom his righteousness was provided, and to whom it is imputed. Grace is on the throne by conquest, and sits there by right.

Grace is enthroned this day, brethren, because Christ has finished his work and gone into the heavens. It is enthroned in power. When we speak of its throne, we mean that it has unlimited might. Grace sits not on the footstool of God; grace stands not in the courts of God, but it sits on the throne; it is the regnant attribute; it is the king to-day. This is the dispensation of grace, the year of grace: grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. We live in the era of reigning grace, for seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for the sons of men, Jesus is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. Sinner, if you were to meet grace in the by-way, like a traveler on his journey, I would bid you make its acquaintance and ask its influence; if you should meet grace as a merchant on the exchange, with treasure in his hand, I would bid you court its friendship, it will enrich you in the hour of poverty; if you should see grace as one of the peers of heaven, highly exalted, I would bid you seek to get its ear; but, oh, when grace sits on the throne, I beseech you close in with it at once. It can be no higher, it can be no greater, for it is written "God is love," which is an alias for grace. Oh, come and bow before it; come and adore the infinite mercy and grace of God. Doubt not, halt not, hesitate not. Grace is reigning; grace is God; God is love. Oh that you, seeing grace is thus enthroned, would come and receive it. I say, then, that grace is enthroned by conquest, by right, and by power, and, I will add, it is enthroned in glory, for God glorifies his grace. It is one of his objects now to make his grace illustrious. He delights to pardon penitents, and so to show his pardoning grace; he delights to look upon wanderers and restore them, to show his reclaiming grace; he delights to look upon the

broken-hearted and comfort them, that he may show his consoling grace. There is a grace to be had of various kinds, or rather the same grace acting different ways, and God delights to make his grace glorious. There is a rainbow round about the throne like unto an emerald, the emerald of his compassion and his love. O happy souls that can believe this, and believing it can come at once and glorify grace by becoming instances of its power.

**IV.** Lastly, our text, if rightly read, has in it SOVEREIGNTY RESPLENDENT IN GLORY, — THE GLORY OF GRACE. The mercy seat is a throne; though grace is there, it is still a throne. Grace does not displace sovereignty. Now, the attribute of sovereignty is very high and terrible; its light is like unto a jasper stone, most precious, and like unto a sapphire stone, or, as Ezekiel calls it, “the terrible crystal.” Thus saith the King, the Lord of hosts: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” “Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” “Hath not the potter power over the clay to make of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?” These are great and terrible words, and are not to be answered. He is a King, and he will do as he wills. None shall stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? But, ah! lest any of you should be downcast by the thought of his sovereignty, I invite you to the text. It is a throne, — there is sovereignty; but to every soul that knows how to pray, to every soul that by faith comes to Jesus, the true mercy seat, divine sovereignty wears no dark and terrible aspect, but is full of love. It is a throne of grace; from which I gather that the sovereignty of God to a believer, to a pleader, to one who comes to God in Christ, is always exercised in pure grace. To you, to you who come to God in prayer, the sovereignty always runs thus: “I will have mercy on that sinner; though he deserves it not, though in him there is no merit, yet because I can do as I will with my own, I will bless him, I will make him my child, I will accept him; he shall be mine in the day when I make up my jewels.” On the mercy seat God never executed sovereignty otherwise than in a way of grace. He reigns, but in this case grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

There are these two or three things to be thought of, and I have done. On the throne of grace sovereignty has placed itself under bonds of love. I must speak with words choice and picked here, and I must hesitate and pause to get the right sentences, lest I err while endeavoring to speak the truth in plainness. God will do as he wills; but, on the mercy seat, he is under bonds — bonds of his own making, for he has entered into covenant with Christ, and so into covenant with his chosen. Though God is and ever must be a sovereign, he never will break his covenant, not alter the word that is gone out of his mouth. He cannot be false to a covenant of his own making. When I come to God in Christ, to God on the mercy seat, I need not imagine that by any act of sovereignty God will set aside his covenant. That cannot be: it is impossible.

Moreover, on the throne of grace, God is again bound to us by his promises. The covenant contains in it many gracious promises, exceeding great and precious. “Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” Until God had said that word or a word to that effect, it was at his own option to hear prayer or not, but it is not so now; for now, if it be true prayer offered through Jesus Christ, his truth binds him to hear it. A man may be perfectly free, but the moment he makes a promise, he is not free to break it; and the everlasting God wants not to break his promise. He delights to fulfill it. He hath declared that all his promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus; but, for our consolation when we survey God under the high and terrible aspect of a sovereign, we have this to reflect on, that he is under covenant bonds of promise to be faithful to the souls that seek him. His throne must be a throne of grace to his people.

And, once more, and sweetest thought of all, every covenant promise has been endorsed and sealed with blood, and far be it from the everlasting God to pour scorn upon the blood of his dear Son. When a king has given a charter to a city, he may before have been absolute, and there may have been nothing to check his prerogatives, but when the city has its charter, then it pleads its rights before the king. Even thus God has given to his people a charter of untold blessings, bestowing upon them the sure mercies of David. Very much of the validity of a charter depends upon the signature and the seal, and, my brethren, how sure is the charter of covenant grace. The signature is the hand-writing of God himself, and the



seal is the blood of the Only-begotten. The covenant is ratified with blood, the blood of his own dear Son. It is not possible that we can plead in vain with God when we plead the blood-sealed covenant, ordered in all things and sure. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the power of the blood of Jesus with God can never fail. It speaks when we are silent, and it prevails when we are defeated. Better things than that of Abel doth it ask for, and its cry is heard. Let us come boldly, for we hear the promise in our hearts. When we feel alarmed because of the sovereignty of God, let us cheerfully sing —

*“The gospel bears my spirit up,  
A faithful and unchanging God  
Lays the foundation for my hope  
In oaths, and promises, and blood.”*

May God the Holy Spirit help us to use aright from this time forward “the throne of grace.” Amen.

**Rome, Dec. 7, 1871.**

### **TO MY BELOVED CHURCH AND FRIENDS IN GENERAL,**

Beloved in the Lord, having felt it to be my duty to leave England for a short time to prevent a return of my former complaint, I am bound gratefully to acknowledge the good hand of the Lord upon me during my sojourn abroad. I hope to return in a brief season, so strengthened as to continue to labor on for a considerable period without another pause. I take this opportunity of thanking my affectionate church and kind friends, for their innumerable acts of generous sympathy, in aiding our College and Orphanage, and especially for those many prayers which were turned to my comfort and healing in my late illness, and are the means of my upholding in my ever-growing service for the Lord. The Lord return into their bosoms a thousandfold the good which faithful friends have implored for me, and make me more than ever the means of blessing to them by ministry.

Just now I implore a renewal of those prayers with increased earnestness, for a revival of religion is greatly needed; and it would be a sure evidence of its speedy coming, if believers united in prayer for it. Already the flame is kindled at the Tabernacle, but it needs to be fanned into a mighty

conflagration. Our country requires a divine visitation, and the promise of it only needs to be pleaded to be fulfilled. Brethren, as one man, cry mightily to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, beseeching him to put his hand to the work, and magnify his Son in the eyes of all the people. Standing where Satan's seat is, in the midst of ten thousand idols, I beseech those who worship God in the spirit to wrestle in prayer for times of refreshing, that all lands may know that Jesus Christ is Lord. How long shall the name of Jesus be blasphemed by the idolatries of Antichrist? It may be that the times of darkness will last till the children of light cry out bitterly, day and night, by reason of soul anguish. Then will God avenge his own elect, and that speedily.

As I have trodden the Appian way I have rejoiced that Jesus, whom Paul preached, is yet alive, and is certain in due season to put down his enemies. Already he has desolated the Colosseum where his faithful martyrs poured forth their blood; the pagan power has fallen, and so also shall the papal, and all other which opposes his kingdom. Let us proclaim a spiritual crusade, and set up our banners by redoubled prayer. It is certain that supplication produces marvellous results in heaven and earth; its power is proven in our own personal experience, and throughout the history of the church. Brethren, LET US PRAY.

Yours, for Jesus' sake,

***C.H. SPURGEON.***

# THE JOY OF THE LORD, THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE

SERMON NO. 1027

DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING,  
DECEMBER 31ST, 1871,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*"The joy of the Lord is your strength."* — ~~1027~~ Nehemiah 8:10.

"And the singers sang aloud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." — ~~1028~~ Nehemiah 12:42-43.

LAST Sabbath day in the morning I spoke of the birth of our Savior as being full of joy to the people of God, and, indeed, to all nations. We then looked at the joy from a distance; we will now in contemplation draw nearer to it, and perhaps as we consider it, and remark the multiplied reasons for its existence, some of those reasons may operate upon our own hearts, and we may go out of this house of prayer ourselves partakers of the exceeding great joy. We shall count it to have been a successful morning if the people of God are made to rejoice in the Lord, and especially if those who have been bowed down and burdened in soul shall receive the oil of joy for mourning. It is no mean thing to comfort the Lord's mourners; it is a work specially dear to the Spirit of God, and, therefore, not to be lightly esteemed. Holy sorrow is precious before God, and is no bar to godly joy. Let it be carefully noted in connection with our first text that abounding mourning is no reason why there should not speedily be seen an equally abundant joy, for the very people who were bidden by Nehemiah and Ezra to rejoice were even then melted with penitential grief, "for all the people wept when they heard the words of

the law.” The vast congregation before the watergate, under the teaching of Ezra, were awakened and cut to the heart; they felt the edge of the law of God like a sword opening up their hearts, tearing, cutting, and killing, and well might they lament: then was the time to let them feel the gospel’s balm and hear the gospel’s music, and, therefore, the former sons of thunder changed their note, and became sons of consolation, saying to them, “This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. Go your way eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Now that they were penitent, and sincerely turned to their God, they were bidden to rejoice. As certain fabrics need to be damped before they will take the glowing colors with which they are to be adorned, so our spirits need the bedewing of repentance before they can receive the radiant colouring of delight. The glad news of the gospel can only be printed on wet paper. Have you ever seen clearer shining than that which follows a shower? Then the sun transforms the rain-drops into gems, the flowers look up with fresher smiles and faces glittering from their refreshing bath, and the birds from among the dripping branches sing with notes more rapturous, because they have paused awhile. So, when the soul has been saturated with the rain of penitence, the clear shining of forgiving love makes the flowers of gladness blossom all around. The steps by which we ascend to the palace of delight are usually moist with tears. Grief for sin is the porch of the House Beautiful, where the guests are full of “The joy of the Lord.” I hope, then, that the mourners, to whom this discourse shall come, will discover and enjoy the meaning of that divine benediction in the sermon on the mount, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

From our text we shall draw several themes of thought, and shall remark: first, there is a joy of divine origin, — “The joy of the Lord;” and, secondly, that joy is to all who partake of it a source of strength — “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” Then we shall go on to show that such strength always reveals itself practically — our second text will help us there: and we shall close by noticing, in the fourth place, that this joy, and, consequently, this strength, are within our reach today.

**I. THERE IS A JOY OF DIVINE ORIGIN** — “The joy of the Lord.” Springing from the Lord as its source, it will necessarily be of a very elevated

character. Since man fell in the garden, he has too often sought for his enjoyments where the serpent finds his. It is written, “upon thy belly shalt thou go and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life,” this was the serpent’s doom; and man, with infatuated ambition, has tried to find his delight in his sensual appetites, and to content his soul with earth’s poor dust. But the joys of time cannot satisfy an undying nature, and when a soul is once quickened by the eternal Spirit, it can no more fill itself with worldly mirth, or even with the common enjoyments of life than can a man snuff up wind and feed thereon. But, beloved, we are not left to search for joy; it is brought to our doors by the love of God our Father; joy refined and satisfying, befitting immortal spirits. God has not left us to wander among those unsatisfactory things which mock the chase which they invite; he has given us appetites which carnal things cannot content, and he has provided suitable satisfaction for those appetites; he has stored up at his right hand pleasures for evermore, which even now he reveals by his Spirit to those chosen ones whom he has taught to long for them.

Let us endeavor to analyze that special and peculiar pleasure which is here called “The joy of the Lord.” It springs from God, and has God for its object. The believer who is in a spiritually healthy state rejoices mainly in God himself; he is happy because there is a God, and because God is in his person and character what he is. All the attributes of God become well-springs of joy to the thoughtful, contemplative believer; for such a man says within his soul, “All these attributes of my God are mine: his power, my protection; his wisdom, my guidance; his faithfulness, my foundation; his grace, my salvation.” He is a God who cannot lie, faithful and true to his promise; he is all love, and at the same time infinitely just, supremely holy. Why, the contemplation of God to one who knows that this God is his God for ever and ever, is enough to make the eyes overflow with tears, because of the deep, mysterious, unutterable bliss which fills the heart. There was nothing in the character of Jupiter, or any of the pretended gods of the heathen, to make glad a pure and holy spirit, but there is everything in the character of Jehovah both to purify the heart and to make it thrill with delight. How sweet is it to think over all the Lord has done; how he has revealed himself of old, and especially how he has displayed his glory in the covenant of grace, and in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. How charming is the thought that he has revealed himself to me personally, and

made me to see in him my Father, my friend, my helper, my God. Oh, if there be one word out of heaven that cannot be excelled, even by the brightness of heaven itself, it is this word, "My God, my Father," and that sweet promise, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." There is no richer consolation to be found: even the Spirit of God can bring nothing home to the heart of the Christian more fraught with delight than that blessed consideration. When the child of God, after admiring the character and wondering at the acts of God, can all the while feel "he is my God; I have taken him to be mine; he has taken me to be his; he has grasped me with the hand of his powerful love; having loved me with an everlasting love, with the bands of lovingkindness has he drawn me to himself; my beloved is mine and I am his;" why, then, his soul would fain dance like David before the ark of the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord with all its might.

A further source of joy is found by the Christian, who is living near to God, in a deep sense of reconciliation to God, of acceptance with God, and yet, beyond that, of adoption and close relationship to God. Does it not make a man glad to know that though once his sins had provoked the Lord they are all blotted out, not one of them remaineth; though once he was estranged from God, and far off from him by wicked works, yet he is made nigh by the blood of Christ. The Lord is no longer an angry judge pursuing us with a drawn sword, but a loving Father into whose bosom we pour our sorrows, and find ease for every pang of heart. Oh, to know, beloved, that God actually loves us! I have often told you I cannot preach upon that theme, for it is a subject to muse upon in silence, a matter to sit by the hour together and meditate upon. The infinite to love an insignificant creature, an ephemera of an hour, a shadow that declineth! Is not this a marvel? For God to pity me I can understand, for God to condescend to have mercy upon me I can comprehend; but for him to love me, for the pure to love a sinner, for the infinitely great to love a worm, is matchless, a miracle of miracles! Such thoughts must comfort the soul. And then, add to this, that the divine love has brought us believers into actual relationship with God, so that we are his sons and daughters, this again is a river of sacred pleasure. "Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son." No minister of flame, though perfect in obedience, has received the honor of adoption; to us, even to us frail creatures of the dust,

is given a boon denied to Gabriel, for through Jesus Christ the firstborn, we are members of the family of God. Oh! The abyss of joy which lies in sonship with God, and joint heirship with Christ! Words are vain here. Moreover, the joy springing from the spirit of adoption is another portion of the believer's bliss. He cannot be an unhappy man who can cry, "Abba, Father." The spirit of adoption is always attended by love, joy, and peace, which are fruits of the Spirit; for we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of liberty and joy in Christ Jesus. "My God, my Father." Oh how sweet the sound. But all men of God do not enjoy this, say you. Alas! we grant it, but we also add that it is their own fault. It is the right and portion of every believer to live in the assurance that he is reconciled to God, that God loves him, and that he is God's child, and if he doth not so live he has himself only to blame. If there be any starving at God's table, it is because the guest stints himself, for the feast is superabundant. If however, a man comes, and I pray you all may, to live habitually under a sense of pardon through the sprinkling of the precious blood, and in a delightful sense of perfect reconciliation with the great God, he is the possessor of a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But, beloved, this is not all. The joy of the Lord in the spirit springs also from an assurance that all the future, whatever it may be, is guaranteed by divine goodness, that being children of God, the love of God towards us is not of a mutable character, but abides and remains unchangeable. The believer feels an entire satisfaction in leaving himself in the hands of eternal and immutable love. However happy I may be today, if I am in doubt concerning tomorrow, there is a worm at the root of my peace; although the past may now be sweet in retrospect, and the present fair in enjoyment, yet if the future be grim with fear, my joy is but shallow. If my salvation be still a matter of hazard and jeopardy, unmingled joy is not mine, and deep peace is still out of my reach. But when I know that he whom I have rested in hath power and grace enough to complete that which he hath begun in me, and for me; when I see the work of Christ to be no half-way redemption, but a complete and eternal salvation; when I perceive that the promises are established upon an unchangeable basis, and are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, ratified by oath and sealed by blood, then my soul hath perfect contentment. It is true, that looking forward

there may be seen long avenues of tribulation, but the glory is at the end of them; battles may be foreseen, and woe unto the man who does not expect them, but the eye of faith perceives the crown of victory. Deep waters are mapped upon our journey, but faith can see Jehovah fording these rivers with us, and she anticipates the day when we shall ascend the banks of the hither shore and enter into Jehovah's rest. When we have received these priceless truths into our souls we are satisfied with favor and full of the goodness of the Lord. There is a theology which denies to believers this consolation, we will not enter into controversy with it, but sorrowfully hint that a heavy chastisement for the errors of that system of doctrine, lies in the loss of the comfort which the truth would have brought into the soul. For my part, I value the gospel not only for what it has done for me in the past, but for the guarantees which it affords me of eternal salvation. "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."

Now, beloved, I have not yet taken you into the great deeps of joy, though these streams are certainly by no means shallow. There is an abyss of delight for every Christian when he comes into actual fellowship with God. I spoke of the truth that God loved us, and the fact that we are related to him by ties most near and dear; but, oh, when these doctrines become experiences, then are we indeed anointed with the oil of gladness. When we enter into the love of God, and it enters into us; when we walk with God habitually, then our joy is like Jordan at harvest time, when it overfloweth all its banks. Do you know what it means — to walk with God — Enoch's joy; to sit at Jesus' feet — Mary's joy; to lean your head upon Jesus' bosom — John's familiar joy? Oh yes, communion with the Lord is no mere talk with some of us. We have known it in the chamber of affliction; we have known it in the solitude of many a night of broken rest; we have known it beneath discouragements and under sorrows and defamations, and all sorts of ills; and we reckon that one dram of fellowship with Christ is enough to sweeten an ocean full of tribulation, and that only to know that he is near us, and to see the gleaming of his dear eye, would transform even hell itself into heaven, if it were possible for us to enjoy his presence there. Alas! Ye do not and cannot know this bliss, ye who quaff. Your foaming bowls, listening to the sound of stringed instruments, ye do not know what this bliss means — ye have not



dreamed of it, nor could ye compass it though a man should tell it unto you. As the beast in the meadow knows not the far-reaching thoughts of him who reads the stars and threads the spheres, so neither can the carnal man make so much as a guess of what are the joys which God hath prepared for them that love him, which any day and every day, when our hearts seek it, he revealeth unto us by his Spirit. This is “the joy of the Lord,” fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Beloved, if we reach this point, we must labor to maintain our standing, for our Lord saith to us “abide in me.” The habit of communion is the life of happiness.

Another form of “the joy of the Lord” will visit us practically every day in the honor of being allowed to serve him. It is a joy worth worlds to be allowed to do good. To teach a little child his letters for Christ, will give a true heart some taste of the joy of the Lord, if it be consciously done for the Lord’s sake alone. To bear the portion to those for whom nothing is prepared, to visit the sick, to comfort the mourner, to aid the poor, to instruct the ignorant, any, and all of such Christian works, if done in Jesus’ name, will in their measure array us in Jehovah’s joy. And happy are we, brethren, if when we cannot work we are enabled to lie still and suffer, for acquiescence is another silver pipe through which “the joy of the Lord” will come to us. It is sweet to smart beneath God’s rod, and feel that if God would have us suffer it is happiness to do so, to fall back with the faintness of nature, but at the same time with the strength of grace, and say, “Thy will be done.” It is joy, when between the millstones crushed like an olive, to yield nothing but the oil of thankfulness; when bruised beneath the flail of tribulation, still to lose nothing but the chaff, and to yield to God the precious grain of entire submissiveness. Why, this is a little heaven upon earth. To glory in tribulations also, this is a high degree of up-climbing towards the likeness of our Lord. Perhaps, the usual communions which we have with our Beloved, though exceeding precious, will never equal those which we enjoy when we have to break through thorns and briars to be at him; when we follow him into the wilderness then we feel the love of our espousals to be doubly sweet. It is a joyous thing when in the midst of mournful circumstances, we yet feel that we cannot mourn because The Bridegroom is with us. Blessed is that man, who in the most terrible storm is driven — not from his God, but even

rides upon the crest of the lofty billows nearer towards heaven. Such happiness is the Christian's lot. I do not say that every Christian possesses it, but I am sure that every Christian ought to do so. There is a highway to heaven, and all in it are safe; but in the middle of that road there is a special way, an inner path, and all who walk therein are happy as well as safe. Many professors are only just within the hedge, they walk in the ditch by the road side, and because they are safe there, they are content to put up with all the inconveniences of their walk; but he who takes the crown of the causeway, and walks in the very center of the road that God has cast up, shall find that no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon, for there the Lord himself shall be his companion, and will manifest himself to him. You shallow Christians who do but believe in Christ, and barely that, whose bibles are unread, whose closets are unfrequented, whose communion with God is a thing of spasms, you have not the joy of the Lord, neither are you strong. I beseech you, rest not as you are, but let your conscious feebleness provoke you to seek the means of strength: and that means of strength is to be found in a pleasant medicine, sweet as it is profitable — the delicious and effectual medicine of “the joy of the Lord.”

**II.** But time would fail me to prolong our remarks upon this very fruitful subject, and we shall turn to our second head, which is this: that THIS JOY IS A SOURCE OF GREAT STRENGTH.

Very rapidly let us consider this thought. It is so because this joy arises from considerations which always strengthen the soul. Very much of the depth of our piety will depend upon our thoughtfulness. Many persons, after having received a doctrine, put it by on the shelf; they are orthodox, they have received the truth, and they are content to keep that truth on hand as dead stock. Sirs, of what account can this be to you, to store your garners with wheat if you never grind the corn for bread, or sow it in the furrows of your fields? He is the joyful Christian who uses the doctrines of the gospel for spiritual meat, as they were meant to be used. Why, some men might as well have a heterodox creed as an orthodox one for all the difference it makes to them. Having the notion that they know, and imagining that to know sufficeth them, they do not consider, contemplate, or regard the truths which they profess to believe, and, consequently, they derive no benefit from them. Now, to contemplate the great truths of

divine election, of eternal love, of covenant engagements, of justification by faith through the blood of Christ, and the indwelling and perpetual abiding of the Holy Ghost in his people, to turn over these things is to extract joy from them; and this also is strengthening to the mind. To press the heavenly grapes by meditation, and make the red wine flow forth in torrents, is an exercise as strengthening as it is exhilarating. Joy comes from the same truths which support our strength, and comes by the process of meditation.

Again, “the joy of the Lord” within us is always the sign and symbol of strong spiritual life. Holy vivacity betokens spiritual vigor. I said that he who had spiritual joy gained it by communion with God, but communion with God is the surest fosterer of strength. You cannot be with a strong God without getting strength yourself, for God is always a transforming God; regarding and looking upon him our likeness changes till we become in our measure like our God. The warmth of the South of France, of which you often hear so much, does not spring from soft balmy winds, but from the sun; at sunset the temperature falls. You shall be on one side of the street in Italy and think it May, cross the street into the shade and it is cold as January. The sun does it all. A man who walks in the sunlight of God’s countenance, for that very reason is warm and strong. The sunlight of joy usually goes with the warmth of spiritual life. As the light of joy varies so does the warmth of holy strength; he who dwells in the light of God is both happy and strong. He who goes into the shade and loses the joy of the Lord becomes weak at the same time. So the joy of the Lord becomes our strength, as being an indicator of its rise or fall. When a soul is really vigorous and active, it is like the torrent which dashes down the mountain side, which scorns in winter to own the bonds of frost: in a few hours the stagnant pools and slowly moving streams are enchained in ice; but the snow king must bring forth all his strength ere he can manacle the rushing torrent. So when a soul dashes on with the sacred force of faith, it is hard to freeze it into misery, its vigor secures its joy.

Furthermore, the man who possesses “the joy of the Lord,” finds it his strength in another respect, that it fortifies him against temptation. What is there that he can be tempted with? He has more already than the world can offer him as a reward for treachery. He is already rich; who shall ensnare him with the wages of unrighteousness? He is already satisfied;

who is he that can seduce him with pleasing baits? “Shall such a man as I flee?” The rejoicing Christian is equally proof against persecution. They may well afford to be laughed at who win at such a rate as he does. “You may scoff,” saith he, “but I know what true religion is within my soul, and your scoffing will not make me relinquish the pearl of great price.” Such a man is, moreover, made strong to bear affliction; for all the sufferings put upon him are but a few drops of bitterness cast into his cup of bliss, to give a deeper tone to the sweetness which absorbs them.

Such a man becomes strong for service, too. What can he not do who is happy in his God? By his God he leaps over a wall, or breaks through a troop. Strong is he, too, for any kind of self-sacrifice. To the God who gives him all, and remains to him as his perpetual portion, such a man gives up all that he hath, and thinks it no surrender. It is but laying up his treasure in his own peculiar treasure house, even in the God of his salvation.

A joyous man, such I have now in my mind’s eye, is to all intents and purposes a strong man. He is strong in a calm restful manner. Whatever happens he is not ruffled or disturbed. He is not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. The ruffled man is ever weak. He is in a hurry, and doth things ill. The man full of joy within is quiet, he bides his time and croucheth in the fullness of his strength. Such a man, though he is humble, is firm and steadfast; he is not carried away with every wind, or bowed by every breeze, he knows what he knows, and holds what he holds, and the golden anchor of his hope entereth within the veil, and holds him fast. His strength is not pretentious but real. The happiness arising from communion with God breeds in him no boastfulness; he does not talk of what he can do, but he does it; he does not say what he could bear, but he bears all that comes. He does not himself always know what he could do; his weakness is the more apparent to himself because of the strength which the Holy Ghost puts upon him; but when the time comes, his weakness only illustrates the divine might, while the man goes calmly on, conquering and to conquer. His inner light makes him independent of the outward sun; his secret granaries make him independent of the outer harvest; his inward fountains place him beyond dread though the brook Cherith may dry Up; he is independent of men and angels, and fearless of devils; all creatures may turn against him if they please, but since God

himself is his exceeding joy, he will not miss their love or mourn their hate. He standeth where others fall, he sings where others weep, he wins where others fly, he glorifies his God where others bring dishonor on themselves and on the sacred name. God grant us the inward joy which arises from real strength and is so linked with it as to be in part its cause.

**III.** But now I must hasten on to notice in the third place that THIS STRENGTH LEADS TO PRACTICAL RESULTS. I am sure I shall have your earnest attention to this, because in many of you I have seen the results follow of which I now speak. I would not flatter any one, but my heart has been full of thanksgiving to the God of all grace when I have seen many of you rejoicing in the Lord under painful circumstances and producing the fruits of a gracious strength. Turn then to our second text, and there you shall observe some of the fruits of holy joy and pious strength.

First, it leads to great praise. “The singers sang aloud,” their minstrelsy was hearty and enthusiastic. Sacred song is not a minor matter. Quaint George Herbert has said —

*“Praying’s the end of preaching.”*

Might he not have gone further and have said, praising’s the end of praying? After all, preaching and praying are not the chief end of man, but the glorifying of God, of which praising God vocally is one form. Preaching is sowing, prayer is watering, but praise is the harvest. God aims at his own glory so should we; and “whoso offereth praise glorifieth me saith the Lord.” Be ye diligent then to sing his praises with understanding. We have put away harps and trumpets and organs, let us mind that we really rise above the need of them. I think we do well to dispense with these helps of the typical dispensation; they are all inferior even in music to the human voice, there is assuredly no melody or harmony like those created by living tongues; but let us mind that we do not put away an atom of the joy. Let us be glad when in the congregation we unite in psalmody. It is a wretched thing to hear the praises of God rendered professionally, as if the mere music were everything. It is horrible to have a dozen people in the table-pew singing for you, as if they were proxies for the whole assembly. It is shocking to me to be present in places of worship where not a tenth of the people ever venture to sing at

all, and these do it through their teeth so very softly, that one had need to have a microscope invented for his ears, to enable him to hear the dying strain. Out upon such mumbling and murdering of the praises of God; if men's hearts were joyous and strong, they would scorn such miserable worship. In this house we all try to sing, but might we not have more praise services? We have had a praise meeting every now and then. Ought we not to hold a praise meeting every week? Should not the prayer meeting be more than ever cheered by praise. The singing of God's people should be, and if they were more full of divine strength would be, more constant and universal. How sinners chant the praise of Baeuchus in the streets! You can hardly rest in the middle of the night, but what unseemly sounds of revelry startle you. Shall the votaries of wine sing so lustily, and shall we be silent? We are not often guilty of disturbing the world with our music; the days in which Christian zeal interfered with the wicked seem to have gone by; we have settled down into more orderliness, and I am afraid also into more lukewarmness. Oh for the old Methodistic shout. Brethren, wake up your singing again. May the Lord give us again a singing-time, and make us all praise him with heart, and with voice, till even the adversaries shall say, "The Lord hath done great things for them;" and we shall reply, "Ay, ye speak the truth; he hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." Perhaps there has not been so large a blessing upon the churches of England, because they have not rendered due thanksgiving. In all the time in which we are in trouble we are anxious and prayerful; when a prince is sick bulletins are issued every hour or so; but ah, when the mercy comes but few bulletins are put out, calling upon us to bless and praise the name of God for his mercies. Let us praise the Lord from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, for great is the Lord, and greatly is he to be praised.

The next result is great sacrifice. "That day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced." What day is that in which the church of God now makes great sacrifices? I have not seen it in the calendar of late; and, alas! If men make any sacrifice they very often do so in a mode which indicates that they would escape the inflection if they could. Few make great sacrifices and rejoice. You can persuade a man to give a considerable sum; a great many arguments at last overcome him, and he does it because he would have been ashamed not to do it, but in his heart he wishes you had not

come that way, and had gone to some other donor. That is the most acceptable gift to God which is given rejoicingly. It is well to feel that whatever good your gift may do to the church, or the poor, or the sick, it is twice as much benefit to you to give it. It is well to give, because you love to give; as the flower which pours forth its perfume because it never dreamed of doing otherwise; or like the bird which quivers with song, because it is a bird and finds a pleasure in its notes; or like the sun which shines, not by constraint, but because, being a sun, it must shine; or like the waves of the sea which flash back the brilliance of the sun, because it is their nature to reflect and not to hoard the light. Oh, to have such grace in our hearts that we shall joyfully make sacrifices unto our God. The Lord grant that we may have much of this; for the bringing of the tithes into the storehouse is the way to the blessing; as saith the Scripture: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in thine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Next to that, there are sure to follow other expressions of joy. They "rejoiced, for God had made them to rejoice with great joy." It was not all singing and giving. When the wheels of the machine are well oiled the whole machine goes easily; and when the man has the oil of joy, then in his business, and in his family, the wheels of his nature glide along sweetly and harmoniously, because he is a glad and a happy man. There are some professors who imagine the sorrow of the Lord to be their strength; they glory in the spirit of bondage and in an unbelieving experience, having great acquaintance with the corruption of their hearts, sometimes of a rather too practical character. They make the deformities of the saints to be their beauty-spots, and their faults to be their evidences. Such men denounce all who rejoice in the Lord, and only tolerate the unbelieving. Their strength lies in being able to take you through all the catacombs of nature's darkness, and to show you the rottenness of their evil hearts. Well, such strength as that let those have who will, but we are persuaded that our text is nearer to wisdom: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." While we know something of our corruption, and mourn it, know something of the world's troubles, and sometimes lament as we bear them; yet there is a joy in the perfect work of Christ, and a joy in our union to him which uplifts

us far above all other considerations. God becomes to us such a strength that we cannot help showing our joy in our ordinary life.

But then the text tells us that holy joy leads to family happiness. “The wives also and the children rejoiced.” It is so in this church. I have lately seen several children from households which God has blessed, and I have rejoiced to see that father and mother know the Lord, and that even the last of the family has been brought to Jesus. O happy households where the joy is not confined to one, but where all partake of it. I dislike much that Christianity which makes a man feel, “If I go to heaven it is all I care for.” Why, you are like a German stove which I found in the room of an hotel the other day — a kind of stove which required all the wood they could bring up merely to warm itself, and then all the heat went up the chimney. We sat around it to make it warm, but scarce a particle of heat came forth from it to us. Too many need all the religion they can get to cheer their own hearts, and their poor families and neighbors sit shivering in the cold of ungodliness. Be like those well constructed stoves of our own houses, which send out all the heat into the room. Send out the heat of piety into your house, and let all the neighbors participate in the blessing, for so the text finishes, “The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.” The joy of the Lord should be observed throughout our neighborhood, and many who might otherwise have been careless of true religion will then enquire, “What makes these people glad, and creates such happy households?” Your joy shall thus be God’s missionary.

**IV.** And now I have to close. THIS JOY, THIS STRENGTH, ARE BOTH WITHIN OUR REACH! “For the Lord had made them glad with great joy.” God alone can give us this great joy. Then it is within the reach of any, for God can give it to one as well as to another. If it depended upon our good works or our natural abilities, some of us could never reach it; but if God is the source and giver of it he may give it to me as well as to thee, my brother, and to thee as well as to another. What was the way in which God gave this joy? Well first, he gave it to these people by their being attentive hearers. They were not only hearers, but they heard with their ears, their ears were into the word; it was read to them and they sucked it in, receiving it into their souls. An attentive hearer is on the way to being a joyous receiver. Having heard it they felt the power of it, and they wept. Did that seem the way to joy? It was. They received the threatenings of



the law with all their terrors into their soul, they allowed the hammer of the word to break them in pieces, they submitted themselves to the word of reproof. Oh! That God would incline you all to do the same, for this, again, is the way in which God gives joy. The word is heard, the word is felt. Then after this, when they had felt the power of the word, we see that they worshipped God devoutly. They bowed the head. Their postures indicated what they felt within. Worshipers who with penitent hearts really adore God, will never complain of weary Sabbaths; adoration helps us into joy. He who can bow low enough before the throne shall be lifted as high before that throne as his heart can desire.

We read also that these hearers and worshippers understood clearly what they heard. Never be content with hearing a sermon unless you can understand it, and if there be a truth that is above you, strain after it, strive to know it. Bible-reader, do not be content with going through the words of the chapter: pray the Holy Ghost to tell you the meaning, and use proper means for finding out that meaning; ask those who know, and use your own enlightened judgment to discover the sense. When shall we have done with formalism of worship and come into living adoration? Sometimes, for all the true singing that there is, the song might as well be in Latin or in Greek. Oh! To know what you are singing, to know what you are saying in prayer, to know what you are reading, to get at it, to come right into it, to understand it — this is the way to holy joy.

And one other point. These people when they had understood what they had devoutly heard, were eager to obey. They obeyed not only the common points of the law in which Israel of old had furnished them with examples, but they found out an old institution which had been buried and forgotten. What was that to them; God had commanded it, and they celebrated it, and in so doing this peculiar joy came upon them. Oh, for the time when all believers shall search the word of God, when they shall not be content with saying, "I have joined myself with a certain body of Christians, and they do so; therefore I do so." May no man say to himself any longer, "Such is the rule of my church;" but may each say, "I am God's servant and not the servant of man, not the servant of thirty-nine articles, of the Prayer-book, or the Catechism; I stand to my own Master, and the only law book I acknowledge is the book of his word, inspired by his Spirit." Oh, blessed day, when every man shall say, "I want to know

wherein I am wrong; I desire to know what I am to do; I am anxious to follow the Lord fully.” Well, then, if your joy in God leads you to practical obedience, you may rest assured it has made you strong in the very best manner.

Beloved brethren and sisters, we had, before I went away for needed rest, a true spirit of prayer among us. I set out for the continent joyfully, because I left with you the names of some eighty persons proposed for church-membership. My beloved officers, with great diligence, have visited these and others, and next Lord’s-day we hope to receive more than a hundred, perhaps a hundred and twenty fresh members into the church. Blessed be God for this. I should not have felt easy in going away if you had been in a barren, cold, dead state; but there was a real fire blazing on God’s altar, and souls were being saved. Now, I desire that this gracious zeal should continue, and be renewed. It has not gone out in my absence, I believe, but I desire now a fresh blast from God’s Spirit to blow the flame very vehemently. Let us meet for prayer tomorrow, and let the prayer be very earnest, and let those wrestlers who have been moved to agonizing supplication renew the ardor and fervency of their desires, and may we be a strong people, and consequently a joyous people in the strength and joy of the Lord. May sinners in great numbers look unto Jesus and be saved. Amen, and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~HEB~~ Nehemiah 8.

# SAVING FAITH

## SERMON NO. 1162

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, MARCH 15, 1874,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

*“Thy faith hath saved thee.” — ~~Q171~~ Luke 7:50; and ~~Q182~~ Luke 18:42.*

I do not remember that this expression is found anywhere else in the Word of God. It is found in these two places in the Gospel by Luke, but not in any other Gospel. Luke also gives us in two other places a kindred, and almost identical expression, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” This you will find used in reference to the woman whose issue of blood had been staunched (~~Q188~~ Luke 8:48), and in connection with that one of the ten lepers who returned to praise the Savior for the cure he had received (~~Q179~~ Luke 17:19). You will find the expression, “Thy faith hath made thee whole” once in Matthew and twice in Mark, but you find it twice in Luke, and together therewith the twice repeated words of our text, “Thy faith hath saved thee.” Are we wrong in supposing that the long intercourse of Luke with the apostle Paul led him not only to receive the great doctrine of justification by faith which Paul so plainly taught, and to attach to faith that high importance which Paul always did, but also to have a peculiar memory for those expressions which were used by the Savior, in which faith was manifestly honored to a very high degree. Albeit Luke would not have written anything which was not true for the sake of maintaining the grand doctrine so clearly taught by the apostle, yet I think his full conviction of it would help to recall to his memory more vividly those words of the Lord Jesus from which it could be more clearly learned or illustrated. Be that as it may, we know that Luke was inspired, and that he has written neither more nor less than what the Savior actually said, and hence we may be quite sure that the expression, “Thy faith hath saved thee,” fell from the Redeemer’s lips, and we are bound to accept it as pure unquestionable truth, and we may repeat it ourselves without fear of

misleading others, or trenching upon any other truth. I mention this because the other day I heard an earnest friend say that faith did not save us, at which announcement I was rather surprised. The brother, it is true, qualified the expression, and showed that he meant to make it clear that Jesus saved us, and not our own act of faith. I agreed with what he meant, but not with what he said, for he had no right to use an expression which was in flat contradiction to the distinct declaration of the Savior, “Thy faith hath saved thee.” We are not to strain any expression to make it mean more than the speaker intended, and it is well to guard words from being misunderstood; but on the other hand, we may not quite go so far as absolutely to negative a declaration of the Lord himself, however we may mean to qualify it. It is to be qualified if you like, but it is not to be contradicted, for there it stands, “Thy faith hath saved thee.” Now we shall this morning, by God’s help, inquire what was it that saved the two persons whose history will come before us? It was their faith. Our second inquiry will be what kind of faith was it which saved them? and then thirdly, what does this teach us in reference to faith?

**I.** WHAT WAS IT THAT SAVED the two persons whose history we are about to consider?

In the penitent woman’s case, her great sins were forgiven her and she became a woman of extraordinary love: she loved much, for she had much forgiven. I feel, in thinking of her, something like an eminent father of the church who said, “This narrative is not one which I can well preach upon; I had far rather weep over it in secret.” That woman’s tears, that woman’s unbraided tresses wiping the Savior’s feet, her coming so near to her Lord in such company, facing such proud cavillers, with such fond and resolute intent of doing honor to Jesus; verily, among those that have loved the Savior, there hath not lived a greater than this woman who was a sinner. Yet for all that Jesus did not say to her, “Thy love hath saved thee.” Love is a golden apple of the tree of which faith is the root, and the Savior took care not to ascribe to the fruit that which belongs only to the root. This loving woman was also right notable for her repentance. Mark ye well those tears. Those were no tears of sentimental emotion, but a rain of holy heart-sorrow for sin. She had been a sinner and she knew it; she remembered well her multitude of iniquities, and she felt each sin deserved a tear, and there she stood weeping herself away, because she had offended

her dear Lord. Yet it is not said, “Thy repentance hath saved thee.” Her being saved caused her repentance, but repentance did not save her. Sorrow for sin is an early token of grace within the heart, yet it is nowhere said, “Thy sorrow for sin hath saved thee.” She was a woman of great humility. She came behind the Lord and washed his feet, as though she felt herself only able to be a menial servant to perform works of drudgery, and to find a pleasure in so serving her Lord. Her reverence for him had reached a very high point; she regarded him as a king, and she did what has sometimes been done for monarchs by zealous subjects — she kissed the feet of her heart’s Lord, who well deserved the homage. Her loyal reverence led her to kiss the feet of her Lord, the Sovereign of her soul, but I do not find that Jesus said, “Thy humility hath saved thee;” or that he said, “Thy reverence hath saved thee;” but he put the crown upon the head of her faith, and said expressly, “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”

In the case of the blind man to whom my second text refers — this man was notable for his earnestness; he cried, and cried aloud, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” He was notable for his importunity, for they who would have silenced him rebuked him in vain; he cried so much the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” But I do not discover that Christ attributed his salvation to his prayers, earnest and importunate though they were. It is not written, “Thy prayers have saved thee”; it is written, “Thy faith hath saved thee.” He was a man of considerable and clear knowledge, and he had a distinct apprehension of the true character of Christ: he scorned to call him Jesus of Nazareth, as the crowd did, but he proclaimed him “Son of David,” and in the presence of that throng he dared avow his full conviction that the humble man, dressed in a peasant’s garb, who was threading his way through the throng, was none other than the royal heir of the royal line of Judah, and was indeed the fulfiller of the type of David, the expected Messiah, the King of the Jews, the Son of David. Yet I do not find that Jesus attributed his salvation to his knowledge, to his clear apprehension, or to his distinct avowal of his Messiahship; but he said to him, “Thy faith hath saved thee,” laying the entire stress of his salvation upon his faith.

This being so in both cases, we are led to ask, what is the reason for it? What is the reason why in every case, in every man that is saved, faith is

the great instrument of salvation? Is it not first because God has a right to choose what way of salvation he pleases, and he has chosen that men should be saved, not by their works, but by their faith in his dear Son? God has a right to give his mercy to whom he pleases; he has a right to give it when he pleases; he has a right to give it in what mode he pleases; and know ye this, O sons of men, that the decree of heaven is immutable, and standeth fast forever — "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." To this there shall be no exception; Jehovah has made the rule and it shall stand. If thou wouldst have salvation, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"; but if not, salvation is utterly impossible to thee. This is the appointed way; follow it, and it leads to heaven; refuse it, and thou must perish. This is God's sovereign determination, "He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God." Jehovah's will be done. If this be his method of grace, let us not kick against it. If he determines that faith shall save, so let it be; only, Good Master, create and increase our faith.

But while I attribute this to the sovereign choice of God, I do see, for Scripture plainly indicates it, a reason in the nature of things why faith should thus have been selected. The apostle tells us it is of faith that it might be of grace. If the condition of salvation had been either feeling or working, then, such is the depravity of our nature, that we should inevitably have attributed the merit of salvation to the working or the feeling. We should have claimed something whereof to glory. It matters not how low the condition may have been, man would have still considered that there was something required of him, that something came from him, and that, therefore, he might take some credit to himself. But no man, unless he be demented, ever claims credit for believing the truth. If he hears that which convinces him, he is convinced; and if he be persuaded, he is persuaded; but he feels that it could not well be otherwise. He attributes the effect to the truth and the influence used. He does not go about and boast because he believes what is so clear to him that he cannot doubt it. If he did so boast of spiritual faith, all thinking men would say at once, "Wherefore dost thou boast in the fact of having believed, and especially when this believing would never have been thine if it had not been for the force of the truth which convinced thee, and the working of the Spirit of

God which constrained thee to believe?" Faith is chosen by Christ to wear the crown of salvation because — let me contradict myself — it refuses to wear the crown. It was Christ that saved the penitent woman, it was Christ that saved that blind beggar, but he takes the crown from off his own head, so dear is faith to him, and he puts the diadem upon the head of faith and says, "Thy faith hath saved thee," because he is absolutely certain that faith will never take the glory to herself, but will again lay the crown at the pierced feet, and say, "Not unto myself be glory, for thou hast done it; thou art the Savior, and thou alone." In order, then, to illustrate and to protect the interests of sovereign grace, and to shut out all vain glorying, God has been pleased to make the way of salvation to be by faith, and by no other means.

Nor is this all. It is clear to every one who chooses to think that in order to the renewal of the heart, which is the chief part of salvation, it is well to begin with the faith; because faith once rightly exercised becomes the mainspring of the entire nature. The man believes that he is forgiven. What then? He feels gratitude to him who has pardoned him. Feeling gratitude, it is but natural that he should hate that which displeases his Savior, and should love intensely that which is pleasing to him who saved him, so that faith operates upon the entire nature, and becomes the instrument in the hand of the regenerating Spirit by which all the faculties of the soul are put into the right condition. As a man thinketh in his heart so is he, but his thinkings come out of his believings; if he be put right in his believings, then his understanding will operate upon his affections, and all the other powers of his manhood, and old things will pass away, all things will become new through the wonderful effect of the faith, which is of the operation of God. Faith works by love, and through love it purifies the soul, and the man becomes a new creature. See ye then the wisdom of God? He may choose what way he will, but he chooses a way which at once guards his grace from our felonious boastings, and on the other hand produces in us a holiness which other wise never would have been there.

Faith in salvation, however, is not the meritorious cause; nor is it in any sense the salvation itself. Faith saves us just as the mouth saves from hunger. If we be hungry, bread is the real cure for hunger, but still it would be right to say that eating removes hunger, seeing that the bread itself could not benefit us, unless the mouth should eat it. Faith is the soul's

mouth, whereby the hunger of the heart is removed. Christ also is the brazen serpent lifted up; all the healing virtue is in him; yet no healing virtue comes out of the brazen serpent to any who will not look; so that the looking is rightly considered to be the act which saves. True, in the deepest sense it is Christ uplifted who saves, to him be all the glory; but without looking to him ye cannot be saved, so that

*“There is life in a look,”*

as well as life in the Savior to whom you look. Nothing is yours until you appropriate it. If you be enriched, the thing appropriated enriches you; yet it is not incorrect but strictly right to say it is the appropriation of the blessing which makes you rich. Faith is the hand of the soul. Stretched out, it lays hold of the salvation of Christ, and so by faith we are saved. “Thy faith hath saved thee.” I need not dwell longer on that point. It is self-evident from the text that faith is the great means of salvation.

**II.** WHAT KIND OF FAITH WAS IT that saved these people? I will mention, first, the essential agreements; and then, secondly, the differentia, or the points in which this faith differed in its external manifestations in the two cases.

In the instances of the penitent woman and the blind beggar, their faith was fixed alone in Jesus. You cannot discover anything floating in their faith in Jesus which adulterated it; it was unmixed faith in him. the woman pressed forward to him, her tears fell on him; her ointment was for him; her unloosed tresses were a towel for his; feet she cared for no one else, not even for the disciples whom she respected for his sake; her whole spirit and soul were absorbed in him. He could save her; he could blot out her sins. She believed him; she did it unto him. The same was the case with that blind man. He had no thought of any ceremonies to be performed by priests; he had no idea of any medicine which might be given him by physicians. His cry was, “Son of David, Son of David.” The only notice he took of others was to disregard them, and still to cry, “Son of David, Son of David.” “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?” was the Lord’s question, and it answered to the desire of his soul, for he knew that if anything were done it must be done by the Son of David. It is essential that our faith must rest alone on Jesus. Mix anything with Christ, and you are undone. If your faith shall stand with one foot upon the rock of his



merits, and the other foot upon the sand of your own duties, it will fall, and great will be the fall thereof. Build wholly on the rock, for if so much as a corner of the edifice shall rest on anything beside, it will ensure the ruin of the whole: —

*“None but Jesus, none but Jesus  
Can do helpless sinners good.”  
All true faith is alike in this respect.*

The faith of these two was alike in its confession of unworthiness. What meant her standing behind? What meant her tears, her everflowing tears, but that she felt unworthy to draw near to Jesus? And what meant the beggar’s cry, “Have mercy on me?” Note the stress he lays upon it. “Have mercy on me.” He does not claim the cure by merit, nor ask it as a reward. To mercy he appealed. Now I care not whose faith it is, whether it be that of David in his bitter cries of the fifty-first Psalm, or whether it be that of Paul in his highest exaltation upon being without condemnation through Christ, there is always in connection with true faith a thorough and deep sense that it is mercy, mercy alone, which saves us from the wrath to come. Dear hearer, do not deceive yourself. Faith and boasting are as opposite to one another as the two poles. If you come before Christ with your righteousness in your hand, you come without faith; but if you come with faith you must also come with confession of sin, for true faith always walks hand in hand with a deep sense of guiltiness before the Most High. This is so in every case.

Their faith was alike, moreover, in defying and conquering opposition. Little do we know the inward struggles of the penitent as she crossed the threshold of Simon’s house. “He will repel thee,” the stern, cold Pharisee will say, “Get thee gone, thou strumpet; how darest thou defile the doors of honest men.” But whatever may happen she passes through the door, she comes to where the feet of the Savior are stretched out towards the entrance as he is reclining at the table, and there she stands. Simon glanced at her: he thought the glance would wither her, but her love to Christ was too well rooted to be withered by him. No doubt he made many signs of his displeasure, and showed that he was horrified at such a creature being anywhere near him, but she took no notice of him. Her Lord was there, and she felt safe. Timid as a dove, she trembled not while he was near; but she returned no defiant glances for Simon’s haughty looks; her eyes were

occupied with weeping. She did not turn aside to demand an explanation of his unkind motions, for her lips were all engrossed with kissing those dear feet. Her Lord, her Lord, was all to her. She overcame through faith in him, and held her ground, and did not leave the house till he dismissed her with "Go in peace."

It was the same with the blind man. He said, "Son of David, have mercy on me." They cried, "Hush! Why these clamours, blind beggar? His eloquence is music; do not interrupt him. Never man spake as he is speaking. Every tone rings like the harps of the angels. Hush! How darest thou spoil his discourse?" But over and above them all went up the importunate prayer, "Son of David, have mercy upon me," and he prevailed. All true faith is opposed. If thy faith be never tried it is not born of the race of the church militant. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," but it is indicated in that very declaration that there must be something to overcome, and that faith must wage war for its existence.

Once more, the faith of these two persons was alike in being openly avowed. I will not say that the avowal took the same form in both, for it did not; but still it was equally open. There is the Savior, and there comes the weeping penitent. She loves him. Is she ashamed to say so? It may bring her reproach; it will certainly rake up the old reproaches against her, for she has been a sinner. Never mind what she has been, nor who may be present to see her. She loves her Lord, and she will show it. She will bring the ointment and she will anoint his feet, even in the presence of Pharisees, Pharisees who would say, "Is this one of the disciples of Christ? A pretty convert to boast of! A fine conquest this, for his kingdom! A harlot becomes a disciple! What next and what next?" She must have known and felt all that, but still there was no concealment. She loved her Lord, and she would avow it, and so in the very house of the Pharisee, there being no other opportunity so convenient, she comes forward, and without words, but with actions far more eloquent than words, she says, "I love him. These tears shall show it; this ointment shall diffuse the knowledge of it, as its sweet perfume fills the room; and every lock of my hair shall be a witness that I am my Lord's and he is mine." She avowed her faith.

And so did the blind man. He did not sit there and say, "I know he is the Son of David, but I must not say it." They said, some of them contemptuously, and others indifferently, "It is Jesus of Nazareth." But he will not have it so. "Thou Son of David," saith he; and loud above their noise I hear him cry, like a herald proclaiming the King, "Son of David." Why, sirs, it seems to me he was exalted to a high office: he became the herald of the King, and proclaimed him, and this belongs to a high officer of State in our country. The blind beggar showed great decision and courage. He cried in effect, "Son of David thou art; Son of David I proclaim thee; Son of David thou shalt be proclaimed, whoever may gainsay it; only turn thine eyes and have mercy upon me." Are there any of you here who have a faith in Christ which you are ashamed of? I also am ashamed of you, and so also will Christ be ashamed of you when he cometh in the glory of his Father and all his holy angels with him. Ashamed to claim that you are honest? Then methinks you must live in bad company, where to be a rogue is to be famous; and if you are ashamed to say, "I love my Lord," methinks you are courting the friendship of Christ's enemies, and what can you be but an enemy yourself: If you love him, say it. Put on your Master's regimentals, enlist in his army, and come forward and declare, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Their faith was alike then in these four particulars, it was fixed alone on him, it was accompanied with a sense of unworthiness, it struggled and conquered opposition, and it openly declared itself before all comers.

By your patience I shall now try to show the differences between the same faith as to its manifestations. First, the woman's faith acted like a woman's faith. She showed tender love, and the affections are the glory and the strength of women. They were certainly such in her. Her love was intense, womanly love, and she poured it out upon the Savior. The man's faith acted like a man's in its determination and strength. He persisted in crying, "Thou Son of David." There was as much that was masculine about his faith as there was of the feminine in the penitent's faith, and everything should be in its order and after its season. It would not have been meet for the woman's voice to be heard so boldly above the crowd; it would have seemed out of place for a man's tears to have been falling upon the Savior's feet. Either one or the other might have been justifiable, but they would not have been equally suitable. But now they are as suitable as

they are excellent. The woman acts as a godly woman should. The man like a godly man. Never let us measure ourselves by other people. Do not, my brother, say, "I could not shed tears." Who asked thee to do so? A man's tears are mostly within, and so let them be: it is ours to use other modes of showing our love. And, my sister, do not say, "I could not act as a herald and publicly proclaim the King." I doubt not thou couldst do so if there were need, but thy tears in secret, and those wordless tokens of love to Jesus which thou are rendering, are not less acceptable because they are not the same as a man would give. Nay, they are the better because they are more suitable to thee. Do not think that all the flowers of God's garden must bloom in the same colour or shed the same perfume.

Notice next that the woman acted like a woman who had been a sinner. What more meet than tears? What more fitting place for her than at the Savior's feet? She had been a sinner, she acts like a sinner; but the man who had been a beggar acted like a beggar. What does a beggar do but clamour for alms? Did he not beg gloriously? Never one plied the trade more earnestly than he. "Son of David," said he, "have mercy on me." I should not have liked to have seen the beggar sitting there weeping; nor to have heard the penitent woman shouting. Neither would have been natural or seemly. Faith works according to the condition, circumstances, sex, or ability of the person in whom it lives, and it best shows itself in its own form, not in an artificial manner, but in the natural outflow of the heart.

Observe, also, that the woman did not speak. There is something very beautiful in the golden silence of the woman, which was richer than her silver speech would have been. But the man was not silent; he spoke; he spoke out, and his words were excellent. I venture to say that the woman's silence spoke as powerfully as the man's voice. Of the two I think I find more eloquence in the tears bedewing, and unbraided hair wiping the Savior's feet, than in the cry, "Son of David, have mercy on me." Yet both forms of expression were equally good, the silence best in the woman with her tears, and the speech best in the man with his confident trust in Christ. Do not think it necessary, dear friend, in order to serve, to do other people's work. What thine own hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. If you think you can never honor Christ till you enter a pulpit, it may be just possible that you will afterwards honor him best by getting out of it as quickly as you can. There have been persons well

qualified to adorn the religion of Christ with a lapstone on their lap who have thought it necessary to mount a pulpit, and in that position have been a hindrance to Christ and his gospel. Sister, there is a sphere for you; keep to it, let none push you out of it; but do not think there is nothing else to do except the work which some other woman does. God has called her, let her follow God's voice; he calls you in another direction, follow his voice thither. You will be most like that other excellent woman when you are most different from her: I mean, you will be most truly obedient to Christ, as she is, if you pursue quite another path.

There was a difference, again, in this. The woman gave — she brought her ointment. The man did the opposite — he begged. There are various ways of showing love to Christ, which are equally excellent tokens of faith. To give him of her ointment, and give him of her tears, and give him the accommodation of her hair, was well; it showed her faith, which worked by love: to give nothing, for the beggar had nothing to give, but simply to honor Christ by appealing to his bounty and his royal power, was best in the beggar. I can commend neither above the other, for I doubt not that both the penitent and the beggar gave Christ their whole heart, and what more does Jesus ask for from any one?

The thoughts of the woman and the thoughts of the beggar were different too. Her thoughts were mainly about the past, and her sins — hence her tears. To be forgiven, that was her point. His thoughts were mainly about the present, and did not so much concern his sin as his deficiency, infirmity, and inability, and so he came with different thoughts. I do not doubt that he thought of sin, as I dare say she also thought of infirmity; but in her case the thought of sin was uppermost, and hence the tears; in his the infirmity was uppermost, and hence the prayer, "Lord, that I might receive my sight." Do not, then, compare your experience with that of another. God is a God of wonderful variety. The painter who repeats himself in many pictures has a paucity of conception, but the master artist scarcely ever sketches the same thing a second time. There is a boundless variety in genius, and God who transcends all the genius of men, creates an infinite variety in the works of his grace. Look not, therefore, for likeness everywhere. The woman, it is said, loved much, and she proved her love by her acts; but the man loved much too, and showed his love by actions which were most admirable, for he followed Jesus in the way, glorifying

God. Yet they were different actions. I do not find that he brought any box of ointment, or anointed Christ's feet, neither do I find that she literally followed Christ in the way, though no doubt she followed him in the spirit; neither did she with a loud voice glorify God as the restored blind beggar did. There are differences of operation, but the same Lord; there are differences of capacity and differences of calling, and by this reflection I hope you will be enabled to deliver yourselves from the fault of judging one by another, and that you will look for the same faith, but not for the same development of it.

So interesting is this subject that I want you to follow me while I very rapidly sketch the woman's case, and then the man's, not mentioning the differences one by one, but allowing the two pictures to impress themselves separately upon your minds.

Observe this woman. What a strange compound she was. She was consciously unworthy, and therefore she wept, yet she drew very near to Jesus. Her acts were those of nearness and communion; she washed his feet with her tears, she wiped them with the hairs of her head, and meanwhile she kissed them again and again. "She hath not ceased," said Christ, "to kiss my feet." A sense of unworthiness, and the enjoyment of communion, were mixed together. Oh, divine faith which blends the two! She was shamefaced, yet was she very bold. She dared not look the Master in the face as yet; she approached him from behind; yet she dared face Simon, and remain in his room, whether he frowned or no. I have known some who have blushed in the face of Christ who would not have blushed before a judge, nor at the stake, if they had been dragged there for Christ's sake. Such a woman was Anne Askew, humble before her Master, but like a lioness before the foes of God.

The penitent woman wept, she was a mourner, yet she had a deep joy; I know she had, for every kiss meant joy. Every time she lifted that blessed foot, and kissed it, her heart leaped with the transport of love. Her heart knew bitterness for sin, but it knew also the sweetness of pardon. What a mixture! Faith made the compound. She was humble, never one more so; yet see how she takes upon herself to deal with the King himself. Brethren, you and I are satisfied, and well we may be, if we may wash the saints' feet, but she was not. Oh, the courage of this woman! She will pass

through the outer court, and get right to the King's own throne, and there pay her homage, in her own person, to his person, and wash the feet of the wonderful, the Counsellor, the mighty God. I know not that an angel ever performed such suit and service, and therefore this woman takes preeminence as having done for Jesus what no other being ever did. I have said that she was silent, and yet she spake; I will add, she was despised, but Christ set her high in honor, and made Simon, who despised her, to feel little in her presence. I will also add she was a great sinner, but she was a great saint. Her great sinnership, when pardoned, became the raw stuff out of which great saints are made by the mighty power of God. Finally she was saved by faith, so says the text, but if ever there was a case in which James could not have said, "Shall faith save thee?" and in which he must have said, "Here is one that shows her faith by her works," it was the case of this woman. There she is before you. Imitate her faith itself, though you cannot actually copy her deeds.

Now look at the man. He was blind, but he could see a great deal more than the Pharisees, who said they could see. Blind, but his inward optics saw the king in his beauty, saw the splendour of his throne, and he confessed it. He was a beggar, but he had a royal soul, and a strong sovereign determination which was not to be put down. He had the kind of mind which dwells in men who are princes among their fellows. He is not to be stopped by disciples, nay, nor by apostles. He has begun to pray, and pray he will till he obtains the boon he seeks. Note well that what he knew he avowed, what he desired he pleaded for, and what he needed he understood. "Lord, that I might receive my sight;" he was clear about his needs, and clear about the only person who could supply them. What he asked for he expected, for when he was bidden to come he evidently expected that his sight would be restored, for we are told by another Evangelist that he cast away his beggar's cloak. He felt he should never want to beg again. He was sure his eyes were about to be opened. Lastly, what he received he was grateful for, for as soon as he could walk without a guide he took Christ to be his guide, and followed him in the way, glorifying him. Look on both pictures. May you have the shadows and the lights of both, as far as they would tend to make you also another and distinct picture by the selfsame artist, whose hand alone can produce such wonders.

**III. WHAT DOES THIS TEACH US IN REFERENCE TO FAITH?** It teaches us first that faith is all important. Do, I pray you, my hearers, see whether you have the precious faith, the faith of God's elect. Remember there are not many things in Scripture called precious, but there is the precious blood, and there goes with it the precious faith. If you have not that you are lost; if you have not that you are neither fit to live nor fit to die; if you have not that, your eternal destiny will be infinite despair; but if you have faith, though it be as a grain of mustard seed, you are saved. "Thy faith hath saved thee."

Learn next that the main matter in faith is the person whom you believe. I do not say in whom you believe. That would be true, but not quite so scriptural an expression. Paul does not say, as I hear most people quote it, "I know in whom I have believed." Faith believes Christ. Your faith must recognise him as a person, and come to him as a person, and rest not in his teaching merely, or his work only, but in him. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." A personal Savior for sinners! Are you resting on him alone? Do you believe him? You know the safety of the building depends mainly upon the foundation, and if the foundation be not right, you may build as you will, it will not last. Do you build, then, on Christ alone? Inquire about that as a special point.

Observe next, that we must not expect exactly the same manifestation in each convert. Let not the elders of the church expect it, let not parents require it from their children; let not anxious friends look for it; do not expect it in yourself. Biographies are very useful, but they may become a snare. I must not judge that I am not a child of God because I am not precisely like that good man whose life I have just been reading. Am I resting in Christ? Do I believe him? Then it may be the Lord's grace is striking out quite a different path for me from that which has been trodden by my brother, that it may illustrate other phases of its power, and show to principalities and powers the exceeding riches of divine love.

And, lastly, the matter which sums up all is this, if we have faith in Jesus we are saved, and ought not to talk or act as if there were any question about it. "THY FAITH HATH SAVED THEE." Jesus says it. Granted, you have faith in Christ, and it is certain that faith hath saved you. Do not, therefore, go on talking and acting and feeling as if you were not saved. I



know a company of saved people who say every Sabbath, "Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners"; but they are not miserable sinners if they are saved, and for them to use such words is to throw a slight upon the salvation which Christ has given them. If they are saved sinners they ought to be rejoicing saints. What some say others do not say, but they act as if it were so. They go about asking God to give them the mercy they have already obtained, hoping one day to receive what Christ assures them is already in their possession, talking to others as if it were a matter of question whether they were saved or not, when it cannot be a matter of question. "Thy faith hath saved thee." Fancy the poor penitent woman turning round and saying to the Savior, "Lord, I humbly hope that it is true." There would have been neither humility nor faith in such an expression. Imagine that blind man, when Christ said, "Thy faith hath saved thee," saying "I trust that in future years it will be found to be so." It would be a belying at once of his own earnest character and of Christ's honesty of speech. If thou hast believed, thou art saved. Do not talk as if thou wert not, but now down from the willows take thy harp, and sing unto the Lord a new song. I have noticed in many prayers a tendency to avoid speaking as if facts were facts. I have heard this kind of expression, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we desire to be glad." The text is, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad;" and if the Lord has done these great things for us our right is to be glad about them, not to go with an infamous "if" upon our lips before the Lord who cannot lie. If ye are dealing with your fellow creatures, suspect them, for they mostly deserve it; if ye are listening to their promises, doubt them, for their promises go to be broken; but if ye are dealing with your Lord and Master, never suspect him, for he is beyond suspicion; never doubt his promises, for heaven and earth and hell shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of his word shall fail. I claim for Christ that ye cast away forever all the talk which is made up of "buts," and "ifs," and "peradventures," and "I hope," and "I trust." You are in the presence of One who said, "Verily, verily," and meant what he said, who is "the Amen, the faithful and true witness."

You would not spit in his face if he were here, yet your "ifs" and "buts" are so much insult cast upon his truth. You would not scourge him, but what do your doubts do but vex him and put him to shame? If he lies,

never believe him; if he speaks the truth, never doubt him. Then shall ye know when ye have cast aside your wicked unbelief, that your faith has saved you, and ye will go in peace.

### **PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE**

**READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~<LUK>~~ LUKE 7:36-50; ~~<DIK>~~ 18:35-43.**

### **HYMNS FROM**

**“OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 18 (VER. 1.), 536, 586.**

# AN EARNEST WARNING ABOUT LUKEWARMNESS

SERMON NO. 1185

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
JULY 26TH, 1874,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and [that] the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—

 Revelation 3:14-21

No Scripture ever wears out. The epistle to the church of Laodicea is not an old letter which may be put into the waste basket and be forgotten; upon its page still glow the words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." This Scripture was not meant to instruct the Laodiceans only, it has a wider aim. The actual church of

Laodicea has passed away, but other Laodiceas still exist — indeed, they are sadly multiplied in our day, and it has ever been the tendency of human nature, however inflamed with the love of God, gradually to chill into lukewarmness. The letter to the Laodiceans is above all others the epistle for the present times.

I should judge that the church at Laodicea was once in a very fervent and healthy condition. Paul wrote a letter to it which did not claim inspiration, and therefore its loss does not render the Scriptures incomplete, for Paul may have written scores of other letters besides. Paul also mentions the church at Laodicea in his letter to the church at Colosse; he was, therefore, well acquainted with it, and as he does not utter a word of censure with regard to it, we may infer that the church was at that time in a sound state. In process of time it degenerated, and cooling down from its former ardor it became careless, lax, and indifferent. Perhaps its best men were dead, perhaps its wealth seduced it into worldliness, possibly its freedom from persecution engendered carnal ease, or neglect of prayer made it gradually backslide; but in any case it declined till it was neither cold nor hot. Lest we should ever get into such a state, and lest we should be in that state now, I pray that my discourse may come with power to the hearts of all present, but especially to the consciences of the members of my own church. May God grant that it may tend to the arousing of us all.

**I.** My first point will be THE STATE INTO WHICH CHURCHES ARE VERY APT TO FALL. *A church may fall into a condition far other than that for which it has a repute.* It may be famous for zeal and yet be lethargic. The address of our Lord begins, “I know thy works,” as much as to say, “Nobody else knows you. Men think better of you than you deserve. You do not know yourselves, you think your works to be excellent; but I know them to be very different.” Jesus views with searching eyes all the works of his church. The public can only read reports, but Jesus sees for himself. He knows what is done, and how it is done, and why it is done. He judges a church not merely by her external activities, but by her internal pieties; he searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men. He is not deceived by glitter; he tests all things, and values only that gold which will endure the fire. Our opinion of ourselves and Christ’s opinion of us may be very different, and it is a very sad thing when it is so. It will be melancholy indeed if we stand out as a church notable for earnestness and

distinguished for success, and yet are not really fervent in spirit, or eager in soul-winning. A lack of vital energy where there seems to be most strength put forth, a lack of real love to Jesus where apparently there is the greatest devotedness to him, are sad signs of fearful degeneracy.

Churches are very apt to put the best goods into the window, very apt to make a fair show in the flesh, and like men of the world, they try to make a fine figure upon a very slender estate. Great reputations have often but slender foundations, and lovers of the truth lament that it should be so.

Not only is it true of churches, but of every one of us as individuals, that often our reputation is in advance of our deserts. Men often live on their former credit, and trade upon their past characters, having still a name to live, though they are indeed dead. To be slandered is a dire affliction, but it is, upon the whole, a less evil than to be thought better than we are; in the one case we have a promise to comfort us, in the second we are in danger of self-conceit. I speak as unto wise men, judge ye how far this may apply to us.

The *condition described in our text is, secondly, one of mournful indifference and carelessness.* They were not cold, but they were not hot; they were not infidels, yet they were not earnest believers; they did not oppose the gospel, neither did they defend it; they were not working mischief, neither were they doing any great good; they were not disreputable in moral character, but they were not distinguished for holiness; they were not irreligious, but they were not enthusiastic in piety nor eminent for zeal: they were what the world calls “Moderates,” they were of the Broad-church school, they were neither bigots nor Puritans, they were prudent and avoided fanaticism, respectable and averse to excitement. Good things were maintained among them, but they did not make too much of them; they had prayer-meetings, but there were few present, for they liked quiet evenings at home: when more attended the meetings they were still very dull, for they did their praying very deliberately and were afraid of being too excited. They were content to have all things done decently and in order, but vigor and zeal they considered to be vulgar. Such churches have schools, Bible-classes, preaching rooms, and all sorts of agencies; but they might as well be without them, for no energy is displayed and no good comes of them. They have deacons and elders who are excellent pillars of the church, if the

chief quality of pillars be to stand still, and exhibit no motion or emotion. They have ministers who may be the angels of the churches, but if so, they have their wings closely clipped, for they do not fly very far in preaching the everlasting gospel, and they certainly are not flames of fire: they may be shining lights of eloquence, but they certainly are not burning lights of grace, setting men's hearts on fire. In such communities everything is done in a half-hearted, listless, dead-and-alive way, as if it did not matter much whether it was done or not. It makes one's flesh creep to see how sluggishly they move: I long for a knife to cut their red tape to pieces, and for a whip to lay about their shoulders to make them bestir themselves. Things are respectably done, the rich families are not offended, the sceptical party is conciliated, and the good people are not quite alienated: things are made pleasant all round. The right things are done, but as to doing them with all your might, and soul, and strength, a Laodicean church has no notion of what that means. They are not so cold as to abandon their work, or to give up their meetings for prayer, or to reject the gospel; if they did so, then they could be convinced of their error and brought to repentance; but on the other hand they are neither hot for the truth, nor hot for conversions, nor hot for holiness, they are not fiery enough to burn the stubble of sin, nor zealous enough to make Satan angry, nor fervent enough to make a living sacrifice of themselves upon the altar of their God. They are "neither cold nor hot."

This is a horrible state, because it is one which in a church wearing a good repute renders that reputation a lie. When other churches are saying, "See how they prosper! see what they do for God!" Jesus sees that the church is doing his work in a slovenly, make-believe manner, and he considers justly that it is deceiving its friends. If the world recognizes such a people as being very distinctly an old-fashioned puritanic church, and yet there is unholy living among them, and careless walking, and a deficiency of real piety, prayer, liberality, and zeal, then the world itself is being deceived, and that too in the worst way, because it is led to judge falsely concerning Christianity, for it lays all these faults upon the back of religion, and cries out, "It is all a farce! The thing is a mere pretense! Christians are all hypocrites!" I fear there are churches of this sort. God grant we may not be numbered with them!

In this state of the church there is much self-glorification, for Laodicea said, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." The members say, "Everything goes on well, what more do we want? All is right with us." This makes such a condition very hopeless, because reproofs and rebukes fall without power, where the party rebuked can reply, "We do not deserve your censures, such warnings are not meant for us." If you stand up in the pulpit and talk to sleepy churches, as I pretty frequently do, and speak very plainly, they often have the honesty to say, "There is a good deal of truth in what the man has said": but if I speak to another church, which really is half asleep, but which thinks itself to be quite a model of diligence, then the rebuke glides off like oil down a slab of marble, and no result comes of it. Men are less likely to repent when they are in the middle passage between hot and cold, than if they were in the worst extremes of sin. If they were like Saul of Tarsus, enemies of God, they might be converted; but if, like Gamaliel, they are neither opposed nor favoring, they will probably remain as they are till they die. The gospel converts a sincerely superstitious Luther, but Erasmus, with his pliant spirit, flippant, and full of levity, remains unmoved. There is more hope of warning the cold than the lukewarm.

When churches get into the condition of half-hearted faith, tolerating the gospel, but having a sweet tooth for error, they do far more mischief to their age than downright heretics.

It is harder a great deal to work for Jesus with a church which is lukewarm than it would be to begin without a church. Give me a dozen earnest spirits and put me down anywhere in London, and by God's good help we will soon cause the wilderness and the solitary place to rejoice; but give me the whole lot of you, half-hearted, undecided, and unconcerned, what can I do? You will only be a drag upon a man's zeal and earnestness. Five thousand members of a church all lukewarm will be five thousand impediments, but a dozen earnest, passionate spirits, determined that Christ shall be glorified and souls won, must be more than conquerors; in their very weakness and fewness will reside capacities for being the more largely blessed of God. Better nothing than lukewarmness.


Alas, this state of lukewarmness is so congenial with human nature that it is hard to fetch men from it. Cold makes us shiver, and great heat causes us

pain, but a tepid bath is comfort itself. Such a temperature suits human nature. The world is always at peace with a lukewarm church, and such a church is always pleased with itself. Not too worldly, — no! We have our limits! There are certain amusements which of course a Christian must give up, but we will go quite up to the line, for why are we to be miserable? We are not to be so greedy as to be called miserly, but we will give as little as we can to the cause. We will not be altogether absent from the house of God, but we will go as seldom as we can. We will not altogether forsake the poor people to whom we belong, but we will also go to the world's church, so as to get admission into better society, and find fashionable friends for our children. How much of this there is abroad! Compromise is the order of the day. Thousands try to hold with the hare and run with the hounds, they are for God and Mammon, Christ and Belial, truth and error, and so are "neither hot nor cold." Do I speak somewhat strongly? Not so strongly as my Master, for he says, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." He is nauseated with such conduct, it sickens him, and he will not endure it. In an earnest, honest, fervent heart nausea is created when we fall in with men who dare not give up their profession, and yet will not live up to it; who cannot altogether forsake the work of God, but yet do it in a sluggard's manner, trifling with that which ought to be done in the best style for so good a Lord and so gracious a Savior. Many a church has fallen into a condition of indifference, and when it does so it generally becomes the haunt of worldly professors, a refuge for people who want an easy religion, which enables them to enjoy the pleasures of sin and the honors of piety at the same time; where things are free and easy, where you are not expected to do much, or give much, or pray much, or to be very religious; where the minister is not so precise as the old school divines, a more liberal people, of broad views, free-thinking and free-acting, where there is full tolerance for sin, and no demand for vital godliness. Such churches applaud cleverness in a preacher; as for his doctrine, that is of small consequence, and his love to Christ and zeal for souls are very secondary. He is a clever fellow, and can speak well, and that suffices. This style of things is all too common, yet we are expected to hold our tongue, for the people are very respectable. The Lord grant that we may be kept clear of such respectability!



We have already said that *this condition of indifference is attended with perfect self-complacency*. The people who ought to be mourning are rejoicing, and where they should hang out signals of distress they are flaunting the banners of triumph. “We are rich, we are adding to our numbers, enlarging our schools, and growing on all sides; we have need of nothing. What can a church require that we have not in abundance?” Yet their spiritual needs are terrible. This is a sad state for a church to be in. Spiritually poor and proud. A church crying out to God because it feels itself in a backsliding state; a church mourning its deficiency, a church pining and panting to do more for Christ, a church burning with zeal for God, and therefore quite discontented with what it has been able to do; this is the church which God will bless: but that which writes itself down as a model for others, is very probably grossly mistaken and is in a sad plight. This church, which was so rich in its own esteem, was utterly bankrupt in the sight of the Lord. It had no real joy in the Lord; it had mistaken its joy in itself for that. It had no real beauty of holiness upon it; it had mistaken its formal worship and fine building and harmonious singing for that. It had no deep understanding of the truth and no wealth of vital godliness, it had mistaken carnal wisdom and outward profession for those precious things. It was poor in secret prayer, which is the strength of any church; it was destitute of communion with Christ, which is the very life blood of religion; but it had the outward semblance of these blessings, and walked in a vain show. There are churches which are poor as Lazarus as to true religion, and yet are clothed in scarlet and fare sumptuously every day upon the mere form of godliness. Spiritual leanness exists side by side with vain-glory. Contentment as to worldly goods makes men rich, but contentment with our spiritual condition is the index of poverty.

Once more, this church of Laodicea had fallen into *a condition which had chased away its Lord*. The text tells us that Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock.” That is not the position which our Lord occupies in reference to a truly flourishing church. If we are walking aright with him, he is in the midst of the church, dwelling there, and revealing himself to his people. His presence makes our worship to be full of spirituality and life; he meets his servants at the table, and there spreads them a feast upon his body and his blood; it is he who puts power and energy into all our church-action,

and causes the word to sound out from our midst. True saints abide in Jesus and he in them. Oh, brethren, when the Lord is in a church, it is a happy church, a holy church, a mighty church, and a triumphant church; but we may grieve him till he will say, “I will go and return to my place, until they acknowledge their offense and seek my face.” Oh, you that know my Lord, and have power with him, entreat him not to go away from us. He can see much about us as a people which grieves his Holy Spirit, much about any one of us to provoke him to anger. Hold him, I pray you, and do not let him go, or if he be gone, bring him again to his mother’s house, into the chamber of her that bare him, where, with holy violence, we will detain him and say, “Abide with us, for thou art life and joy, and all in all to us as a church. Ichabod is written across our house if thou be gone, for thy presence is our glory and thy absence will be our shame.” Churches may become like the temple when the glory of the Lord had left the holy place, because the image of jealousy was set up and the house was defiled. What a solemn warning is that which is contained in  Jeremiah 7:12-15,

“But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; therefore I will do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.”

**II.** Now let us consider, secondly, THE DANGER OF SUCH A STATE. The great danger is, first, *to be rejected of Christ*. He puts it, “I will spue thee out of my mouth,” — as disgusting him, and causing him nausea. Then the church must first be in his mouth, or else it could not be spued from it. What does this mean? Churches are in Christ’s mouth in several ways, they are used by him as his testimony to the world; he speaks to the world through their lives and ministries. He does as good as say, “O sinners, if ye would see what my religion can do, see here a godly people banded together in my fear and love, walking in peace and holiness.” He speaks powerfully by them, and makes the world see and know that there

is a true power in the gospel of the grace of God. But when the church becomes neither cold nor hot he does not speak by her, she is no witness for him. When God is with a church the minister's words come out of Christ's mouth. "Out of his mouth went a two-edged sword," says John in the Revelation, and that "two-edged sword" is the gospel which we preach. When God is with a people they speak with divine power to the world, but if we grow lukewarm Christ says, "Their teachers shall not profit, for I have not sent them, neither am I with them. Their word shall be as water spilt on the ground, or as the whistling of the wind." This is a dreadful thing. Better far for me to die than to be spued out of Christ's mouth.

Then he also ceases to plead for such a church. Christ's special intercession is not for all men, for he says of his people, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." I do not think Christ ever prays for the church of Rome — what would he pray for, but her total overthrow? Other churches are nearing the same fate; they are not clear in his truth or honest in obedience to his word: they follow their own devices, they are lukewarm. But there are churches for which he is pleading, for he has said, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." Mighty are his pleadings for those he really loves, and countless are the blessings which comes in consequence. It will be an evil day when he casts a church out of that interceding mouth, and leaves her unrepresented before the throne because he is none of his. Do you not tremble at such a prospect? Will you not ask for grace to return to your first love? I know that the Lord Jesus will never leave off praying for his own elect, but for churches as corporate bodies he may cease to pray, because they become anti-Christian, or are mere human gatherings, but not elect assemblies, such as the church of God ought to be. Now this is the danger of any church if it declines from its first ardor and becomes lukewarm. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

What is the other danger? This first comprehends all, but another evil is hinted at, — such a church will be *left to its fallen condition*, to become

wretched, — that is to say, miserable, unhappy, divided, without the presence of God, and so without delight in the ways of God, lifeless, spiritless, dreary, desolate, full of schisms, devoid of grace, and I know not what beside, that may come under the term “wretched.” Then the next word is “miserable,” which might better be rendered “pitiable.” Churches which once were a glory shall become a shame. Whereas men said, “The Lord has done great things for them,” they shall now say, “see how low they have fallen! What a change has come over the place! What emptiness and wretchedness! What a blessing rested there for so many years, but what a contrast now!” Pity will take the place of congratulation, and scorn will follow upon admiration. Then it will be “poor” in membership, poor in effort, poor in prayer, poor in gifts and graces, poor in everything. Perhaps some rich people will be left to keep up the semblance of prosperity, but all will be empty, vain, void, Christless, lifeless. Philosophy will fill the pulpit with chaff, the church will be a mass of worldliness, the congregation an assembly of vanity. Next, they will become blind, they will not see themselves as they are, they will have no eye upon the neighborhood to do it good, no eye to the coming of Christ, no eye for his glory. They will say, “We see,” and yet be blind as bats. Ultimately they will become “naked,” their shame will be seen by all, they will be a proverb in everybody’s mouth. “Call that a church!” says one. “Is that a church of Jesus Christ?” cries a second. Those dogs that dared not open their mouths against Israel when the Lord was there will begin to howl when he is gone, and everywhere will the sound be heard, “How are the mighty fallen, how are the weapons of war broken.”

In such a case as that the church will *fail of overcoming*, for it is “to him that overcometh” that a seat upon Christ’s throne is promised; but that church will come short of victory. It shall be written concerning it even as of the children of Ephraim, that being armed and carrying bows they turned their backs in the day of battle. “Ye did run well,” says Paul to the Galatians, “what did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” Such a church had a grand opportunity, but it was not equal to the occasion, its members were born for a great work, but inasmuch as they were unfaithful, God put them aside and used other means. He raised up in their midst a flaming testimony for the gospel, and the light thereof was cast athwart the ocean, and gladdened the nations, but the people were not

worthy of it, or true to it, and therefore he took the candlestick out of its place, and left them in darkness. May God prevent such an evil from coming upon *us*: but such is the danger to all churches if they degenerate into listless indifference.

**III.** Thirdly, I have to speak of THE REMEDIES WHICH THE LORD EMPLOYS. I do earnestly pray that what I say may come home to all here, especially to every one of the members of this church, for it has come very much home to me, and caused great searching of heart in my own soul, and yet I do not think I am the least zealous among you. I beseech you to judge yourselves, that you be not judged. Do not ask me if I mean anything personal. I am personal in the most emphatic sense. I speak of *you* and to *you* in the plainest way. Some of you show plain symptoms of being lukewarm, and God forbid that I should flatter you, or be unfaithful to you. I am aiming at personality, and I earnestly want each beloved brother and sister here to take home each affectionate rebuke. And you who come from other churches, whether in America or elsewhere, you want arousing quite as much as we do, your churches are not better than ours, some of them are not so good, and I speak to you also, for you need to be stirred up to nobler things.

Note, then, the first remedy. Jesus gives a *clear discovery* as to the church's true state. He says to it — "Thou are lukewarm, thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." I rejoice to see people willing to know the truth, but most men do not wish to know it, and this is an ill sign. When a man tells you that he has not looked at his ledger, or day-book, or held a stock-taking for this twelvemonths, you know whereabouts he is, and you say to your manager, "Have you an account with him? Then keep it as close as you can." When a man dares not know the worst about his case, it is certainly a bad one, but he that is right before God is thankful to be told what he is and where he is. Now, some of you know the faults of other people, and in watching this church you have observed weak points in many places, — have you wept over them? Have you prayed over them? If not, you have not watched as you should do for the good of your brethren and sisters, and, perhaps, have allowed evils to grow which ought to have been rooted up: you have been silent when you should have kindly and earnestly spoken to the offenders, or made your own example a warning to them. Do not judge your brother,

but judge yourself: if you have any severity, use it on your own conduct and heart. We must pray the Lord to use this remedy, and make us know just where we are. We shall never get right as long as we are confident that we are so already. Self-complacency is the death of repentance.

Our Lord's next remedy is *gracious counsel*. He says, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." Does not that strike you as being very like the passage in Isaiah, "Come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price?" It is so, and it teaches us that one remedy for lukewarmness is to begin again just as we began at first. We were at a high temperature at our first conversion. What joy, what peace, what delight, what comfort, what enthusiasm we had when first we knew the Lord! We bought gold of him then for nothing, let us go and buy again at the same price.

If religion has not been genuine with us till now, or if we have been adding to it great lumps of shining stuff which we thought was gold and was not, let us now go to the heavenly mint and buy gold tried in the fire, that we may be really rich. Come, let us begin again, each one of us. Inasmuch as we may have thought we were clothed and yet we were naked, let us hasten to him again, and at his own price, which is no price, procure the robe which he has wrought of his own righteousness, and that goodly raiment of his Spirit, which will clothe us with the beauty of the Lord. If, moreover, we have come to be rather dim in the eye, and no longer look up to God and see his face, and have no bright vision of the glory to be revealed, and cannot look on sinners with weeping eyes, as we once did, let us go to Jesus for the eye-salve, just as we went when we were stone blind at first, and the Lord will open our eyes again, and we shall behold him in clear vision as in days gone by. The word from Jesus is, "Come near to me, I pray you, my brethren. If you have wandered from me, return; if you have been cold to me I am not cold to you, my heart is the same to you as ever, come back to me, my brethren. Confess your evil deeds, receive my forgiveness, and henceforth let your hearts burn towards me, for I love you still and will supply all your needs." That is good counsel, let us take it.

Now comes a third remedy, sharp and cutting, but sent in love, namely, *rebukes and chastenings*. Christ will have his favored church walk with

great care, and if she will not follow him fully by being shown wherein she has erred, and will not repent when kindly counselled, he then betakes himself to some sharper means. “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.” The word here used for “love” is a very choice one; it is one which signifies an intense personal affection. Now, there are some churches which Christ loves very specially, favoring them above others, doing more for them than for others, and giving them more prosperity; they are the darlings of his heart, his Benjamins. Now, it is a very solemn thing to be dearly loved by God. It is a privilege to be coveted, but mark you, the man who is so honored occupies a position of great delicacy. The Lord thy God is a jealous God, and he is most jealous where he shows most love. The Lord lets some men escape scot free for awhile after doing many evil things, but if they had been his own elect he would have visited them with stripes long before. He is very jealous of those whom he has chosen to lean upon his bosom and to be his familiar friends. Your servant may do many things which could not be thought of by your child or your wife; and so is it with many who profess to be servants of God — they live a very lax life, and they do not seem to be chastened for it, but if they were the Lord’s own peculiarly beloved ones he would not endure such conduct from them. Now mark this, if the Lord exalts a church, and gives it a special blessing, he expects more of it, more care of his honor, and more zeal for his glory than he does of any other church; and when he does not find it, what will happen? Why, because of his very love he will rebuke it with hard sermons, sharp words, and sore smittings of conscience. If these do not arouse it he will take down the rod and deal out chastenings. Do you know how the Lord chastens churches? Paul says, “For this cause some are sickly among you, and many sleep.” Bodily sickness is often sent in discipline upon churches, and losses, and crosses, and troubles are sent among the members, and sometimes leanness in the pulpit, breakings out of heresy and divisions in the pew, and lack of success in all church work. All these are smittings with the rod. It is very sad, but sometimes that rod does not fall on that part of the church which does the wrong. Sometimes God may take the best in the church, and chasten them for the wrong of others. You say, “How can that be right?” Why, because they are the kind of people who will be most benefited by it. If a vine wants the knife, it is not the branch that bears very little fruit which is trimmed, but the branch which bears much fruit is purged because it is worth purging. In

their case the chastening is a blessing and a token of love. Sorrow is often brought upon Christians by the sins of their fellow-members, and many an aching heart there is in this world that I know of, of brethren and sisters who love the Lord and want to see souls converted, but they can only sigh and cry because nothing is done. Perhaps they have a minister who does not believe the gospel, and they have fellow-members who do not care whether the minister believes it or not, they are all asleep together except those few zealous souls who besiege the throne of grace day and night, and they are the ones who bear the burden of the lukewarm church. Oh, if the chastening comes here, whoever bears it, may the whole body be the better for it, and may we never rest till the church begins to glow with the sacred fire of God, and boil with enthusiastic desire for his glory.

The last remedy, however, is the best of all to my mind. I love it best and desire to make it my food when it is not my medicine. The best remedy for backsliding churches is *more communion with Christ*. "Behold," saith he, "I stand at the door and knock." I have known this text preached upon to sinners numbers of times as though Christ knocked at their door and they had to open it, and so on. The preacher has never managed to keep to free grace for this reason, that the text was not meant to be so used, and if men will ride a text the wrong way, it will not go. This text belongs to the church of God, not to the unconverted. It is addressed to the Laodicean church. There is Christ outside the church, driven there by her unkindness, but he has not gone far away, he loves his church too much to leave her altogether, he longs to come back, and therefore he waits at the doorpost. He knows that the church will never be restored till he comes back, and he desires to bless her, and so he stands waiting, knocking and knocking, again and again; he does not merely knock once, but he *stands* knocking by earnest sermons, by providences, by impressions upon the conscience, by the quickenings of his Holy Spirit; and while he knocks he speaks, he uses all means to awaken his church. Most condescendingly and graciously does he do this, for having threatened to spue her out of his mouth, he might have said, "I will get me gone; and I will never come back again to thee," that would have been natural and just; but how gracious he is when, having expressed his disgust he says, "Disgusted as I am with your condition, I do not wish to leave you; I have taken my presence from you, but I love you, and therefore I knock at your door, and wish to be received



into your heart. I will not force myself upon you, I want you voluntarily to open the door to me." Christ's presence in a church is always a very tender thing. He never is there against the will of the church, it cannot be, for he lives in his people's wills and hearts, and "worketh in them to will and to do of his own good pleasure." He does not break bolt and bar and come in as he often does into a sinner's heart, carrying the soul by storm, because the man is dead in sin, and Christ must do it all, or the sinner will perish; but he is here speaking to living men and women, who ought also to be loving men and women, and he says, "I wish to be among you, open the door to me." We ought to open the door at once, and say, "Come in, good Lord, we grieve to think we should ever have put thee outside that door at all."

And then see what promises he gives. He says he will come and sup with us. Now, in the East, the supper was the best meal of the day, it was the same as our dinner; so that we may say that Christ will come and dine with us. He will give us a rich feast, for he himself is the daintiest and most plenteous of all feasts for perishing souls. He will come and sup with us, that is, we shall be the host and entertain him: but then he adds, "and he with me," that is, he will be the host and guest by turns. We will give him of our best, but poor fare is that, too poor for him, and yet he will partake of it. Then he shall be host, and we will be guest, and oh, how we will feast on what he gives! Christ comes, and brings the supper with him, and all we do is to find the room. The Master says to us, "Where is the guest chamber?" and then he makes ready and spreads his royal table. Now, if these be the terms on which we are to have a feast together, we will most willingly fling open the doors of our hearts and say, "Come in, good Lord." He says to you, "Children, have you any meat?" and if you are obliged to say, "No, Lord," he will come in unto you none the less readily, for there are the fish, the net is ready to break, it is so full, and here are more upon the coals ready. I warrant you, if we sup with him, we shall be lukewarm no longer. The men who live where Jesus is soon feel their hearts burning. It is said of a piece of scented clay by the old Persian moralist that the clay was taken up and questioned. "How camest thou to smell so sweetly, being nothing but common clay?" and it replied, "I laid for many a year in the sweet society of a rose, until at last I drank in its perfume"; and we may say to every warm-hearted Christian, "How

camest thou so warm?" and his answer will be, "My heart bubbleth up with a good matter, for I speak of the things which I have made touching the King. I have been with Jesus, and I have learned of him."

Now, brethren and sisters, what can I say to move you to take this last medicine? I can only say, take it, not only because of the good it will do you, but because of the sweetness of it. I have heard say of some persons that they were pledged not to take wine except as a medicine, but then they were very pleased when they were ill: and so if this be the medicine, "I will come and sup with him, and he with me," we may willingly confess our need of so delicious a remedy. Need I press it on you? May I not rather urge each brother as soon as he gets home today to see whether he cannot enter into fellowship with Jesus? and may the Spirit of God help him!

This is my closing word, there is something for us to do in this matter. We must examine ourselves, and we must confess the fault if we have declined in grace. An then we must not talk about setting the church right, we must pray for grace each one for himself, for the text does not say, "If the church will open the door," but "If *any man* hear my voice and open the door." It must be done by individuals: the church will only get right by each man getting right. Oh, that we might get back into an earnest zeal for our Lord's love and service, and we shall only do so by listening to his rebukes, and then falling into his arms, clasping him once again, and saying, "My Lord and my God." That healed Thomas, did it not? Putting his fingers into the print of the nails, putting his hand into the side, that cured him. Poor, unbelieving, staggering Thomas only had to do that and he became one of the strongest of believers, and said, "My Lord and my God." You will love your Lord till your soul is as coals of juniper if you will daily commune with him. Come close to him, and once getting close to him, never go away from him any more. The Lord bless you, dear brethren, the Lord bless you in this thing.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Revelation 3.

# FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?

## SERMON NO. 1191

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
SEPTEMBER 6TH, 1874,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

*“Christ died for the ungodly.” — ~~ROM~~ Romans 5:6.*

In this verse the human race is described as a sick man, whose disease is so far advanced that he is altogether without strength: no power remains in his system to throw off his mortal malady, nor does he desire to do so; he could not save himself from his disease if he would, and would not if he could. I have no doubt that the apostle had in his eye the description of the helpless infant given by the prophet Ezekiel; it was an infant — an infant newly born — an infant deserted by its mother before the necessary offices of tenderness had been performed; left unwashed, unclothed, unfed, a prey to certain death under the most painful circumstances, forlorn, abandoned, hopeless. Our race is like the nation of Israel, its whole head is sick, and its whole heart faint. Such, unconverted men, are you! Only there is this darker shade in your picture, that your condition is not only your calamity, but your fault. In other diseases men are grieved at their sickness, but this is the worst feature in your case, that you love the evil which is destroying you. In addition to the pity which your case demands, no little blame must be measured out to you: you are without will for that which is good, your “cannot” means “will not,” your inability is not physical but moral, not that of the blind who cannot see for want of eyes, but of the willingly ignorant who refuse to look.

While man is in this condition Jesus interposes for his salvation. “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”; “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” according to “his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and

sins.” The pith of my sermon will be an endeavour to declare that the reason of Christ’s dying for us did not lie in our excellence; but where sin abounded grace did much more abound, for the persons for whom Jesus died were viewed by him as the reverse of good, and he came into the world to save those who are guilty before God, or, in the words of our text, “Christ died for the ungodly.”

Now to our business. We shall dwell first upon the fact — “Christ died for the ungodly”; then we shall consider the fair inferences therefrom; and, thirdly, proceed to think and speak of the proclamation of this simple but wondrous truth.

**First,** here is THE FACT — “Christ died for the ungodly.” Never did the human ear listen to a more astounding and yet cheering truth. Angels desire to look into it, and if men were wise they would ponder it night and day. Jesus, the Son of God, himself God over all, the infinitely glorious One, Creator of heaven and earth, out of love to me stooped to become a man and die. Christ, the thrice holy God, the pure-hearted man, in whom there was no sin and could be none, espoused the cause of the wicked. Jesus, whose doctrine makes deadly war on sin, whose Spirit is the destroyer of evil, whose whole self abhors iniquity, whose second advent will prove his indignation against transgression, yet undertook the cause of the impious, and even unto death pursued their salvation. The Christ of God, though he had no part or lot in the fall and the sin which has arisen out of it, has died to redeem us from its penalty, and, like the psalmist, he can cry, “Then I restored that which I took not away.” Let all holy beings judge whether this is not the miracle of miracles!

Christ, the name given to our Lord, is an expressive word; it means “Anointed One,” and indicates that he was sent upon a divine errand, commissioned by supreme authority. The Lord Jehovah said of old, “I have laid help upon one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people”; and again, “I have given him as a covenant to the people, a leader and commander to the people.” Jesus was both set apart to this work, and qualified for it by the anointing of the Holy Ghost. He is no unauthorised savior, no amateur deliverer, but an ambassador clothed with unbounded power from the great King, a Redeemer with full credentials from the Father. It is this ordained and appointed Savior who has “died for

the ungodly.” Remember this, ye ungodly! Consider well who it was that came to lay down his life for such as you are.

The text says Christ died. He did a great deal besides dying, but the crowning act of his career of love for the ungodly, and that which rendered all the rest available to them, was his death for them. He actually gave up the ghost, not in fiction, but in fact. He laid down his life for us, breathing out his soul, even as other men do when they expire. That it might be indisputably clear that he was really dead, his heart was pierced with the soldier’s spear, and forthwith came there out blood and water. The Roman governor would not have allowed the body to be removed from the cross had he not been duly certified that Jesus was indeed dead. His relatives and friends who wrapped him in linen and laid him in Joseph’s tomb, were sorrowfully sure that all that lay before them was a corpse. The Christ really died, and in saying that, we mean that he suffered all the pangs incident to death; only he endured much more and worse, for his was a death of peculiar pain and shame, and was not only attended by the forsaking of man, but by the departure of his God. That cry, “My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” was the innermost blackness of the thick darkness of death.

Our Lord’s death was penal, inflicted upon him by divine justice; and rightly so, for on him lay our iniquities, and therefore on him must lay the suffering. “It pleased the Father to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.” He died under circumstances which made his death most terrible. Condemned to a felon’s gibbet, he was crucified amid a mob of jesters, with few sympathising eyes to gaze upon him; he bore the gaze of malice and the glance of scorn; he was hooted and jeered by a ribald throng, who were cruelly inventive in their taunts and blasphemies. There he hung, bleeding from many wounds, exposed to the sun, burning with fever, and devoured with thirst, under every circumstance of contumely, pain, and utter wretchedness; his death was of all deaths the most deadly death, and emphatically “Christ died.”

But the pith of the text comes here, that “Christ died for the ungodly”; not for the righteous, not for the reverent and devout, but for the ungodly. Look at the original word, and you will find that it has the meaning of “impious, irreligious, and wicked.” Our translation is by no means too

strong, but scarcely expressive enough. To be ungodly, or godless, is to be in a dreadful state, but as use has softened the expression, perhaps you will see the sense more clearly if I read it, "Christ died for the impious," for those who have no reverence for God. Christ died for the godless, who, having cast off God, cast off with him all love for that which is right. I do not know a word that could more fitly describe the most irreligious of mankind than the original word in this place, and I believe it is used on purpose by the Spirit of God to convey to us the truth, which we are always slow to receive, that Christ did not die because men were good, or would be good, but died for them as ungodly — or, in other words, "he came to seek and to save that which was lost."

Observe, then, that when the Son of God determined to die for men, he viewed them as ungodly, and far from God by wicked works. In casting his eye over our race he did not say, "Here and there I see spirits of nobler mould, pure, truthful, truth-seeking, brave, disinterested, and just; and therefore, because of these choice ones, I will die for this fallen race." No; but looking on them all, he whose judgment is infallible returned this verdict, "They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Putting them down at that estimate, and nothing better, Christ died for them. He did not please himself with some rosy dream of a superior race yet to come, when the age of iron should give place to the age of gold, — some halcyon period of human development, in which civilisation would banish crime, and wisdom would conduct man back to God. Full well he knew that, left to itself, the world would grow worse and worse, and that by its very wisdom it would darken its own eyes. It was not because a golden age would come by natural progress, but just because such a thing was impossible, unless he died to procure it, that Jesus died for a race which, apart from him, could only develop into deeper damnation. Jesus viewed us as we really were, not as our pride fancies us to be; he saw us to be without God, enemies of our own Creator, dead in trespasses and sins, corrupt, and set on mischief, and even in our occasional cry for good, searching for it with blinded judgment and prejudiced heart, so that we put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. He saw that in us was no good thing, but every possible evil, so that we were lost, — utterly, helplessly,

hopelessly lost apart from him: yet viewing us as in that graceless and Godless plight and condition, he died for us.

I would have you remember that the view under which Jesus beheld us was not only the true one, but, for us, the kindly one; because had it been written that Christ died for the better sort, then each troubled spirit would have inferred “he died not for me.” Had the merit of his death been the perquisite of honesty, where would have been the dying thief? If of chastity, where the woman that loved much? If of courageous fidelity, how would it have fared with the apostles, for they all forsook him and fled? There are times when the bravest man trembles lest he should be found a coward, the most disinterested frets about the selfishness of his heart, and the most pure is staggered by his own impurity; where, then, would have been hope for one of us, if the gospel had been only another form of law, and the benefits of the cross had been reserved as the rewards of virtue? The gospel does not come to us as a premium for virtue, but it presents us with forgiveness for sin. It is not a reward for health, but a medicine for sickness. Therefore, to meet all cases, it puts us down at our worst, and, like the good Samaritan with the wounded traveller, it comes to us where we are. “Christ died for the impious” is a great net which takes in even the leviathan sinner; and of all the creeping sinners innumerable which swarm the sea of sin, there is not one kind which this great net does not encompass.

Let us note well that in this condition lay the need of our race that Christ should die. I do not see how it could have been written “Christ died for the good.” To what end for the good? Why need they his death? If men are perfect, does God need to be reconciled to them? Was he ever opposed to holy beings? Impossible! On the other hand, were the good ever the enemies of God? If such there be are they not of necessity his friends? If man be by nature just with God, to what end should the Savior die? “The just for the unjust” I can understand; but the “just dying for the just” were a double injustice — an injustice that the just should be punished at all, and another injustice that the just should be punished for them. Oh no! If Christ died, it must be because there was a penalty to be paid for sin committed, hence he must have died for those who had committed the sin. If Christ died, it must have been because “a fountain filled with blood” was necessary for the cleansing away of heinous stains; hence, it must

have been for those who are defiled. Suppose there should be found anywhere in this world an unfallen man — perfectly innocent of all actual sin, and free from any tendency to it, there would be a superfluity of cruelty in the crucifixion of the innocent Christ for such an individual. What need has he that Christ should die for him, when he has in his own innocence the right to live? If there be found beneath the copes of heaven an individual who, notwithstanding some former slips and flaws, can yet, by future diligence, completely justify himself before God, then it is clear that there is no need for Christ to die for him. I would not insult him by telling him that Christ died for him, for he would reply to me, “Why should he? Cannot I make myself just without him?” In the very nature of things it must be so, that if Christ Jesus dies he must die for the ungodly. Such agonies as his would not have been endured had there not been a cause, and what cause could there have been but sin?

Some have said that Jesus died as our example; but that is not altogether true. Christ’s death is not absolutely an example for men, it was a march into a region of which he said, “Ye cannot follow me now.” His life was our example, but not his death in all respects, for we are by no means bound to surrender ourselves voluntarily to our enemies as he did, but when persecuted in one city we are bidden to flee to another. To be willing to die for the truth is a most Christly thing, and in that Jesus is our example; but into the winepress which he trod it is not ours to enter, the voluntary element which was peculiar to his death renders it inimitable. He said, “I lay down my life of myself; no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.” One word of his would have delivered him from his foes; he had but to say “Begone!” and the Roman guards must have fled like chaff before the wind. He died because he willed to do so; of his own accord he yielded up his spirit to the Father. It must have been as an atonement for the guilty; it could not have been as an example, for no man is bound voluntarily to die. Both the dictates of nature, and the command of the law, require us to preserve our lives. “Thou shalt not kill” means “Thou shalt not voluntarily give up thine own life any more than take the life of another.” Jesus stood in a special position, and therefore he died; but his example would have been complete enough without his death, had it not been for the peculiar office which he had undertaken. We may fairly conclude that Christ died for men who needed such a death; and, as the



good did not need it for an example — and in fact it is not an example to them — he must have died for the ungodly.

The sum of our text is this — all the benefits resulting from the Redeemer's passion, and from all the works that followed upon it, are for those who by nature are ungodly. His gospel is that sinners believing in him are saved. His sacrifice has put away sin from all who trust him, and, therefore, it was offered for those who had sin upon them before. "He rose again for our justification," but certainly not for the justification of those who can be justified by their own works. He ascended on high, and we are told that he "received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also." He lives to intercede, and Isaiah tells us that "He made intercession for the transgressors." The aim of his death, resurrection, ascension, and eternal life, is towards the sinful sons of men. His death has brought pardon, but it cannot be pardon for those who have no sin — pardon is only for the guilty. He is exalted on high "to give repentance," but surely not to give repentance to those who have never sinned, and have nothing to repent of. Repentance and remission both imply previous guilt in those who receive them: unless, then, these gifts of the exalted Savior are mere shams and superfluities, they must be meant for the really guilty. From his side there flowed out water as well as blood — the water is intended to cleanse polluted nature, then certainly not the nature of the sinless, but the nature of the impure; and so both blood and water flowed for sinners who need the double purification. To-day the Holy Spirit regenerates men as the result of the Redeemer's death; and who can be regenerated but those who need a new heart and a right spirit? To regenerate the already pure and innocent were ridiculous; regeneration is a work which creates life where there was formerly death, gives a heart of flesh to those whose hearts were originally stone, and implants the love of holiness where sin once had sole dominion. Conversion is also another gift, which comes through his death, but does he turn those whose faces are already in the right direction? It cannot be. He converts the sinner from the error of his ways, he turns the disobedient into the right way, he leads back the stray sheep to the fold. Adoption is another gift which comes to us by the cross. Does the Lord adopt those who are already his sons by nature? If children already, what room is there for adoption? No; but the grand act of divine love is that which takes those who are "children of wrath even as others," and by

sovereign grace puts them among the children, and makes them “heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ.”

To-day I see the Good Shepherd in all the energy of his mighty love, going forth into the dreadful wilderness. For whom is he gone forth? For the ninety and nine who feed at home? No, but into the desert his love sends him, over hill and dale, to seek the one lost sheep which has gone astray. Behold, I see him arousing his church, like a good housewife, to cleanse her house. With the besom of the law she sweeps, and with the candle of the word she searches, and what for? For those bright new coined pieces fresh from the mint, which glitter safely in her purse? Assuredly not, but for that lost piece which has rolled away into the dust, and lies hidden in the dark corner. And lo! grandest of all visions! I see the Eternal Father, himself, in the infinity of his love, going forth in haste to meet a returning child. And whom does he go to meet? The elder brother returning from the field, bringing his sheaves with him? An Esau, who has brought him savory meat such as his soul loveth? A Joseph whose godly life has made him lord over all Egypt? Nay, the Father leaves his home to meet a returning prodigal, who has companied with harlots, and grovelled among swine, who comes back to him in disgraceful rags, and disgusting filthiness! It is on a sinner’s neck that the Father weeps; it is on a guilty cheek that he sets his kisses; it is for an unworthy one that the fatted calf is killed, and the best robe is worn, and the house is made merry with music and with dancing. Yes, tell it, and let it ring round earth and heaven, Christ died for the ungodly. Mercy seeks the guilty, grace has to do with the impious, the irreligious and the wicked. The physician has not come to heal the healthy, but to heal the sick. The great philanthropist has not come to bless the rich and the great, but the captive and the prisoner. He puts down the mighty from their seats, for he is a stern leveller, but he has come to lift the beggar from the dunghill, and to set him among princes, even the princes of his people. Sing ye, then, with the holy Virgin, and let your song be loud and sweet, — “He hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he hath sent empty away.” “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” “He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” O ye guilty ones, believe in him and live.

**II.** Let us now consider THE PLAIN INFERENCES FROM THIS FACT. Let me have your hearts as well as your ears, especially those of you who are not yet saved, for I desire you to be blessed by the truths uttered; and oh, may the Spirit of God cause it to be so. It is clear that those of you who are ungodly — and if you are unconverted you are that — are in great danger. Jesus would not interpose his life and bear the bloody sweat and crown of thorns, and nails, and spear, and scorn unmitigated, and death itself, if there were not solemn need and imminent peril. There is danger, solemn danger, for you. You are under the wrath of God already, and you will soon die, and then, as surely as you live, you will be lost, and lost forever; as certain as the righteous will enter into everlasting life, you will be driven into everlasting punishment. The cross is the danger signal to you, it warns you that if God spared not his only Son, he will not spare you. It is the lighthouse set on the rocks of sin to warn you that swift and sure destruction awaits you if you continue to rebel against the Lord. Hell is an awful place, or Jesus had not needed to suffer such infinite agonies to save us from it.

It is also fairly to be inferred that out of this danger only Christ can deliver the ungodly, and he only through his death. If a less price than that of the life of the Son of God could have redeemed men, he would have been spared. When a country is at war, and you see a mother give up her only boy to fight her country's battles — her only well-beloved, blameless son — you know that the battle must be raging very fiercely, and that the country is in stern danger: for, if she could find a substitute for him, though she gave all her wealth, she would lavish it freely to spare her darling. If she were certain that in his heart a bullet would find its target, she must have strong love for her country, and her country must be in dire necessity ere she would bid him go. If, then, "God spared not his Son, but freely delivered him up for us all," there must have been a dread necessity for it. It must have stood thus: die he, or the sinner must, or justice must; and since justice could not, and the Father desired that the sinner should not, then Christ must; and so he did. Oh, miracle of love! I tell you, sinners, you cannot help yourselves, nor can all the priests of Rome or Oxford help you, let them perform their antics as they may; Jesus alone can save, and that only by his death. There on the bloody tree hangs all man's hope; if you enter heaven it must be by force of the incarnate God's

bleeding out his life for you. You are in such peril that only the pierced hand can lift you out of it. Look to him, at once, I pray you, ere the proud waters go over your soul.

Then let it be noticed — and this is the point I want constantly to keep before your view — that Jesus died out of pure pity. He must have died out of the most gratuitous benevolence to the undeserving, because the character of those for whom he died could not have attracted him, but must have been repulsive to his holy soul. The impious, the godless — can Christ love these for their character? No, he loved them notwithstanding their offences, loved them as creatures fallen and miserable, loved them according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses and tender mercies, from pity, and not from admiration. Viewing them as ungodly, yet he loved them. This is extraordinary love! I do not wonder that some persons are loved by others, for they wear a potent charm in their countenances, their ways are winsome, and their characters charm you into affection; “but God commendeth his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” He looked at us, and there was not a solitary beauty spot upon us: we were covered with “wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores,” distortions, defilements, and pollutions; and yet, for all that, Jesus loved us. He loved us because he would love us; because his heart was full of pity, and he could not let us perish. Pity moved him to seek the most needy objects that his love might display its utmost ability in lifting men from the lowest degradation, and putting them in the highest position of holiness and honor.

Observe another inference. If Christ died for the ungodly, this fact leaves the ungodly no excuse if they do not come to him, and believe in him unto salvation. Had it been otherwise they might have pleaded, “We are not fit to come.” But you are ungodly, and Christ died for the ungodly, why not for you? I hear the reply, “But I have been so very vile.” Yes, you have been impious, but your sin is not worse than this word ungodly will compass. Christ died for those who were wicked, thoroughly wicked. The Greek word is so expressive that it must take in your case, however wrongly you have acted. “But I cannot believe that Christ died for such as I am,” says one. Then, sir, mark! I hold you to your words, and charge you with contradicting the Eternal God to his teeth, and making him a liar. Your statement gives God the lie. The Lord declares that “Christ died for

the ungodly,” and you say he did not, what is that but to make God a liar? How can you expect mercy if you persist in such proud unbelief? Believe the divine revelation. Close in at once with the gospel. Forsake your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall surely live. The fact that Christ died for the ungodly renders self-righteousness a folly. Why need a man pretend that he is good if “Christ died for the ungodly?” We have an orphanage, and the qualification for our orphanage is that the child for whom admission is sought shall be utterly destitute. I will suppose a widow trying to show to me and my fellow trustees that her boy is a fitting object for the charity; will she tell us that her child has a rich uncle? Will she enlarge upon her own capacities for earning a living? Why, this would be to argue against herself, and she is much too wise for that, I warrant you, for she knows that any such statements would damage rather than serve her cause. So, sinner, do not pretend to be righteous, do not dream that you are better than others, for that is to argue against yourself. Prove that you are not by nature ungodly, and you prove yourself to be one for whom Jesus did not die. Jesus comes to make the ungodly godly, and the sinful holy, but the raw material upon which he works is described in the text not by its goodness but by its badness; it is for the ungodly that Jesus died. “Oh, but if I felt!” Felt what? Felt something which would make you better? Then you would not so clearly come under the description here given. If you are destitute of good feelings, and thoughts, and hopes, and emotions, you are ungodly, and “Christ died for the ungodly.” Believe in him and you shall be saved from that ungodliness.

“Well,” cries out some Pharisaic moralist, “this is dangerous doctrine.” How so? Would it be dangerous doctrine to say that physicians exercise their skill to cure sick people and not healthy ones? Would that encourage sickness? Would that discourage health? You know better; you know that to inform the sick of a physician who can heal them is one of the best means for promoting their cure. If ungodly and impious men would take heart and run to the Savior, and by him become cured of impiety and ungodliness, would not that be a good thing? Jesus has come to make the ungodly godly, the impious pious, the wicked obedient, and the dishonest upright. He has not come to save them in their sins, but from their sins; and this is the best of news for those who are diseased with sin. Self-righteousness is a folly, and despair is a crime, since Christ died for the

ungodly. None are excluded hence but those who do themselves exclude; this great gate is set so wide open that the very worst of men may enter, and you, dear hearer, may enter now.

I think it is also very evident from our text that when they are saved, the converted find no ground of boasting; for when their hearts are renewed and made to love God they cannot say, "See how good I am," because they were not so by nature; they were ungodly, and, as such, Christ died for them. Whatever goodness there may be in them after conversion they ascribe it to the grace of God, since by nature they were alienated from God, and far removed from righteousness. If the truth of natural depravity be but known and felt, free grace must be believed in, and then all glorying is at an end.

This will also keep the saved ones from thinking lightly of sin. If God had forgiven sinners without an atonement they might have thought little of transgression, but now that pardon comes to them through the bitter griefs of their Redeemer they cannot but see it to be an exceeding great evil. When we look to Jesus dying on the cross we end our dalliance with sin, and utterly abhor the cause of so great suffering to so dear a Savior. Every wound of Jesus is an argument against sin. We never know the full evil of our iniquities till we see what it cost the Redeemer to put them away.

Salvation by the death of Christ is the strongest conceivable promoter of all the things which are pure, honest, lovely, and of good report. It makes sin so loathsome that the saved one cannot take up even its name without dread. "I will take away the name of Baali out of thy mouth." He looks upon it as we should regard a knife rusted with gore, wherewith some villain had killed our mother, our wife, or child. Could we play with it? Could we bear it about our persons or endure it in our sight? No, accursed thing! stained with the heart's blood of my beloved, I would fain fling thee into the bottomless abyss! Sin is that dagger which stabbed the Savior's heart, and henceforth it must be the abomination of every man who has been redeemed by the atoning sacrifice.

To close this point. Christ's death for the ungodly is the grandest argument to make the ungodly love him when they are saved. To love Christ is the mainspring of obedience in men — how shall men be led to love him? If you would grow love, you must sow love. Go, then; and let

men know the love of Christ to sinners, and they will, by grace, be moved to love him in return. No doubt all of us require to know the threatenings of the wrath of God; but that which soonest touches my heart is Christ's free love to an unworthy one like myself. When my sins seem blackest to me, and yet I know that through Christ's death I am forgiven, this blest assurance melts me down.

*“If thou hadst bid thy thunders roll,  
And lightnings flash, to blast my soul.  
I still had stubborn been;  
But mercy has my heart subdued,  
A bleeding Savior I have view'd,  
And now I hate my sin.”*

I have heard of a soldier who had been put in prison for drunkenness and insubordination several times and he had been also flogged, but nothing improved him. At last he was taken in the commission of another offence, and brought before the commanding officer, who said to him, “My man, I have tried everything in the martial code with you, except shooting you; you have been imprisoned and whipped, but nothing has changed you. I am determined to try something else with you. You have caused us a great deal of trouble and anxiety, and you seem resolved to do so still; I shall, therefore, change my plans with you, and I shall neither fine you, flog you, nor imprison you; I will see what kindness will do, and therefore I fully and freely forgive you.” The man burst into tears, for he reckoned on a round number of lashes, and had steeled himself to bear them, but when he found he was to be forgiven, and set free, he said, “Sir, you shall not have to find fault with me again.” Mercy won his heart. Now, sinner, in that fashion God is dealing with you. Great sinners! Ungodly sinners! God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways. I have threatened you, and you hardened your hearts against me. Therefore, come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” “Well,” says one, “I am afraid if you talk to sinners so they will go and sin more and more.” Yes, there are brutes everywhere, who can be so unnatural as to sin because grace abounds, but I bless God there is such a thing as the influence of love, and I am rejoiced that many feel the force of it, and yield to the conquering arms of amazing grace. The Spirit of God wins the day by such arguments as these; love is the great

battering-ram which opens gates of brass. When the Lord says, "I have blotted out thy transgressions like a cloud, and like a thick cloud thine iniquities," then the man is moved to repentance.

I can tell you hundreds and thousands of cases in which this infinite love has done all the good that morality itself could ask to have done; it has changed the heart and turned the entire current of the man's nature from sin to righteousness. The sinner has believed, repented, turned from his evil ways, and become zealous for holiness. Looking to Jesus he has felt his sin forgiven, and he has started up a new man, to lead a new life. God grant it may be so this morning, and he shall have all the glory of it.

**III.** So now we must close — and this is the last point — THE PROCLAMATION OF THIS FACT, that "Christ died for the ungodly." I would not mind if I were condemned to live fifty years more, and never to be allowed to speak but these five words, if I might be allowed to utter them in the ear of every man, and woman, and child who lives. "CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY" is the best message that even angels could bring to men. In the proclamation of this the whole church ought to take its share. Those of us who can address thousands should be diligent to cry aloud — "Christ died for the ungodly"; but those of you who can speak to one, or write a letter to one, must keep on at this — "Christ died for the ungodly." Shout it out, or whisper it out; print it in capitals, or write it in a lady's hand — "Christ died for the ungodly." Speak it solemnly, it is not a thing for jest. Speak it joyfully; it is not a theme for sorrow, but for joy. Speak it firmly; it is indisputable fact. Facts of science, as they call them, are always questioned: this is unquestionable. Speak it earnestly; for if there be any truth which ought to arouse all a man's soul it is this: "Christ died for the ungodly." Speak it where the ungodly live, and that is at your own house. Speak it also down in the dark corners of the city, in the haunts of debauchery, in the home of the thief, in the den to the depraved. Tell it in the gaol; and sit down at the dying bed and read in a tender whisper — "Christ died for the ungodly." When you pass the harlot in the street, do not give a toss with that proud head of yours, but remember that "Christ died for the ungodly"; and when you recollect those that injured you, say no bitter word, but hold your tongue, and remember "Christ died for the ungodly." Make this henceforth the message of your life — "Christ died for the ungodly."



And, oh, dear friends, you that are not saved, take care that you receive this message. Believe it. Go to God with this on your tongue — "Lord save me, for Christ died for the ungodly, and I am of them." Fling yourself right on to this as a man commits himself to his lifebelt amid the surging billows. "But I do not feel," says one. Trust not your feelings if you do; but with no feelings and no hopes of your own, cling desperately to this, "Christ died for the ungodly." The transforming, elevating, spiritualising, moralising, sanctifying power of this great fact you shall soon know and be no more ungodly; but first, as ungodly, rest you on this, "Christ died for the ungodly." Accept this truth, my dear hearer, and you are saved. I do not mean merely that you will be pardoned, I do not mean that you will enter heaven, I mean much more; I mean that you will have a new heart; you will be saved from the love of sin, saved from drunkenness, saved from uncleanness, saved from blasphemy, saved from dishonesty. "Christ died for the ungodly" — if that be really known and trusted in, it will open in your soul new springs of living water which will cleanse the Augean stable of your nature, and make a temple of God of that which was before a den of thieves. Trust in the mercy of God through the death of Jesus Christ, and a new era in your life's history will at once commence.

Having put this as plainly as I know how, and having guarded my speech to prevent there being anything like a flowery sentence in it, having tried to put this as clearly as daylight itself, — that "Christ died for the ungodly," if your ears refuse the precious boons that come through the dying Christ, your blood be on your own heads, for there is no other way of salvation for any one among you. Whether you reject or accept this, I am clear. But oh! do not reject it, for it is your life. If the Son of God dies for sinners, and sinners reject his blood, they have committed the most heinous offence possible. I will not venture to affirm, but I do suggest that the devils in hell are not capable of so great a stretch of criminality as is involved in the rejection of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Here lies the highest love. The incarnate God bleeds to death to save men, and men hate God so much that they will not even have him as he dies to save them. They will not be reconciled to their Creator, though he stoops from his loftiness to the depths of woe in the person of his Son on their behalf. This is depravity indeed, and desperateness of rebellion. God grant you may not be guilty of it. There can be no fiercer flame of wrath than that

which will break forth from love that has been trampled upon, when men have put from them eternal life, and done despite to the Lamb of God. “Oh,” says one, “would God I could believe!” “Sir, what difficulty is there in it? Is it hard to believe the truth? Darest thou belie thy God? Art thou steeling thy heart to such desperateness that thou wilt call thy God a liar?” “No; I believe Christ died for the ungodly,” says one, “but I want to know how to get the merit of that death applied to my own soul.” Thou mayest, then, for here it is — “He that believeth in him,” that is, he that trusts in him, “is not condemned.” Here is the gospel and the whole of it — “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned.”

I am a poor weak man like yourselves, but my gospel is not weak; and it would be no stronger if one of “the mailed cherubim, or sworded seraphim” could take the platform and stand here instead of me. He could tell to you no better news. God, in condescension to your weakness, has chosen one of your fellow mortals to bear to you this message of infinite affection. Do not reject it! By your souls’ value, by their immortality, by the hope of heaven and by the dread of hell, lay hold upon eternal life; and by the fear that this may be your last day on earth, yea, and this evening your last hour, I do beseech you now, “steal away to Jesus.” There is life in a look at the crucified one; there is life at this moment for you. Look to him now and live. Amen.

#### **PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —**

**EZEKIEL 16:1-14; ROMANS 5:1-11.**

#### **HYMNS FROM**

**“OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 174, 502 (V. 4, 5, 6), 553**

# CHRIST THE END OF THE LAW

## SERMON NO. 1325

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
NOVEMBER 19TH, 1876,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” — ~~500~~ Romans 10:4.*

YOU REMEMBER we spoke last Sabbath morning of “the days of the Son of man.” Oh that every Sabbath now might be a day of that kind in the most spiritual sense. I hope that we shall endeavor to make each Lord’s Day as it comes round a day of the Lord, by thinking much of Jesus by rejoicing much in him, by laboring for him, and by our growingly importunate prayer, that to him may the gathering of the people be. We may not have very many Sabbaths together, death may soon part us; but while we are able to meet as a Christian assembly, let us never forget that Christ’s presence is our main necessity, and let us pray for it and entreat the Lord to vouchsafe that presence always in displays of light, life and love! I become increasingly earnest that every preaching time should be a soul-saving time. I can deeply sympathize with Paul when he said, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.” We have had so much preaching, but, comparatively speaking, so little believing in Jesus; and if there be no believing in him, neither the law nor the gospel has answered its end, and our labor has been utterly in vain. Some of you have heard, and heard, and heard again, but you have not believed in Jesus. If the gospel had not come to your hearing you could not have been guilty of refusing it. “Have they not heard?” says the apostle. “Yes, verily:” but still “they have not all obeyed the gospel.” Up to this very moment there has been no hearing with the inner ear, and no work of faith in the heart, in the case of many whom we love. Dear friends, is it always to be so? How long is it to be so? Shall there not soon come an end

of this reception of the outward means and rejection of the inward grace? Will not your soul soon close in with Christ for present salvation? Break! Break, O heavenly day, upon the benighted ones, for our hearts are breaking over them.

The reason why many do not come to Christ is not because they are not earnest, after a fashion, and thoughtful and desirous to be saved, but because they cannot brook God's way of salvation. "They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge," We do get them by our exhortation so far on the way that they become desirous to obtain eternal life, but "they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." Mark, "submitted themselves," for it needs submission. Proud man wants to save himself, he believes he can do it, and he will not give over the task till he finds out his own helplessness by unhappy failures. Salvation by grace, to be sued for in forma pauperis, to be asked for as an undeserved boon from free, unmerited grace, this it is which the carnal mind will not come to as long as it can help it: I beseech the Lord so to work that some of you may not be able to help it. And oh, I have been praying that, while this morning I am trying to set forth Christ as the end of the law, God may bless it to some hearts, that they may see what Christ did, and may perceive it to be a great deal better than anything they can do; may see what Christ finished, and may become weary of what they themselves have labored at so long, and have not even well commenced at this day. Perhaps it may please the Lord to enchant them with the perfection of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. As Bunyan would say, "It may, perhaps, set their mouths a watering after it," and when a sacred appetite begins it will not be long before the feast is enjoyed. It may be that when they see the raiment of wrought gold, which Jesus so freely bestows on naked souls, they will throw away their own filthy rags which now they hug so closely.

I am going to speak about two things, this morning, as the Spirit of God shall help me: and the first is, Christ in connection with the law — he is "the end of the law for righteousness"; and secondly, ourselves in connection with Christ — "to everyone that believeth Christ is the end of the law for righteousness."

**I.** First, then, CHRIST IN CONNECTION WITH THE LAW. The law is that which, as sinners, we have above all things cause to dread; for the sting of

death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. Towards us the law darts forth devouring flames, for it condemns us, and in solemn terms appoints us a place among the accursed, as it is written, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” Yet, strange infatuation! like the fascination which attracts the gnat to the candle which burns its wings, men by nature fly to the law for salvation, and cannot be driven from it. The law can do nothing else but reveal sin and pronounce condemnation upon the sinner, and yet we cannot get men away from it, even though we show them how sweetly Jesus stands between them and it. They are so enamoured of legal hope that they cling to it when there is nothing to cling to; they prefer Sinai to Calvary, though Sinai has nothing for them but thunders and trumpet warnings of coming judgment. O that for awhile you would listen anxiously while I set forth Jesus my Lord, that you may see the law in him.

Now, what has our Lord to do with the law? He has everything to do with it, for he is its end for the noblest object, namely, for righteousness. He is the “end of the law.” What does this mean? I think it signifies three things: first, that Christ is the purpose and object of the law; secondly, that he is the fulfillment of it; and thirdly, that he is the termination of it.

First, then, our Lord Jesus Christ is the purpose and object of the law. It was given to lead us too him. The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, or rather our attendant to conduct us to the school of Jesus. The law is the great net in which the fish are enclosed that they may be drawn out of the element of sin. The law is the stormy wind which drives souls into the harbor or refuge. The law is the sheriff’s officer to shut men up in prison for their sin, concluding them all under condemnation in order that they may look to the free grace of God alone for deliverance. This is the object of the law: it empties that grace may fill, and wounds that mercy may heal. It has never been God’s intention towards us, as fallen men, that the law should be regarded as a way to salvation to us, for a way of salvation it can never be. Had man never fallen, had his nature remained as God made it, the law would have been most helpful to him to show him the way in which he should walk: and by keeping it he would have lived, for “he that doeth these things shall live in them.” But ever since man has fallen the Lord has not proposed to him a way of salvation by works, for

he knows it to be impossible to a sinful creature. The law is already broken; and whatever man can do he cannot repair the damage he has already done: therefore he is out of court as to the hope of merit. The law demands perfection, but man has already fallen short of it; and therefore let him do his best. He cannot accomplish what is absolutely essential. The law is meant to lead the sinner to faith in Christ, by showing the impossibility of any other way. It is the black dog to fetch the sheep to the shepherd, the burning heat which drives the traveler to the shadow of the great rock in a weary land.

Look how the law is adapted to this; for, first of all, it shows man his sin. Read the ten commandments and tremble as you read them. Who can lay his own character down side by side with the two tablets of divine precept without at once being convinced that he has fallen far short of the standard? When the law comes home to the soul it is like light in a dark room revealing the dust and the dirt which else had been unperceived. It is the test which detects the presence of the poison of sin in the soul. "I was alive without the law once," said the apostle, "but when the commandment came sin revived and I died." Our comeliness utterly fades away when the law blows upon it. Look at the commandments, I say, and remember how sweeping they are, how spiritual, how far-reaching. They do not merely touch the outward act, but dive into the inner motive and deal with the heart, the mind, the soul. There is a deeper meaning in the commands than appears upon their surface. Gaze into their depths and see how terrible is the holiness which they require. As you understand what the law demands you will perceive how far you are from fulfilling it, and how sin abounds where you thought there was little or none of it. You thought yourself rich and increased in goods and in no need of anything, but when the broken law visits you, your spiritual bankruptcy and utter penury stare you in the face. A true balance discovers short weight, and such is the first effect of the law upon the conscience of man.

The law also shows the result and mischief of sin. Look at the types of the old Mosaic dispensation, and see how they were intended to lead men to Christ by making them see their unclean condition and their need of such cleansing as only he can give. Every type pointed to our Lord Jesus Christ. If men were put apart because of disease or uncleanness, they were made to see how sin separated them from God and from his people; and

when they were brought back and purified with mystic rites in which were scarlet wool and hyssop and the like, they were made to see how they can only be restored by Jesus Christ, the great High Priest. When the bird was killed that the leper might be clean, the need of purification by the sacrifice of a life was set forth. Every morning and evening a lamb died to tell of daily need of pardon, if God is to dwell with us. We sometimes have fault found with us for speaking too much about blood; yet under the old testament the blood seemed to be everything, and was not only spoken of but actually presented to the eye. What does the apostle tell us in the Hebrews?

“Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people saying, this is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is not remission.”

The blood was on the veil, and on the altar, on the hangings, and on the floor of the tabernacle: no one could avoid seeing it. I resolve to make my ministry of the same character, and more and more sprinkle it with the blood of atonement. Now that abundance of the blood of old was meant to show clearly that sin has so polluted us that without an atonement God is not to be approached: we must come by the way of sacrifice or not at all. We are so unacceptable in ourselves that unless the Lord sees us with the blood of Jesus upon us he must away with us. The old law, with its emblems and figures, set forth many truths as to men's selves and the coming Savior, intending by every one of them to preach Christ. If any stopped short of him, they missed the intent and design of the law. Moses leads up to Joshua, and the law ends at Jesus.

Turning our thoughts back again to the moral rather than the ceremonial law, it was intended to teach men their utter helplessness. It shows them how short they fall of what they ought to be, and it also shows them, when they look at it carefully, how utterly impossible it is for them to

come up to the standard. Such holiness as the law demands no man can reach of himself. "Thy commandment is exceeding broad." If a man says that he can keep the law, it is because he does not know what the law is. If he fancies that he can ever climb to heaven up the quivering sides of Sinai, surely he can never have seen that burning mount at all. Keep the law! Ah, my brethren, while we are yet talking about it we are breaking it; while we are pretending that we can fulfill its letter, we are violating its spirit, for pride as much breaks the law as lust or murder. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" No, soul, thou canst not help thyself in this thing, for since only by perfection thou canst live by the law, and since that perfection is impossible, thou canst not find help in the covenant of works. In grace there is hope, but as a matter of debt there is none, for we do not merit anything but wrath. The law tells us this, and the sooner we know it to be so the better, for the sooner we shall fly to Christ.

The law also shows us our great need — our need of cleansing, cleansing with the water and with the blood. It discovers to us our filthiness, and this naturally leads us to feel that we must be washed from it if we are ever to draw near to God. So the law drives us to accept of Christ as the one only person who can cleanse us, and make us fit to stand within the veil in the presence of the Most High. The law is the surgeon's knife which cuts out the proud flesh that the wound may heal. The law by itself only sweeps and raises the dust, but the gospel sprinkles clean water upon the dust, and all is well in the chamber of the soul. The law kills, the gospel makes alive; the law strips, and then Jesus Christ comes in and robes the soul in beauty and glory. All the commandments, and all the types direct us to Christ, if we will but heed their evident intent. They wean us from self, they put us off from the false basis of self-righteousness, and bring us to know that only in Christ can our help be found. So, first of all, Christ is the end of the law, in that he is its great purpose.

And now, secondly, he is the law's fulfillment. It is impossible for any of us to be saved without righteousness. The God of heaven and earth by immutable necessity demands righteousness of all his creatures. Now, Christ has come to give to us the righteousness which the law demands, but which it never bestows. In the chapter before us we read of "the



righteousness which is of faith," which is also called "God's righteousness"; and we read of those who "shall not be ashamed" because they are righteous by believing unto righteousness." What the law could not do Jesus has done. He provides the righteousness which the law asks for but cannot produce. What an amazing righteousness it must be which is as broad and deep and long and high as the law itself. The commandment is exceeding broad, but the righteousness of Christ is as broad as the commandment, and goes to the end of it. Christ did not come to make the law milder, or to render it possible for our cracked and battered obedience to be accepted as a sort of compromise. The law is not compelled to lower its terms, as though it had originally asked too much; it is holy and just and good, and ought not to be altered in one jot or tittle, nor can it be. Our Lord gives the law all it requires, not a part, for that would be an admission that it might justly have been content with less at first. The law claims complete obedience without one spot or speck, failure, or flaw, and Christ has brought in such a righteousness as that, and gives it to his people. The law demands that the righteousness should be without omission of duty and without commission of sin, and the righteousness which Christ has brought is just such an one that for its sake the great God accepts his people and counts them to be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The law will not be content without spiritual obedience, mere outward compliances will not satisfy. But our Lord's obedience was as deep as it was broad, for his zeal to do the will of him that sent him consumed him. He says himself, "I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea thy law is within my heart." Such righteousness he puts upon all believers. "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous"; righteous to the full, perfect in Christ. We rejoice to wear the costly robe of fair white linen which Jesus has prepared, and we feel that we may stand arrayed in it before the majesty of heaven without a trembling thought. This is something to dwell upon, dear friends. Only as righteous ones can we be saved, but Jesus Christ makes us righteous, and therefore we are saved. He is righteous who believeth on him, even as Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. "There is therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," because they are made righteous in Christ. Yea, the Holy Spirit by the mouth of Paul challengeth all men, angels, and devils, to lay anything to the charge of God's elect, since Christ hath died. O law, when thou demandest of me a perfect

righteousness, I, being a believer, present it to thee; for through Christ Jesus faith is accounted unto me for righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is mine, for I am one with him by faith, and this is the name wherewith he shall be called — “The Lord our righteousness.”

Jesus has thus fulfilled the original demands of the law, but you know, brethren, that since we have broken the law there are other demands. For the remission of past sins something more is asked now than present and future obedience. Upon us, on account of our sins, the curse has been pronounced, and a penalty has been incurred. It is written that he “will by no means clear the guilty,” but every transgression and iniquity shall have its just punishment and reward. Here, then, let us admire that the Lord Jesus Christ is the end of the law as to penalty. That curse and penalty are awful things to think upon, but Christ has ended all their evil, and thus discharged us from all the consequences of sin. As far as every believer is concerned the law demands no penalty and utters no curse. The believer can point to the Great Surety on the tree of Calvary, and say, “See there, oh law, there is the vindication of divine justice which I offer to thee. Jesus pouring out his heart’s blood from his wounds and dying on my behalf is my answer to thy claims, and I know that I shall be delivered from wrath through him.” The claims of the law both as broken and unbroken Christ has met: both the positive and the penal demands are satisfied in him. This was a labor worthy of a God, and lo, the incarnate God has achieved it. He has finished the transgression, made an end of sins, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness. All glory be to his name.

Moreover, not only has the penalty been paid, but Christ has put great and special honor upon the law in so doing. I venture to say that if the whole human race had kept the law of God and not one of them had violated it, the law would not stand in so splendid a position of honor as it does today when the man Christ Jesus, who is also the Son of God, has paid obeisance to it. God himself, incarnate, has in his life, and yet more in his death, revealed the supremacy of law; he has shown that not even love nor sovereignty can set aside justice. Who shall say a word against the law to which the Lawgiver himself submits? Who shall now say that it is too severe when he who made it submits himself to its penalties. Because he was found in fashion as a man, and was our representative, the Lord demanded from his own Son perfect obedience to the law, and the Son

voluntarily bowed himself to it without a single word, taking no exception to his task. “Yea, thy law is my delight,” saith he, and he proved it to be so by paying homage to it even to the full. Oh wondrous law under which even Emmanuel serves! Oh matchless law whose yoke even the Son of God does not disdain to bear, but being resolved to save his chosen was made under the law, lived under it and died under it, “obedient to death, even the death of the cross.”

The law’s stability also has been secured by Christ. That alone can remain which is proved to be just, and Jesus has proved the law to be so, magnifying it and making it honorable. He says, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” I shall have to show you how he has made an end of the law in another sense, but as to the settlement of the eternal principles of right and wrong, Christ’s life and death have achieved this forever. “Yea, we established the law.” said Paul, “we do not make void the law through faith.” The law is proved to be holy and just by the very gospel of faith, for the gospel which faith believes in does not alter or lower the law, but teaches us how it was to the uttermost fulfilled. Now shall the law stand fast forever and ever, since even to save elect man God will not alter it. He had a people, chosen, beloved, and ordained to life, yet he would not save them at the expense of one principle of right. They were sinful, and how could they be justified unless the law was suspended or changed? Was, then, the law changed? It seemed as if it must be so, if man was to be saved, but Jesus Christ came and showed us how the law could stand firm as a rock, and yet the redeemed could be justly saved by infinite mercy. In Christ we see both mercy and justice shining full orbéd, and yet neither of them in any degree eclipsing the other. The law has all it ever asked, as it ought to have, and yet the Father of all mercies sees all his chosen saved as he determined they should be through the death of his Son. Thus I have tried to show you how Christ is the fulfillment of the law to its utmost end. May the Holy Ghost bless the teaching.

And now, thirdly, he is the end of the law in the sense that he is the termination of it. He has terminated it in two senses. First of all, his people are not under it as a covenant of life. “We are not under the law,

but under grace.” The old covenant as it stood with father Adam was “This do and thou shalt live”: its command he did not keep, and consequently he did not live, nor do we live in him, since in Adam all died. The old covenant was broken, and we became condemned thereby, but now, having suffered death in Christ, we are no more under it, but are dead to it. Brethren, at this present moment, although we rejoice to do good works, we are not seeking life through them, we are not hoping to obtain divine favor by our own goodness, nor even to keep ourselves in the love of God by any merit of our own. Chosen, not for our works, but according to the eternal will and good pleasure of God; called, not of works, but by the Spirit of God, we desire to continue in this grace and return no more to the bondage of the old covenant. Since we have put our trust in an atonement provided and applied by grace through Christ Jesus, we are no longer slaves but children, not working to be saved, but saved already, and working because we are saved. Neither that which we do, nor even that which the Spirit of God worketh in us is to us the ground and basis of the love of God toward us, since he loved us from the first, because he would love us, unworthy though we were; and he loves us still in Christ, and looks upon us not as we are in ourselves, but as we are in him; washed in his blood and covered in his righteousness. Ye are not under the law, Christ has taken you from the servile bondage of a condemning covenant and made you to receive the adoption of children, so that now ye cry, Abba, Father.

Again, Christ is the terminator of the law, for we are no longer under its curse. The law cannot curse a believer, it does not know how to do it; it blesses him, yea, and he shall be blessed; for as the law demands righteousness and looks at the believer in Christ, and sees that Jesus has given him all the righteousness it demands, the law is bound to pronounce him blessed. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Oh, the joy of being redeemed from the curse of the law by Christ, who was “made a curse for us,” as it is written, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” Do ye, my brethren, understand the sweet mystery of salvation? Have you ever seen Jesus standing in your place that you may stand in his place? Christ accused and Christ condemned, and Christ led out to die, and Christ smitten of the

Father, even to the death, and then you cleared, justified, delivered from the curse, because the curse has spent itself on your Redeemer. You are admitted to enjoy the blessing because the righteousness which was his is now transferred to you that you may be blessed of the Lord world without end. Do let us triumph and rejoice in this evermore. Why should we not? And yet some of God's people get under the law as to their feelings, and begin to fear that because they are conscious of sin they are not saved, whereas it is written, "he justifieth the ungodly." For myself, I love to live near a sinner's Savior. If my standing before the Lord depended upon what I am in myself and what good works and righteousness I could bring, surely I should have to condemn myself a thousand times a day. But to get away from that and to say, "I have believed in Jesus Christ and therefore righteousness is mine," this is peace, rest, joy, and the beginning of heaven! When one attains to this experience, his love to Jesus Christ begins to flame up, and he feels that if the Redeemer has delivered him from the curse of the law he will not continue in sin, but he will endeavor to live in newness of life. We are not our own, we are bought with a price, and we would therefore glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits, which are the Lord's. Thus much upon Christ in connection with the law.

**II.** Now, secondly, OURSELVES IN CONNECTION WITH CHRIST — for "Christ is the end of the law to everyone that believeth." Now see the point "to everyone that believeth," there the stress lies. Come, man, woman, dost thou believe? No weightier question can be asked under heaven. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" And what is it to believe? It is not merely to accept a set of doctrines and to say that such and such a creed is yours, and there and then to put it on the shelf and forget it. To believe is, to trust, to confide, to depend upon, to rely upon, to rest in. Dost thou believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead? Dost thou believe that he stood in the sinner's stead and suffered the just for the unjust? Dost thou believe that he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him? And dost thou therefore lay the whole weight and stress of thy soul's salvation upon him, yea, upon him alone? Ah then, Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to thee, and thou art righteous. In the righteousness of God thou art clothed if thou believest. It is of no use to bring forward anything else if you are not believing, for

nothing will avail. If faith be absent the essential thing is wanting: sacraments, prayers, Bible reading, hearings of the gospel, you may heap them together, high as the stars, into a mountain, huge as high Olympus, but they are all mere chaff if faith be not there. It is thy believing or not believing which must settle the matter. Dost thou look away from thyself to Jesus for righteousness? If thou dost he is the end of the law to thee.

Now observe that there is no question raised about the previous character, for it is written, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." But, Lord, this man before he believed was a persecutor and injurious, he raged and raved against the saints and haled them to prison and sought their blood. Yes, beloved friend, and that is the very man who wrote these words by the Holy Ghost, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." So if I address one here this morning whose life has been defiled with every sin, and stained with every transgression we can conceive of, yet I say unto such, remember "all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." If thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ thine iniquities are blotted out, for the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleanseth us from all sin. This is the glory of the gospel that it is a sinner's gospel; good news of blessing not for those without sin, but for those who confess and forsake it. Jesus came into the world, not to reward the sinless, but to seek and to save that which was lost; and he, being lost and being far from God, who cometh nigh to God by Christ, and believeth in him, will find that he is able to bestow righteousness upon the guilty. He is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth, and therefore to the poor harlot that believeth, to the drunkard of many years standing that believeth, to the thief, the liar, and the scoffer who believeth, to those who have aforetime rioted in sin, but now turn from it to trust in him. But I do not know that I need mention such cases as these; to me the most wonderful fact is that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to me, for I believe in him. I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him until that day.

Another thought arises from the text, and that is, that there is nothing said by way of qualification as to the strength of the faith. He is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth, whether he is Little Faith or Greatheart. Jesus protects the rear rank as well as the vanguard. There

is no difference between one believer and another as to justification. So long as there is a connection between you and Christ the righteousness of God is yours. The link may be very like a film, a spider's line of trembling faith, but, if it runs all the way from the heart to Christ, divine grace can and will flow along the most slender thread. It is marvelous how fine the wire may be that will carry the electric flash. We may want a cable to carry a message across the sea, but that is for the protection of the wire, the wire which actually carries the message is a slender thing. If thy faith be of the mustard-seed kind, if it be only such as tremblingly touches the Savior's garment's hem, if thou canst only say "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," if it be but the faith of sinking Peter, or weeping Mary, yet if it be faith in Christ, he will be the end of the law for righteousness to thee as well as to the chief of the apostles.

If this be so then, beloved friends, all of us who believe are righteous. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ we have obtained the righteousness which those who follow the works of the law know nothing of. We are not completely sanctified, would God we were; we are not quit of sin in our members, though we hate it; but still for all that, in the sight of God, we are truly righteous and being qualified by faith we have peace with God. Come, look up, ye believers that are burdened with a sense of sin. While you chasten yourselves and mourn your sin, do not doubt your Savior, nor question his righteousness. You are black, but do not stop there, go on to say as the spouse did, "I am black, but comely."

*"Though in ourselves deform'd we are,  
And black as Kedar's tents appear,  
Yet, when we put Thy beauties on,  
Fair as the courts of Solomon."*

Now, mark that the connection of our text assures us that being righteous we are saved; for what does it say here, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." He who is justified is saved, or what were the benefit of justification? Over thee, O believer, God hath pronounced the verdict "saved," and none shall reverse it. You are saved from sin and death and hell; you are saved even now, with a present salvation; "He hath saved us and called us with a holy calling." Feel the transports of it at this hour. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God."

And now I have done when I have said just this. If any one here thinks he can save himself, and that his own righteousness will suffice before God, I would affectionately beg him not to insult his Savior. If your righteousness sufficeth, why did Christ come here to work one out? Will you for a moment compare your righteousness with the righteousness of Jesus Christ? What likeness is there between you and him? As much as between an emmet and an archangel. Nay, not so much as that: as much as between night and day, hell and heaven. Oh, if I had a righteousness of my own that no one could find fault with, I would voluntarily fling it away to have the righteousness of Christ, but as I have none of my own I do rejoice the more to have my Lord's. When Mr. Whitefield first preached at Kingswood, near Bristol, to the colliers, he could see when their hearts began to be touched by the gutters of white made by the tears as they ran down their black cheeks. He saw they were receiving the gospel, and he writes in his diary "as these poor colliers had no righteousness of their own they therefore gloried in Him who came to save publicans and sinners." Well, Mr. Whitefield, that is true of the colliers, but it is equally true of many of us here, who may not have had black faces, but we had black hearts. We can truly say that we also rejoice to cast away our own righteousness and count it dross and dung that we may win Christ, and be found in him. In him is our sole hope and only trust.

Last of all, for any of you to reject the righteousness of Christ must be to perish everlastingly, because it cannot be that God will accept you or your pretended righteousness when you have refused the real and divine righteousness which he sets before you in his Son. If you could go up to the gates of heaven, and the angel were to say to you, "What title have you to entrance here?" and you were to reply, "I have a righteousness of my own," then for you to be admitted would be to decide that your righteousness was on a par with that of Immanuel himself. Can that ever be? Do you think that God will ever allow such a lie to be sanctioned? Will he let a poor wretched sinner's counterfeit righteousness pass current side by side with the fine gold of Christ's perfection? Why was the fountain filled with blood if you need no washing? Is Christ a superfluity? Oh, it cannot be. You must have Christ's righteousness or be unrighteous, and being unrighteous you will be unsaved, and being unsaved you must remain lost forever and ever.



What! has it all come to this, then, that I am to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness, and to be made just through faith? Yes, that is it: that is the whole of it. What! trust Christ alone and then live as I like! You cannot live in sin after you have trusted Jesus, for the act of faith brings with it a change of nature and a renewal of your soul. The Spirit of God who leads you to believe will also change your heart. You spoke of “living as you like,” you will like to live very differently from what you do now. The things you loved before your conversion you will hate when you believe, and the things you hated you will love. Now, you are trying to be good, and you make great failures, because your heart is alienated from God; but when once you have received salvation through the blood of Christ, your heart will love God, and then you will keep his commandments, and they will be no longer grievous to you. A change of heart is what you want, and you will never get it except through the covenant of grace. There is not a word about conversion in the old covenant, we must look to the new covenant for that, and here it is — “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and an new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” This is one of the greatest covenant promises, and the Holy Ghost preforms it in the chosen. Oh that the Lord would sweetly persuade you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that promise and all the other covenant engagements shall be fulfilled to your soul. The Lord bless you! Spirit of God, send thy blessing on these poor words of mine for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Romans 10.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 231, 535, 647.

# PRAYER PERFUMED WITH PRAISE

SERMON NO. 1469

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
APRIL 20TH, 1879,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

*“In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let  
your requests be made known unto God.” — ~~ROM~~ Philippians 4:6.*

ACCORDING TO THE TEXT, we are both by prayer and supplication to make known our requests unto God. If any distinction be intended here, I suppose that by prayer is meant the general act of devotion and the mention of our usual needs; and by supplication I think would be intended our distinct entreaties and special petitions. We are to offer the general prayer common to all the saints, and we are to add thereto the special and definite petitions which are peculiar to ourselves. We are to worship in prayer, for God is to be adored by all his saints, and then we are to beseech his favors for ourselves, according to the words of the text, letting our requests be made known unto God. Do not forget this second form of worship. There is a good deal of generalizing in prayer, and God forbid that we should say a word against it, so far as it is sincere worship, but we want to have more of specific, definite pleading with God, asking him for such-and-such things, with a clear knowledge of what we ask. You will hear prayers at prayer-meetings, in which everything is asked in general but nothing in particular, and yet the reality and heartiness of prayer will often be best manifested by the putting up of requests for distinct blessings. See how Abraham, when he went to worship the Lord, did not merely adore him, and in general pray for his glory, but on a special occasion he pleaded concerning the promised heir, at another time he cried, “O that Ishmael might live before thee,” and on one special occasion he

interceded for Sodom. Elijah, when on the top of Carmel, did not pray for all the blessings of providence in general, but for rain, for rain there and then. He knew what he was driving at, kept to his point, and prevailed. So, my beloved friends, we have many wants which are so pressing as to be very distinct and definite, and we ought to have just so many clearly defined petitions which we offer unto God by way of supplication, and for the divine answers to these we are bound to watch with eager expectancy, so that when we receive them we may magnify the Lord.

The point to which I would draw your attention is this: that whether it be the general prayer or the specific supplication we are to offer either or both “with thanksgiving.” We are to pray about everything, and with every prayer we must blend our thanksgivings. Hence it follows that we ought always to be in a thankful condition of heart: since we are to pray without ceasing, and are not to pray without thanksgiving, it is clear that we ought to be always ready to give thanks unto the Lord. We must say with the Psalmist, “Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name.” The constant tenor and spirit of our lives should be adoring gratitude, love, reverence, and thanksgiving to the Most High.

This blending of thanks with devotion is always to be maintained. Always must we offer prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. No matter though the prayer should struggle upward out of the depths, yet must its wings be silvered o’er with thanksgiving. Though the prayer were offered upon the verge of death, yet in the last few words which the trembling lips can utter there should be notes of gratitude as well as words of petition. The law saith: “With all thy sacrifices thou shalt offer salt;” and the gospel says with all thy prayers thou shalt offer praise. “One thing at a time” is said to be a wise proverb, but for once I must venture to contradict it, and say two things at a time are better, when the two are prayer and thanksgiving. These two holy streams flow from one common source, the Spirit of life which dwells within us; and they are utterances of the same holy fellowship with God; and therefore it is right that they should mingle as they flow, and find expression in the same holy exercise. Supplication and thanksgiving so naturally run into each other that it would be difficult to keep them separate: like kindred colors, they shade off into each other. Our very language seems to indicate this, for there is small difference between the words “to pray,” and “to praise.” A psalm may be either a

prayer or praise, or both; and there is yet another form of utterance which is certainly prayer, but is used as praise, and is really both. I refer to that joyous Hebrew word which has been imported into all Christian languages, "Hosanna." Is it a prayer? Yes. "Save, Lord." Is it not praise? Yes; for it is tantamount to "God save the king," and is used to extol the Son of David. While we are here on earth we should never attempt to make such a distinction between prayer and praise that we should either praise without prayer or pray without praise; but with every prayer and supplication we should mingle thanksgiving, and thus make known our requests unto God.

This commingling of precious things is admirable. It reminds me of that verse in the Canticles where the king is described as coming up from the wilderness in his chariot, "like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant." There is the myrrh of prayer, and the frankincense of praise. So, too, the holy incense of the sanctuary yielded the smoke of prayer which filled the holy place, but with it there was the sweet perfume of choice spices, which may be compared to praise. Prayer and praise are like the two cherubim on the ark, they must never be separated. In the model of prayer which our Savior has given us, saying, "After this manner pray ye," the opening part of it is rather praise than prayer — "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," and the closing part of it is praise, where we say, "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen." David, who is the great tutor and exemplar of the church as to her worship, being at once her poet and her preacher, takes care in almost every psalm, though the petition may be agonizing, to mingle exquisite praise. Take for instance, that psalm of his after his great sin with Bathsheba. There one would think, with sighs and groans and tears so multiplied, he might have almost forgotten or have feared to offer thanksgiving while he was trembling under a sense of wrath; and yet ere the psalm that begins "Have mercy upon me, O God," can come to a conclusion the psalmist has said: "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise," and he cannot pen the last word without beseeching the Lord to build the walls of Jerusalem, adding the promise, "then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shalt they offer bullocks upon thine altar." I need not stop to quote other instances, but it is almost

always the case that David by the fire of prayer warms himself into praise. He begins low, with many a broken note of complaining, but he mounts and glows, and, like the lark, sings as he ascends. When at first his harp is muffled he warbles a few mournful notes and becomes excited, till he cannot restrain his hand from that well-known and accustomed string which he had reserved for the music of praise alone. There is a passage in the eighteenth Psalm, at the third verse, in which indeed he seems to have caught the very idea which I want to fix upon your minds this morning. "I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies." He was in such a condition that he says, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me." Driven by distress, he declares that he will call upon the Lord, that is, with utterances of prayer; but he does not alone regard his God as the object of prayer, but as One who is to be praised. "I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised;" and then, as if inspired to inform us of the fact that the blending of thanksgiving with prayer renders it infallibly effectual, as I shall have to show you it does, he adds, "So shall I be saved from mine enemies."

Now, if this habit of combining thanksgiving with prayer is found in the Old Testament saints, we have a right to expect it yet more in New Testament believers, who in clearer light perceive fresh reasons for thanksgiving; but I shall give you no instance except that of the writer of my text. Does he not tell us in the present chapter that those things which we have seen in him we are to do, for his life was agreeable with his teachings? Now, observe, how frequently he commences his epistles with a blending of supplication and thanksgiving. Turn to ~~ROM~~ Romans 1:8-9, and note this fusion of these precious metals —

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers."

There is "I thank my God," and "I make mention of you always in my prayers." This was not written with a special eye to the percept of our

text; it was natural to Paul so to thank God when he prayed. Look at  
~~500B~~Colossians 1:3 —

“We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 praying always for you.”

To the same effect we read in ~~500B~~First Thessalonians 1:2 —

“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you  
 in our prayers.”

Look also at ~~500B~~Second Timothy 1:3 —

“I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure  
 conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my  
 prayers night and day.”

And if it be so in other epistles, we are not at all surprised to find it so in  
~~500B~~Philippians 1:3-4 —

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in  
 every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.”

Nor need I confine you to the language of Paul’s epistle, since it is most  
 noteworthy that in Philippi itself (and those to whom he wrote must have  
 remembered the incident) Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God  
 at midnight, so that the prisoners heard them. It is clear that Paul  
 habitually practiced what he here enjoins. His own prayers had not been  
 offered without thanksgiving; what God hath joined together he had never  
 put asunder.

With this as a preface, I invite you to consider, carefully and prayerfully,  
 first, the grounds of thanksgiving in prayer; secondly, the evil of its  
 absence; and thirdly, the result of its presence.

**I.** First, then, there are REASONS FOR MINGLING THANKSGIVING WITH  
 PRAYER. In the nature of things it ought to be so. We have abundant cause,  
 my brethen, for thanksgiving at all times. We do not come to God in  
 Prayer as if he had left us absolutely penniless, and we cried to him like  
 starving prisoners begging through prison bars. We do not ask as if we had  
 never received a single farthing of God before, and hardly thought we

should obtain anything now; but on the contrary, having been already the recipients of immense favors, we come to a God who abounds in lovingkindness, who is willing to bestow good gifts upon us, and waits to be gracious to us. We do not come to the Lord as slaves to an unfeeling tyrant craving for a boon, but as children who draw nigh to a loving father, expecting to receive abundantly from his liberal hands. Thanksgiving is the right spirit in which to come before the God who daily loadeth us with benefits. Bethink you for awhile what cause you have for thanksgiving in prayer.

And first you have this, that such a thing as prayer is possible, that a finite creature can speak with the infinite Creator, that a sinful being can have audience with the thrice-holy Jehovah. It is worthy of thanksgiving that God should have commanded prayer and encouraged us to draw near unto him; and that moreover he should have supplied all things necessary to the sacred exercise. He has set up a mercy seat, blood besprinkled; and he has prepared a High Priest, ever living to make intercession; and to these he has added the Holy Ghost to help our infirmities and to teach us what we should pray for as we ought. Everything is ready, and God waits for us to enquire at his hands. He has not only set before us an open door and invited us to enter, but he has given us the right spirit with which to approach. The grace of supplication is poured out upon us and wrought in us by the Holy Ghost. What a blessing it is that we do not attempt prayer with a peradventure, as if we were making a doubtful experiment, nor do we come before God as a forlorn hope, desperately afraid that he will not listen to our cry; but he has ordained prayer to be the ordinary commerce of heaven and earth, and sanctioned it in the most solemn manner. Prayer may climb to heaven, for God has himself prepared the ladder and set it down just by the head of his lonely Jacob, so that though that head be pillowed on a stone it may rest in peace. Lo, at the top of that ladder is the Lord himself in his covenant capacity, receiving our petitions and sending his attendant angels with answers to our requests. Shall we not bless God for this?

Let us praise his name, dear friends, also especially that you and I are still spared to pray and permitted to pray. What if we are greatly afflicted, yet it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed. If we had received our deserts we should not now have been on praying ground and pleading

terms with him. But let it be for our comfort and to God's praise that still we may stand with bowed head and cry each one — "God be merciful to me a sinner." Still may we cry like sinking Peter, "Lord save, or I perish." Like David, we may be unable to go up to the temple, but we can still go to our God in prayer. The prodigal has lost his substance, but he has not lost his power to supplicate. He has been feeding swine, but as yet he is still a man, and has not lost the faculty of desire and entreaty. He may have forgotten his father, but his father has not forgotten him; he may arise and he may go to him, and he may pour out his soul in his father's bosom. Therefore, let us give thanks unto God that he has nowhere said unto us — "Seek ye my face in vain." If we find a desire to pray trembling within our soul, and if though almost extinct we feel some hope in the promise of our gracious God, if our heart still groans after holiness and after God, though she hath lost her power to pray with joyful confidence as once she did, yet let us be thankful that we can pray even if it be but a little. In the will and power to pray there lies the capacity for infinite blessedness: he who hath the key of prayer can open heaven, yea, he hath access to the heart of God; therefore, bless God for prayer.

And then, beloved, beyond the fact of prayer and our power to exercise it, there is a further ground of thanksgiving that we have already received great mercy at God's hands. We are not coming to God to ask favors and receive them for the first time in our lives. Why, blessed be his name, if he never granted me another favor, I have enough for which to thank him as long as I have any being. And this, moreover, is to be recollected, that whatever great things we are about to ask, we cannot possibly be seeking for blessings one-half so great as those which we have already received if we are indeed his children. If thou art a Christian, thou hast life in Christ. Art thou about to ask for meat and raiment? The life is more than these. Thou hast already obtained Christ Jesus to be thine, and he that spared him not will deny thee nothing. Is there, I was about to say, anything to compare with the infinite riches which are already ours in Christ Jesus? Let us perpetually thank our Benefactor for what we have while we make request for something more. Should it not be so? Shall not the abundant utterances of the memory of his great goodness run over into our requests, till our petitions are baptized in gratitude. While we come before God, in one aspect, empty handed to receive of his goodness, on the other hand we



should never appear before him empty, but come with the fat of our sacrifices, offering praise and glorifying God.

Furthermore, there is this to be remembered, that when we come before God in the hour of trouble, remembering his great goodness to us in the past, and therefore thanking him, we ought to have faith enough to believe that the present trouble, about which we are praying, is sent in love. You will win with God in prayer if you can look at your trials in this light: — “Lord, I have this thorn in the flesh. I beseech thee, deliver me from it, but meanwhile I bless thee for it; for though I do not understand the why or the wherefore of it, I am persuaded there is love within it; therefore, while I ask thee to remove it, so far as it seemeth evil to me, yet wherein it may to thy better knowledge work my good, I bless thee for it, and I am content to endure it so long as thou seest fit.” Is not that a sweet way of praying? “Lord, I am in want, be pleased to supply me; but, meanwhile, if thou do not, I believe it is better for me to be in need, and so I praise thee for my necessity while I ask thee to supply it. I glory in mine infirmity, even while I ask thee to overcome it. I triumph before thee in my affliction, and bless thee for it even while I ask thee to help me in it and to rescue me out of it.” This is a royal way of praying: such an amalgam of prayer and thanksgiving is more precious than the gold of Ophir.

Furthermore, beloved, whenever we are on our knees in prayer, it becomes us to bless God that prayer has been answered so many times before. Here thy poor petitioner bends before thee to ask again, but ere he asks he thanks thee for having heard him so many times before. I know that thou hearest me always, therefore do I continue still to cry to thee. My thanksgivings urge me to make fresh petitions, encouraging me in the full confidence that thou wilt not send me away empty. Why, many of the mercies which you possess today, and rejoice in, are answers to prayer. They are dear to you because, like Samuel, whom his mother so named because he was “asked of God,” they came to you as answers to your supplications. When mercies come in answer to prayer they have a double delight about them, not only because they are good in themselves, but because they are certificates of our favor with the Lord. Well, then, as God has heard us so often and we have the proofs of his hearing, should we ever pray with murmurings and complainings? Should we not rather feel an

intense delight when we approach the throne of grace, a rapture awakened by sunny memories of the past?

Again, we ought to pray with thanksgiving in its highest of all senses, by thanking God that we have the mercy which we seek. I wish we could learn this high virtue of faith. When I was conversing lately with our dear friend George Moller, he frequently astonished me with the way in which he mentioned that he had for so many months and years asked for such and such a mercy, and praised the Lord for it. He praised the Lord for it as though he had actually obtained it. Even in praying for the conversion of a person, as soon as he had begun to intercede he began also to praise God for the conversion of that person. Though I think he told us he had in one instance already prayed for thirty years and the work was not yet done, yet all the while he had gone on thanking God, because he knew the prayer would be answered. He believed that he had his petition, and commenced to magnify the Giver of it. Is this unreasonable? How often do we antedate our gratitude among the sons of men! If you were to promise some poor person that you would pay his rent when it came due, he would thank you directly, though not a farthing had left your pocket. We have enough faith in our fellow-men to thank them beforehand, and surely we may do the same with our Lord. Shall we not be willing to trust God for a few months ahead, ay, and for years beforehand, if his wisdom bids us wait. This is the way to win with him. When ye pray, believe that ye receive the boons ye ask, and ye shall have them. "Believe that ye have it," says the Scripture, "and ye shall have it." As a man's note of hand stands for the money, so let God's promise be accounted as the performance. Shall not heaven's bank-notes pass as cash? Yea, verily, they shall have unquestioned currency among believers. We will bless the Lord for giving us what we have sought, since our having it is a matter of absolute certainty. We shall never thank God by faith and then find that we were befooled. He has said, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." And therefore we may rest assured that the thanksgiving of faith shall never bring shame into the face of the man who offers it.

Once again, and then I will say no more upon these grounds of thanksgiving; surely, brethren, if the Lord do not answer the prayer which we are offering, yet still he is so good, so supremely good, that we will bless him whether or no. We ought even to praise him when he does not

answer us, ay, and bless him for refusing our desires. How devoutly might some of us thank him that he did not answer our prayers when we sought for evil things in the ignorance of our childish minds. We asked for flesh, and He might have sent us quails in His anger, and while the flesh was yet in our mouths his wrath might have come upon us; but in love he would not hear us. Blessed be his name for closing his ear in pity! Let us adore him when he keeps us waiting at his doors; thank him for rebuffs, and bless him for refusals, believing always that Ralph Erskine spoke the truth when he said:

*“I’m heard when answered soon or late,  
Yea, heard when I no answer get:  
Yea, kindly answered when refused,  
And treated well when harshly used.”*

Faith glorifies the love of God, for she knows that the Lord’s roughest usage is only love in disguise. We are not so sordid as to make our songs depend upon the weather, or on the fullness of the olive-press and the wine-fat. Blessed be his name, he must be right even when he seems at cross purposes with his people; we are not going to quarrel with him, like silly babes with their nurses, because he does not happen to grant us every desire of our foolish hearts. Though he slay us we will trust in him, much more if he decline our requests. We ask him for our daily bread, and if he withhold it we will praise him. Our praises are not suspended upon his answers to our prayers. If the labor of the olive should fail, and the field should yield no fruit; if the flock should be cut off from the fold, and the herd from the stall, yet still would we rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation. Blessed Spirit, raise us to this state of grace and keep us there.

Of that which we have spoken this is the sum: under every condition, and in every necessity, draw nigh to God in prayer, but always bring thanksgiving with you. As Joseph said to his brethren, “Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you;” so may the Lord say to you, “You shall not receive my smile unless you bring thankfulness with you.” Let your prayers be like those ancient missals which one sometimes sees, in which the initial letters of the prayers are gilded and adorned with a profusion of colors, the work of cunning writers. Let even the general confession of sin and the litany of mournful petitions have at least one

illuminated letter. Illuminate your prayers; light them up with rays of thanksgiving all the way through; and when you come together to pray forget not to make melody unto the Lord with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.

**II.** Secondly, I shall drive at the same point, while I try to show THE EVIL OF THE ABSENCE OF THANKSGIVING in our prayers.

First and foremost, we should be chargeable with ingratitude. Are we to be always receiving and never to return thanks? Aristotle rightly observes: "A return is required to preserve friendship between two persons," and as we have nothing else to give to God except gratitude, let us abound therein. If we have no fruit of the field, let us at least render to him the fruit of our lips. Have you no thanks to bring? How, then, can you expect further favors? Does not liberality itself close its hand when ingratitude stands in the way? What, never a word of gratitude to him from whom all blessings flow! Then may even the ungodly despise you.

Next, it would argue great selfishness if we did not combine praise with prayer. Can it be right to think only of ourselves, to pray for benefits and never honor our Benefactor? Are we going to import the detestable vice of avarice into spiritual things, and only care for our own souls' good? What, no thought for God's glory! No idea of magnifying his great and blessed name! God forbid that we should fall into a spirit so mean and narrow. Healthy praise and thanksgiving must be cultivated, because they prevent prayer from becoming overgrown with the mildew of selfishness.

Thanksgiving also prevents prayer from becoming an exhibition of the want of faith; for indeed some prayer is rather a manifestation of the absence of faith than the exercise of confidence in God. If when I am in trouble I still bless the Lord for all I suffer, therein my faith is seen. If before I obtain the mercy, I thank God for the grace which I have not yet tasted, therein my faith is manifest. What, is our faith such that it only sings in the sunshine? Have we no nightingale music for our God? Is our trust like the swallow, which must leave us in winter? Is our faith a flower which needs the conservatory to keep it alive? Can it not blossom like the gentian at the foot of the frozen glacier, where the damp and chill of adversity surround it? I trust it can, it ought to do so, and we ought to feel

that we can praise and bless God when outward circumstances appear rather to demand sighs than songs.

Not to thank God in our prayers would argue willfulness, and want of submission to his will. Must everything be ordered according to our mind? To refuse to praise unless we have our own way is great presumption, and shows that like a naughty child we will sulk if we cannot be master. I might illustrate the willfulness of many a supplication by that of a little boy who was very diligent in saying his prayers, but was at the same time disobedient, ill-tempered, and the pest of the house. His mother told him that she thought it was mere hypocrisy for him to pretend to pray. He replied, "No, mother, indeed it is not, for I pray God to lead you and father to like my ways better than you do." Numbers of people want the Lord to like their ways better, but they do not intend to follow the ways of the Lord. Their minds are contrary to God and will not submit to his will, and therefore there is no thanksgiving in them. Praise in a prayer is indicative of an humble, submissive, obedient spirit, and when it is absent we may suspect willfulness and self-seeking. Very much of the prayer of rebellious hearts is the mere growling of an angry obstinacy, the whine of an ungratified self-conceit. God must do this and he must do that, or else we will not love him. What baby talk! What spoiled children such are! A little whipping will do them good. "I have never believed in the goodness of God," said one, "ever since he took my dear mother away." I knew a good man whose child was on the verge of the grave; when I went to see her he charged me not to mention death to her, for he said, "I do not believe God could do such an unkind action as take my only child away." When I assured him that she would surely die in a few days, and that he must not quarrel with the will of the Lord, he stood firm in his rebellion. He prayed, but he could not bless God, and it was no marvel that his heart sank within him, and he refused to be comforted, when at last his child died, as we all felt sure she would. He became afterwards resigned, but his want of acquiescence cost him many a smart. This will not do; this quarreling with God is poor work! Resignation comes to the heart like an angel unawares, and when we entertain it our soul is comforted. We may ask for the child's life, but we must also thank the Lord that the dear life has been prolonged so long as it has been, and we must put the child and everything else into our Father's hands and say, "If thou shouldest take all

away, yet still will I bless thy name, O thou Most High.” This is acceptable prayer, because it is not soured by the leaven of self-will, but salted with thankfulness.

We must mingle our thanksgivings with our prayers, or else we may fear that our mind is not in harmony with the divine will. Recollect, dear friends, that prayer does not alter the mind of God: it never was the intent of prayer that it should attempt anything of the kind. Prayer is the shadow of the decrees of the Eternal. God has willed such a thing, and he makes his saints to will it, and express their will in prayer. Prayer is the rustling of the wings of the angels who are bringing the blessing to us. It is written, “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” It is not said that he will give the desire of his heart to every Jack and Tom; but you must first delight in the Lord, and when your mind finds all her joy in God then it is clear that God and you, as far as it can be, are standing on the same plane and moving in the same direction, and now you shall have the desire of your heart because the desire of your heart is the desire of God’s heart. Character, as much as faith, lies at the basis of prevalence in prayer. I do not mean in the case of the prayer of the sinner when he is seeking mercy, but I mean in the habitual prayers of the godly. There are some men who cannot pray so as to prevail, for sin has made them weak, and God walks contrary to them because they walk contrary to him. He who has lost the light of God’s countenance has also lost much of the prevalence of his prayers. You do not suppose that every Israelite could have gone to the top of Carmel and opened the windows of heaven as Elijah did. No, he must first be Elijah, for it is the effectual, fervent prayer, not of every man, but of a righteous man, that availeth much; and when the Lord has put your heart and my heart into an agreement with him then we shall pray and prevail. What did our Lord say — “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” Doubtless many lose power in prayer because their lives are greivous in the sight of the Lord, and he cannot smile upon them. Will any father listen to the requests of a child who has set himself up in opposition to parental authority? The obedient, tender, loving child, who would not wish for anything which you did not think right to give, is he whose requests you are pleased to consider and fulfill; yea, more, you even anticipate the wishes of such a

child, and before he calls you answer him. May we be such children of the great God.

**III.** And now, in the third place, let us consider THE RESULT OF THE PRESENCE OF THIS THANKSGIVING IN CONNECTION WITH PRAYER. According to the context, the presence of thanksgiving in the heart together with prayer is productive of peace. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Now that peace, that conscious calm, that divine serenity, which is described as the peace of God, is not produced by prayer alone, but by prayer with thanksgiving. Some men pray, and therein they do well; but for lack of mixing thanksgiving with it their prayer agitates them, and they come away from the closet even more anxious than when they entered it. If they mingled in their petitions that sweet powder of the merchants, which is called praise, and mixed it after the art of the apothecary, in due proportions, the blessing of God would come with it, causing repose of heart. If we bless our gracious Lord for the very trouble we pray against; if we bless him for the very mercy which we need, as though it had already come; if we resolve to praise him whether we receive the boon or not, learning in whatsoever state we are therewith to be content, then "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus." Brethren, as you value this divine rest of spirit, as you prize constant serenity of soul, I beseech you, mingle praises with your prayers.

The next effect of it will be this: the thanksgiving will often warm the soul, and enable it to pray. I believe it is the experience of many who love secret devotion that at times they cannot pray, for their heart seems hard, cold, dumb, and almost dead. Do not pump up unwilling and formal prayer, my brethren; but take down the hymn-book and sing. While you praise the Lord for what you have, you will find your rocky heart begin to dissolve and flow in rivers. You will be encouraged to plead with the Lord because you will remember what you have aforetime received at his hand. If you had an empty wagon to raise to the mouth of a coal-pit, it might be a very difficult task for you; but the work is managed easily by the common-sense of the miners. They make the full wagons, as they run down, pull the empty wagons up the incline. Now, when your heart is loaded with

praise for mercy received, let it run down the incline, and draw up the empty wagon of your desires, and you will thus find it easy to pray. Cold and chill prayers are always to be deplored, and if by so simple a method as entreating the Lord to accept our thanksgiving our hearts can be warmed and renewed, let us by all means take care to use it.

Lastly, I believe that when a man begins to pray with thanksgiving he is upon the eve of receiving the blessing. God's time to bless you has come when you begin to praise him as well as pray to him. God has his set time to favor us, and he will not grant us our desire until the due season has arrived. But the time has come when you begin to bless the Lord. Now, take an instance of this in ~~4000~~ Second Chronicles 20:20 — Jehoshaphat went out to fight with an exceeding great army, and mark how he achieved the victory.

“They rose early in the morning and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people he appointed”

— what? warriors, captains? No, that was all done, but he “appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.” Victory came when they began to sing and praise. You shall get your answers to prayer when you multiply your thanksgivings in all your prayers and supplications: rest you sure of that.

Our thanksgiving will show that the reason for our waiting is now exhausted; that the waiting has answered its purpose, and may now come to a joyful end. Sometimes we are not in a fit state to receive a blessing, but when we reach the condition of thankfulness, then is the time when it is safe for God to indulge us. A professing Christian came to his minister once and said, “Sir, you say we should always pray.” “Yes, my friend, undoubtedly.” “But then, Sir, I have been praying for twelve months that I



might enjoy the comforts of religion, and I am no happier than before. I have made that my one perpetual prayer, that I might enjoy the comforts of religion, and I do not feel joy nor even peace of mind; in fact, I have more doubts and fears than ever I had.” “Yes,” said his minister, “and that is the natural result of such a selfish prayer. Why, dear friend,” he said, “come and kneel down with me, and let us pray in another manner, ‘Father, glorify thy name! Thy kingdom come.’ Now,” said he, “go and offer those petitions and get to work to try to make it true, and see if you do not soon enjoy the comforts of religion.” There is a great deal in that fact: if you will but desire God to be glorified, and aim at glorifying him yourself, then shall the joys of true godliness come to you in answer to prayer.

The time for the blessing is when you begin to praise God for it. For, brethren, you may be sure that when you put up a thanksgiving on the ground that God has answered your prayer, you really have prevailed with God. Suppose you had promised to some poor woman that you would give her a meal tomorrow. You might forget it, you know; but suppose when the morning came she sent her little girl with a basket for it, she would be likely to get it I think. But, suppose that she sent in addition a little note in which the poor soul thanked you for your great kindness, could you have the heart to say, “My dear girl, I cannot attend to you today. Come another time”? Oh dear no, if the cupboard was bare you would send out to get something, because the good soul so believed in you that she had sent you thanks for it before she received your gift. Well, now, trust the Lord in the same manner. He cannot run back from his Word, my brethren. Believing prayer holds him, but believing thanksgiving binds him. If it is not in your own heart, though you be evil, to refuse to give what you have promised when that promise is so believed that the person rejoices as though he had it; then depend upon it the good God will not find it in his heart to refuse. The time for reception is fully come because thanksgiving for that reception fills your heart. I leave the matter with you. If you are enabled to pray in that fashion, great good will come to yourselves, and to the church of God, and to the world at large by such prayers.

Now, I think I hear in this audience somebody saying, “But I cannot pray so. I do not know how to pray. Oh, that I knew how to pray! I am a poor,

guilty sinner. I cannot mix any thanksgiving with my supplications.” Ah, my dear soul, do not think about that just now. I am not so much preaching to you as I am preaching to the people of God. For you it is quite enough to say — “God be merciful to me a sinner.” And yet I will venture to say that there is praise in such a petition. You are implicitly praising the justice of God, and you are praising his mercy by appealing to him. When the prodigal returned, and he began his prayer by saying, “I am not worthy to be called thy son,” there was in that confession a real praise of the father’s goodness, of which he was unworthy to partake. But you need not to think about this matter at present, for first you have to find Jesus, and eternal life in him. Go and plead the merit of Jesus, and cast yourself upon the love and mercy of God in him and he will not cast you away: and then another day, when you thus have found and known him, take care that the thanksgiving for your salvation never ceases. Even when you are most hungry, and poor, and needy in the future continue to bless your saving Lord, and say, “This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him: and because the LORD inclined his ear unto me I will praise his name as long as I live.”

God bless you, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~STORY~~ Philippians 4.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK.” — 18 (Vers. 1.), 1001, 982.

# CONSTANT, INSTANT, EXPECTANT

## SERMON NO. 1480

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 22ND, 1879,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

*“Continuing instant in prayer.” —  Romans 12:12.*

THIS is placed in connection with a large number of brief but very weighty precepts. Prayer has a distinct relationship to all Christian duties and graces. It is not possible for us to carry out the holy commands of our Lord Jesus unless we are abundant in supplication. The Romans at the time that Paul wrote to them were subject to persecution, and in this verse he mentions two remedies for impatience under such afflictions, remedies which are equally effectual under all the trials of life. The old physicians tell us of two antidotes against poison, the hot and the cold, and they dilate upon the special excellence of each of these: in like manner the apostle Paul gives us first the warm antidote — “Rejoicing in hope,” and then he gives us the cool antidote, “Patient in tribulation.” Either of these, or both together, will work wonderfully for the sustaining of the spirit in the hour of affliction; but it is to be observed, that neither of these remedies can be taken into the soul except they be mixed with a draught of prayer. Joy and patience are curative essences, but they must be dropped into a glass full of supplication, and then they will be wonderfully efficient. How can we “rejoice in hope” if we know nothing about prayer to the God of hope. Whenever your hope seems to fail you and your joy begins to sink, — the shortest method is to take to your knees. By remembering the promise in prayer hope will be sustained, and then joy is sure to spring from it, for joy is the first-born child of hope. As for “patience,” how can we be patient if we cannot pray? Have not holy men of old always sustained themselves in their worst times of grief and depression by betaking themselves to prayer? Mind that you do the same. Impatience will be sure to follow prayerlessness, but the endurance of the

divine will grows out of communion with God in prayer. I like that beautiful, though sad, picture of the Norwich martyr, Hudson, of whom Foxe tells us that, when he stood at the stake with the chain about him to be burnt, he fell under a cloud. The Lord had withdrawn the light of his countenance from him, and therefore this man of God slipped from under the chain to have a few minutes alone with God. Some thought that he was about to recant, and his fellow martyrs began exhorting him to be steadfast and to play the man, but this dear believer knew what he was at, and when he had spoken with his God he came back to the stake with a bright and beaming countenance, saying, “Now, I thank God, I am strong, and fear not what man can do unto me,” and stood in his place with his fellow sufferers and there burned quick to the death without fear. Oh the power of prayer! If we do but know how to get in contact with the Eternal and Omnipotent, we shall be joyful and patient in all tribulations, and bravely endure even the keen edge of death.

Prayer is to be exercised in all things, for from its position in the present context we are taught that it is not without prayer that we proceed to “distribute to the necessities of the saints.” Because we have prayed for them we are ready to befriend them by deeds of love. If we have not been accustomed to pray for the brethren, we shall not be “given to hospitality”; much less shall we “bless them which persecute us.” prayer is the life-blood of duty, the secret sap of holiness, the fountain of obedience. Upon prayer as spoken of in the text may the Holy Spirit help us now to meditate.

Three things I shall speak upon which will be remembered the better by being linked with three words — Instant, constant, expectant.

**I.** First, then, Instant — “Continuing instant in prayer.” It may be proper at this stage to say that these words, though I shall dwell upon them in the English, are not identical with the Greek, in which there is but one word. I do not know that a better translation could possibly be given, and so I shall content myself with the very words of our own version. The word “instant,” as used by our translators, meant pressing, urgent, importunate, earnest. The Greek word is said to have the signification of “always applying strength in prayer,” or continuing with all your might in prayer. Our prayer is to be full of strength; “blessed is the man whose strength is

in thee.” Master Brooks saith that the word is a metaphor taken from hunting dogs, which will never give up the game till they have got it. A hunting dog when in pursuit of its victim works itself into full motion, using every limb and muscle to follow as fast as possible. If you catch a glimpse of it you will see that it throws itself forward with intense eagerness, the whole body and soul of the dog is in motion towards one object; no portion of him lingers, not so much as a glance is given to anything else, the whole creature is instant after the game which it pursues, urgently pressing, hot foot, as we say, to overtake the prey. Now, this is the way in which we are to pray. Prayer as a mere form is but a mockery; prayer in a languid, half-hearted manner may be more dishonoring to God than honoring to him; we ourselves may be rather injured by lukewarm prayer than benefited by it. Prevalent prayer is frequently spoken of in Scripture as an agony — “striving together with me in your prayers.” We frequently speak of it as “wrestling,” and we do well, for so it is. In wrestling a man hath all his mind as well as all his body occupied with the desire to overthrow his antagonist. Now he bends and twists, and anon he strains and stretches: now he uses one foot and then another; he tries his arm and stretches: now he uses one foot and then another; he tries his arm and now his leg; he shifts his ground, he shifts his ground, he takes up another position, and he keeps his eye perpetually open lest he should be caught unawares. He hath both his hands eager for a grip, his whole body ready for a throw: the whole man is in his wrestling. After such a manner pray ye; the whole of your mind, your memory, your judgement, your affection, your hopes, your fears, and even your imagination must be concentrated upon this labor of prayer. May the Holy Ghost work in you this comprehensive ardor, this energy of the whole man. We must go with our whole soul to God or he will not accept us. It will be ill for us if we are half-hearted, for it is written, “their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty.” “The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” We are exhorted to “knock,” and as our model we are directed to him who at midnight aroused his slumbering friend. We are exhorted to be importunate, like the widow with the unjust judge. We are to pray as if all depended upon our praying; though after all that praying is in itself an affect of a cause which has existed long before. We are to be as importunate as if God were unwilling, and to plead as earnestly as if he did not already know far better than we

do what things we have need of. Earnestness must be present in all our prayers or they will return to us unanswered: this is reasonable enough. Shall God be expected to give to us that which we do not value? If we do not value the blessing sufficiently to be eager in seeking it, is it not right that he should withhold it until we are in a better mind? Are we to worship God with a divided reverence? Are we to treat him as though it were quite enough for him if we gave him a stray thought, or a half-hearted desire, now and then, as a sort of compliment? Can we expect that he will receive our sacrifice if we lay no fire under it? If we have no impetuous earnestness of spirit, can we expect that we shall be accepted? He loathes the lukewarm, will he not loath our prayers? See how we deal with our fellow men; if they ask a favor of us and we see that they care but little about it, we are in no great haste to put ourselves about to do them the turn, but if they are very pressing, we yield to their entreaties; and so doth God in his mercy yield to their entreaties of his people. As one hath very prettily said, the nurse when she hath her child in the cradle, though it beginneth to cry and whinny a little, she leaves it and continueth at her household work, and when it cries a little more, and a little more she still hearkens, but she lets it be where it is. But when at last the babe takes to vehement crying, then straightway she presses it to her bosom with many a kiss and a kindly word. Children of God, you must cry mightily unto the Lord, and pour out your hearts like water before him, and then will he have regard unto the voice of your cry, and it shall be unto you even according to your desire. Instancy in prayer is needful; we must be fervent or burning, or we shall not prevail.

How are we to attain to this urgency? God's gracious Spirit must give it to us, but what are the methods by which, under his direction, we may become instant in prayer?

I answer first, let us study very thoroughly the value of the mercy which we are seeking at God's hand. Seeker, take heed to this.

Whatever it is that thou are asking for, it is nor trifle. Look at it. If it be a thing about which thou art not certain that it would be according to God's mind, lay it aside: thou hast no right to be very fervent about that which is of questionable necessity. If this may or may not be good for thee, put up thy requests to the great Father gently once or twice, and then lay them

lightly in Jesus' hand. But when thou art certain that the blessing sought for is a good and necessary thing for thy soul, then in order that thy spirit may be strong in prayer get a deep sense of it's value, its goodness, and its necessity; examine it as a goldsmith inspects a jewel when he wishes to estimate its worth. A man's ardor in pursuit will be in proportion to his consciousness of the value of that which he pursues. Get thou to feel what a precious thing grace is, what it cost the Lord to bring it to thee; what blessings it brings with it for time and for eternity, and when thy heart sees that it seeks after an unspeakably precious gift, then will its desire be stirred up to pray with intense longings.

When thou hast done this, meditate much upon thy necessities that thou mayest get a sense of thy need of the mercy thou art seeking. See thy soul's poverty and thine own undeservingness. Look at what will happen to thee unless this blessing come. If it be some absolutely indispensable spiritual blessing, picture to thyself where thou wilt be if God should withhold it, what evils will spring of thy continuing in want of it, and what further wants may yet beset thee. The more thy need smites thee the more eagerly wilt thou cry unto the Lord concerning it. Art thou desirous of bread for thy soul, be hungry, and let thine hunger eat into thy heart. Art thou desirous of the water of life; be thirsty, and let thy thirst burn thee till thou art dried up like a potsherd. Let thy necessities have liberty, by meditation, to seize thee and to distress thee with a sense of thine emptiness and nothingness. Nothing sets a man more eagerly upon prayer than a deep sense of his need of that which he is seeking at the Lord's hand. He will eagerly seek for garments who shivers in his nakedness amid the winter's blast. He will earnestly long for home who feels himself lost upon a moor in the midst of a midnight fog. Get thou a consciousness of where and what thou art apart from Christ and from the mercy of God, and then, when thou perceivest well thy need, this, with a sense of the greatness of the blessing, will much quicken thee as to instancy in prayer.

Endeavour also to get a distinct consciousness of the fact that God must give thee this blessing, or thou wilt never have it. It requires time to think over these things, therefore set thyself apart awhile from all other occupations, and think on these matters. Say to thyself — Here is such and such a spiritual mercy, and I can never get it out of myself, for I am a dry well. Nothing can come out of nothing, and I am nothing. I cannot

bring a clean thing out of an unclean, and I am unclean. This spiritual blessing I cannot obtain from my fellow-man; nor king nor priest could bring it to me. I cannot climb to heaven after it, nor dive into the abyss to find it; nor earth nor heaven can yield it, nor can either time or eternity produce it. God alone must give it to me, and he is a sovereign, he has a right to give or to withhold. I cannot claim it of him as a matter of right, he must give it to me of his mere mercy, it must be a boon of undeserved favor. Oh, if you get that truth well wrought into your soul you will pray earnestly, and you will use the right arguments, — “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies.” God alone can help you, and if he refuse you are undone for ever, therefore cry mightily unto him.

Further to make you instant in prayer endeavor eagerly to desire the good thing. Stand not before God if thou wouldst win at his hands, as one who will be content whether or no. Say not “Give it or withhold it, it is all one to me. I knock at thy door, and if thou open I will be somewhat pleased, but if thy door be shut I will be pleased too.” Oh no; such listlessness will never prevail with God. There are times when you must be brought to this condition that you will not be denied. There is a holy “impudency,” as the Puritans were wont to call it, to which we must be brought, in which we shall with holy boldness dare to say like Jacob, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” Such language would be blasphemy if it were not permitted, it would be presumption if it were not encouraged; but there is little fear of our being too bold, for in these times men are more inclined to keep at a distance than to come too near. We are permitted to use the liberty of obedient, loving children. We are allowed in the holy confidence of faith to resolve that we will seek until we find, we will ask until we receive, we will knock until the door is opened unto us. Our case is urgent, and we must needs press it till our suit is gained. Never was a man brought to such a pass by the grace of God but what speedily the Lord was pleased to open the hand of his liberality and give him according to his desire; but this vehemence must be manifested. A certain person is mentioned in John Bunyan’s “Holy War,” Whose name is Mr. Desiresawake, and their prayers lie dormant like certain wild beasts in winter; fain would I stir them out of their dens. Wake up, man, wake up when you pray, for it is insulting to God to give him sleepy worship.



Dreaming at praying and playing at praying, as some do, are grievous sins. No, no, prayer must be heart work, soul-work, spirit work. Prayer ought to be the sweat of the soul, it should sometimes be even as the bloody sweat of an agonizing heart, crying mightily unto the Lord, as Jesus did in the garden. To such the Lord sendeth down his angel to strengthen them or in some way heareth their pleadings in that concerning which they were filled with anguish. Intensity of desire must be exhibited or else it may come to pass that the time of the bestowal is not yet come.

I will suppose, dear brother, that you have followed these directions so far by the help of God's Spirit, and now you know your need of the mercy, and something of the value of it; you see that God alone can give it you, and you are anxiously desirous to have it. Now comes the tug of war; you are to plead with all your might. Gather up all your faculties to see whether this thing be a matter of promise or no. Take down the Book, your charter and your Father's will, and see if there be any part of the charter which promises this good thing to you. When you have found the promise lay your finger on it. Better still, with your spirit grasp it in your hand, and go before God with it. If your prayer be as Luther calls it, "bombarda Christianorum," the Christian's great gun with which he doth bombard heaven, then surely the promise is the shot which he sends forth. Plead the promise by saying, "Lord, do as thou hast said. Fulfil this word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope." If you do not seem to prevail with one promise seek out another and plead it. This, perhaps will be more to the point, — a promise which your very soul seems to suck in as though it were spoken to you newly and freshly, as if never another man had ever received it. Spread this second promise before the Lord. Nothing pleases him more than seeing his own word pleaded by his own children. Try this, and if it is manifest that you have not succeeded turn to yet another promise, and another and another and another, and then plead, "For thy name's sake, for thy truth's sake, for thy covenant's sake" ; and then came in with the greatest plea of all, "For Jesus' sake and in his name, for the blood's sake, I plead with thee, my God. O thou that hearest prayer, wilt thou not keep touch with thine own word, and be true to thine own Son?" You have prevailed there. By that sign you have conquered. Again it shall be seen that the Lord hath hearkened to the voice of a man.

Still there is one thing more wanted, and that is strong faith, not only that God is, but that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. You cannot be instant in prayer, nay, you cannot offer an acceptable prayer at all except as you believe in the prayer-hearing God. The modern wise men assure us, with a patronizing air, that prayer is a pious exercise, exceedingly beneficial to ourselves, but quite inoperative with God. They are kind enough to allow us to pray, only we must not suppose that it has the slightest effect. And do they think that we are such idiots that we would stand and whistle to the wind and find good for our souls in such a stupid proceeding? They must have formed their notion of our mental condition from their own if they imagine that we should pray if we knew that God did not hear us, and would not answer us. Prayer apart from the idea of a hearing God is not praying; it is soliloquizing, or, in plainer words, a silly talking to yourself, such as one sees in half-witted old persons who have outlived what few senses they once possessed. You must believe that God is, and that your pleadings are a part of the divine way of blessing you, or else you are not praying but maundering and chattering. The Lord does really listen to the pleadings of his people, and though he does not alter his ordinance and his decree, yet in some way or other he makes the prayers of his people to be an efficient link in the machinery of his providence and grace, so that not without prayer doth he bless them, but with it he doth bless them abundantly. Dear friends, may the Lord the Holy Spirit stir us all up to be instant in mighty, energetic prayer.

**II.** Now, secondly, comes the **CONSTANT** — “continuing instant in prayer.” To go back to the hunting dog with which we set out. We saw him rushing like the wind after his game, but this will not be enough if it only lasts for a little; he must continue running if he is to catch his prey. It matters not how fast the stag-hound goes if after having kept the pace awhile he begins to slacken — the stag will escape from him. It is a sign of failure in the iron trade when the furnaces are blown out; when business flourishes the fire blazes both day and night; and so will it be with prayer when the soul is in a flourishing state. If prayer be the Christian’s vital breath, how can he leave off praying?

We must maintain the ardor of prayer; we must be intense always. Prayer is not to be a thing of yesterday, but of to-day, and to-morrow, until it

changeth into praise above. Perhaps prayer will continue even in heaven. Certainly the souls under the altar cry “How long?” and unfulfilled prophecies yet big with future events will be pleaded even there. Praise, however, is the chief characteristic of the future state, as prayer is the characteristic of the present one. We are to get into a good pace — “instant in prayer,” and then to keep it up — continuing instant in prayer. “That is difficult” says one. Who said it was not? All the processes of the Christian life are difficult; indeed, they are impossible apart from the abiding help of the divine Spirit: but “the Spirit helpeth our infirmities.” Now then, brethren, that we may be helped to keep up our fervency in prayer, please to notice that prayer must be continuous, because it is so singularly mixed with the whole gospel dispensation. As the incense filled the temple, so does prayer fill the gospel economy. The blood was upon the mercy seat, and upon the altar, and the laver, and the candlestick, and the book; it was sprinkled everywhere in the Jewish Tabernacle, and thus atonement was the most conspicuous object in the worship prescribed by the law of Moses; but next to this, prayer was most prominent in the continual calling upon God, and in the smoke of the incense by which prayer was symbolized. It is the high privilege of those who are believers in Jesus to draw nigh unto God with their petitions perpetually. The whole church, like the twelve tribes, is instantly serving God day and night in prayer, hoping for the fulfillment of the promise of the glorious appearing. “Behold, he prayeth” is the very mark of the individual Christian, and the unity, the life, and the spirituality of the church are best seen in prayer.

*“Nor prayer is made on earth alone;  
The Holy Spirit pleads;  
And Jesus, on the eternal throne,  
For sinners intercedes.”*

Prayer was dear to Jesus when he was the Man of Nazareth upon the mountain’s lonely side; and prayer is dear to him now that as the Son of God he intercedes in glory. Even to him the covenant hath this condition of prayer appended, “Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Prayer is the atmosphere which surrounds Emanuel’s land: as the clouds hang on the mountains, so doth prayer linger over every great mercy of God.

Prayer is connected with every covenant blessing. Why, beloved, it is to him that calleth upon the name of the Lord that the promise of salvation is given. Our heavenly Father gives the Holy Spirit to those that ask him. Justification was given to the publican rather than to the Pharisee, because he had offered humble, believing, acceptable prayer ; whereas the Pharisee asked nothing, but only glorified himself. Adoption begets prayer, for it brings us the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. From election right onward to perfection in Christ there is no blessing of the covenant but what is understood, received, enjoyed, fed upon, and practically used in the way of prayer. Those who would safely navigate the sea of life must pray their passage to heaven.

Moreover, beloved, prayer has been connected with every living spiritual experience you have ever had. Will you kindly look back to the hour when you were under the fig tree and Jesus saw you. Were you not at prayer? When you first arose to go to your Father, was not you first step a prayer? When you received the assurance of salvation, was it not in answer to prayer? When his banner over you has been love, have you not felt it sweet to pray? When you have feasted at his table, and he has revealed himself to you as he does not to the world, have you not then been in the spirit of prayer? The hill Mizar and the Hermonites — places you never can forget, those choicest of spots, which seem as you look back along the vista of life to be gleaming with a supernatural splendor — has not prayer been connected with them all? There has been nothing grandly great or good in your spiritual life, but Jabbok has flowed near it, and the top of Carmel has been near to view, where you have wrestled with God and have prevailed.

Now, beloved, we are commanded to be constant in our instance. Is not this right? Is there any time when we can afford to slacken prayer? Would you kindly put your finger on the map of the way, and tell me where a Christian man may leave off praying? Is it when he prospers? No, for then he needs grace to carry a full cup with a steady hand. Is it when he is in distress? Doth not nature itself teach us that in time of affliction we should especially draw near to God in prayer? When should he pray, nay, when should he not pray? Where may he pray? The answer is, he may pray everywhere, for as one has well said, a man who carries his temple about with him is always in a place where he may pray ; and know ye not

that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost? Wherever you go you carry your temples with you, and therefore be sure that you do pray. If you are on the housetop with Peter pray there, and if waiting at table with Nehemiah, pray there: if in the field with Isaac or on the mountain with the Lord, or in the sea with Jonah, or in a prison with Joseph, or in the article of death with Stephen, pray there.

*“Long as they live should Christians pray,  
For only while they pray they live.”*

When they are under the wings of the cherubim crying unto God at his mercy seat then are they in the secret place of the tabernacle of the Most High, and then shall they abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

But specially we ought to be constant in prayer, because such remarkable gifts are vouchsafed to importunity. God often gives liberally to prayer when it speaks but once, but frequent pleading begets abundant answering. That is the most soul-enriching prayer which is long in winning its way with God. When prayers like great ships have been long on the voyage you may hope that they have gone far and have gathered rich cargoes and will come home freighted with all the goodlier merchandise. If you can but quietly hope, and patiently wait, all will be well. The very choicest blessings of heaven are reserved for the Elijahs who can say, “Go again seven times,” for the men who come again and again and again and never faint. Wait then upon the Lord with holy importunity of prayer, and your reward shall more than repay you. It is good for us to be compelled to pray like this ; it brings us up from spiritual childhood to perfect manhood. Therefore be ye constant in prayer, and gather strength for importunate pleadings.

No reason can be given why we should not continue in prayer. I can suppose one brother saying, “I feel I cannot pray.” When you feel you cannot pray, be sure that you are more in need of prayer than ever. Is not a disinclination to prayer one of the saddest marks of your soul’s condition, one of those reasons which ought above all others to drive you to the mercy-seat? “Would you say the same, sir, if I tell you that I can pray?” Precisely the same, for now when the wind is favorable you should hoist all sail. If you cannot make progress now, when will you? Therefore pray when you can pray, and pray when you cannot pray. “Alas, sir, I cannot get beyond a groan.” Brother, be not distressed, for the best

praying in all the world consists of “groanings that cannot be uttered.” We may sometimes have a doubt whether the Spirit of God helps us to pray in cheerful prayers, though I do not say that there is any need for the doubt, — but we cannot have a question about our sad prayings, for it is expressly said he “maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Do you think that the chief end of a Christian’s life is to be comfortable? It is often more good to us to mourn like doves than to sing like nightingales. Sometimes there may be more prayer in a sigh than in a long oration. Often do I myself personally look back upon times of bondage when I cried to God with all my soul, and thought I did not pray, and I wish that I prayed now as I did then. Therefore always pray; whether you feel in a mind for prayer or not, still pray. The fisherman at Mentone keep on fishing with their great net; ay, by the score these fishermen take it out and haul it in again, and frequently they get no more than one little sardine for their pains. Many and many a time I have seen no more than they could hold in their hand as the produce of a net which covered acres of the sea. But why do they go on? Because they are fishermen, and cannot do anything else. You and I are praying men, and there is nothing else we can do but wait upon the Lord. So if, after many a throw of the net, we get but one small answer, we will try again, for this is all we can do. “Lord, to whom should we go but thee?”

Continue in prayer because the continuance of our instancy in prayer is the test of the reality of our devotion. Men that are in business and are in earnest cannot afford to open the shop and do a little occasional trade, and then put up a notice, “The proprietor of this shop has gone out for an excursion, and will resume his business when he feels inclined to.” This would be trifling, and not trading; and it is so in prayer: a little bit of praying and then a stretch of neglect will prove a delusion and a snare. A poor simpleton who had never been to sea before, when he was going to Australia, asked a friend on board the vessel what the sailors did with the vessel at night. “Do of a night,” was the reply, “Why, sail as fast as they can go.” “I did not know,” he said, “they worked in the night, I thought they stopped the ship.” He must have thought he was out on some pleasure excursion along the coast, and that the yacht would anchor when the sun went down; but he was in an ocean clipper which was out for work and not for play. The man who means business must sail whether it

is dark or light; and so in prayer we must serve God instantly, both day and night. Real prayers are constant prayers. There is a fish, you know, that sometimes attempts to fly, but it is no bird for all that. It only takes a little flight and then it is in the water again; but a true bird keeps on the wing, especially if it is such a bird as the eagle, whose untiring wing bears it above the clouds. Beware of prayers which leap up like a grasshopper and are soon down again. Let your prayers have the wings of a dove, let them fly away from earth and rest in God. Hypocrites pray by fits and starts, the genuine Christian “prays without ceasing.”

Beware of judging yourselves by certain spasms of prayer. When I put my lamp out last night, as I thought, it flashed up, then went down again, and yet again flashed up; it did so many times, as I stood waiting, but I knew it must go out ere long. Some have a way of flashing a prayer or two, but their piety is only a dying light, it will all be over soon. Continue instant in prayer, it shall be the test of whether your prayer is a lamp of the Lord or a dying light of your own kindling.

Beloved, we must continue in prayer, but the Holy Spirit alone can enable us to do it. We may, however, be much helped in it by occasionally setting apart a special time. Days of prayer and hours of prayer, and set seasons of prayer are very helpful. We ought to have our appointed seasons each day, but special times over and above our regular custom may stir the fire and enable it to burn more brightly. To unite with other Christians in prayer is often very helpful. Private prayer is more important than public prayer under any aspects, and is a better test of a Christian; still public prayer often reacts upon private devotion, and when two or three are together, and are agreed as touching the kingdom, their supplications will often be helpful to each other and obtain the thing which they desire.

**III.** Our last word EXPECTANT. It is not in the text verbally, but it must be there really, because there will be no such thing as instancy or constancy unless there is an expectation, and a belief that God can and will give that which we seek. Let us go back to our dog again: the dog would not run at so great a rate if he did not expect to seize his prey; but see how every limb is stretched with intensity, and he goes over hedge and ditch after his game because he has almost seized it, and though it flies before him with all its might, yet he close upon it. There is no praying with any fervor unless there is faith that God will hear you; at least if instancy can

be felt for a while, constancy cannot be kept up long without it. Expectancy that God will hear. I was awakened at about four o'clock this morning by a sharp shrill sound. I thought it was a swallow screaming by the window, and I fell asleep again. A young bird had found its way into my room, and was crying for liberty. I left my bed and opened the window to let the captive free. It did not seem to know its way, and so I caught it and gently placed it at the window, and in a moment it flew to the oak tree close by and sat itself down. I watched its movement. The moment it had perched itself comfortably it began to utter sharp cries, and it turned its little head round on all sides as if looking for some one. It was crying for its mother, and why? Because it expected to be fed. And why did it expect to be fed? Because it had been fed before. If it had been a full-grown bird, it would not have called for food, but would have helped itself; but this poor little creature had been nourished by its parents, and it was looking round to be supplied again. This is why we pray. O Lord, thou hast supplied our wants so long and so often in answer to prayer, that we are in the way of it; and now we pray, not only because we ought to do so, but because it has become natural to us to pray, and we expect thee to hear us. When thou dost hear us we bless thee, but we are not surprised, as though it were a strange thing. Thy truth causes great admiration but no astonishment, for it is like thee to keep thy word, We are poor dependent children, and thou a wise and tender Father; thou has never left us and thou wilt never leave us, and so we continue instant in prayer, because we are expectant of thy grace. Some professors seldom exercise expectancy in prayer, but the soul of prayer is gone when you have no expectation. God will the cry of your desire, but the hand into which he will put the mercy is the hand of your expectation. You must believe that you have the blessing, or you will not have it unless it be by some extraordinary mercy beyond what is promised. His usual way is to raise our expectations so that we look out for the favor, and then he sends it. If some people looked out for answers to prayer they might soon have them, for their prayers would be answered by themselves. I was reminded of that by a little boy whose father prayed in the family that the Lord would visit the poor and relieve their wants. When he had finished, his little boy said, "Father, I wish I had your money." "Why so?" "Because," he said, "I would answer your prayers for you." "Which prayers, John?" "Why, father, you prayed that the poor might be helped, and you could do it very well with your



own money." I like better still that story of the good man at the prayer-meeting, who reading the list of prayers found one for a poor widow that her distress might be relived, so he began to read it, but stopped and added, "we won't trouble the Lord with that, I will attend to that myself." Numbers of prayers are of that kind: we are praying God to do what we ought to do ourselves, and that is sheer impertinence. If we really prayed in earnest, expecting to be heard, our answer would often come in this very way, by our being stirred up to see that the Lord had heard us. The Lord might well say to us, "Thou sayest, Thy kingdom come; arise and help to make my kingdom come! Thou askest that my name may be hallowed; go thyself and hallow my name." Oh, that we had the expectancy which would teach us practical action, so that we should find the answer to our prayer given before we asked, according to the promise, "Before they call I will answer them, and while they are yet speaking I will hear."

I had many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now, for the time has passed. I shall close by recommending to all of you one simple but very comprehensive prayer. It was offered by a poor man in Fife, and it was copied out by the Duchess of Gordon, and found among her papers when she died. "O Lord, give me grace to feel my need of thy grace! Give me grace to ask for thy grace! Give me grace to receive thy grace!" See ye not what scope there is for prayer! You will never need to leave off pleading for want of subjects. Continue, therefore, to be instant in it.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Romans 12.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK." — 30, 981, 978.

GIRLS' ORPHANAGE. — We have purchased "The Hawthorns," near the Boys' Orphanage, for £4,000, in order to commence an institution for fatherless girls. We earnestly desire to pay the money when it is due, namely, on the 15th of July next. This will need not only liberal help, but help given speedily, for the time is very limited. Up to this moment, in all our movements, we have paid our way with ready money, and it would rejoice our heart if we should be enabled to do so now. About £1,200 has been given or promised.

*C.H. Spurgeon.*

# CHEER UP, MY COMRADES!

## SERMON NO. 1513

DELIVERED AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE,  
NEWINGTON,

*“And Josiah set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord” — <sup>482</sup>2 Chronicles 35:2.*

JOSIAH, as you remember, in the early part of his reign set his face against the idolatries that prevailed, to root them out of the land. He then bent his thoughts upon repairing and beautifying the temple. After that it was his heart's aim to restore the sacred services, to observe the solemn feasts, and to revive the worship of God after the due order, according to the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. Our text tells us something of the method with which he went to work; and it may well serve us as a model.

The first thing is to get every man into his proper place; the next thing is for every man to have a good spirit in his present place, so as to occupy it worthily. I will suppose, dear friends, that in the providence of God you are in your place, and that by the direction of God's Spirit you have also sought and found the precise form of usefulness in which you ought to exercise yourself. To-night it shall not be my business to arrange you; but assuming that it is well for you to keep where you are, my object shall be to encourage you to do your work for your Lord without being cast down. I am hardly going to preach so much as to talk to different persons who are discouraged in the work of the Lord, that we may rouse them up, rally them round us, and encourage them to keep rank.

**I.** And, first, I would speak a little to THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY CAN DO NOTHING. They will tell me that in such a sermon not a sentence can concern them: if I am to encourage men to the service of the house of the Lord, it will be in vain for them, as they can do nothing at all. Well, dear friends, you must not take that for granted; you must make quite sure that you cannot do anything before I may venture to speak to you as if it

were a matter of fact; for sometimes there is a want of way because there is a want of will. Though I do not go so far as to allege that this is your case, we know too well that “cannot” often does mean “will not,” and not to have triumphed may mean that you have not tried. You have been so discouraged that you have excused yourself for inaction, and your inaction has grown into indolence. If a man, under the notion that he could not lift his right hand, constantly kept it still, I should not wonder if, after weeks and months, it would become a matter of fact that he had not the power to use it. It might actually stiffen for no reason but because he had not moved it. Do you not think that, before your muscles get rigid, it would be well to exercise them by attempting some kind of service? Especially you younger folk, if you do not work for the Lord almost as soon as you are converted it will be very difficult afterwards to make you take to it. Aptitude, I have often noticed, comes with employment, and through negligence and sloth people become enervated and helpless. You say that you cannot move your arm, and so you do not move it; take heed, for by-and-by your pretense will become the parent of real powerlessness.

But I will take what you have said as being true. You are ill; the vigor you felt in the bright days of health fails you now; you have to suffer pain, weariness, and exhaustion; you are often detained at home; and home seems now to you a gloomy hospital all the day long, rather than a genial hostelry when evening shadows fall. Little indeed, therefore, can you do; so little that you are apt to reckon it as nothing at all. The thought is a burden to you. You wish you could serve the Lord. How constantly you have dreamed of the pleasure since you have been denied the privilege! How willing your feet would be to run; how ready your hands would be to labor; how glad would your tongue be to testify! You envy those who are able, and you would fain emulate and excel them; not indeed that you harbour ill-will against them, but you devoutly wish that you could do some personal service in the cause of your Master.

Now, I want to encourage you first by reminding you that the law of the Son of David is the same as the law of David himself; and you know the law of David about those that went to the battle. There were some that were lame, and some that were otherwise incapable of action, and he left them with the baggage. “There,” he said, “you are very weary and ill: stop in the camp: take care of the tents, and the ammunition, while we go and

fight.” Now, it happened once on a time that the men that went to fight claimed all the spoil. They said, “These people have done nothing: they have been lying in the trenches: they shall not carry off a share of the booty.” But King David there and then made a law that they should share and share equally — those that were in the trenches and those that engaged in the fray. “As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel.” Nor is the law of the Son of David less gracious. If by sickness you are detained at home, — if for any other reason, such as age or infirmity, you are not able to enter into actual service, yet if you are a true soldier and would fight if you could, and your heart is in it, you shall share even with the best and bravest of those who, clad in the panoply of God, encounter and grapple with the adversary.

And, brethren, you have no reason to envy, though you may admire to your heart’s content, all who are diligent and successful in the service of Christ. Let me remind you of a law of the kingdom of heaven with which you are all familiar — “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward.” In truth, it is a splendid appointment to be a servant of the Lord. David thought so, for you often read at the commencement of his psalms — “A prayer of David, the servant of God,” though you never read, “A prayer of David, the king of Israel,” for he thought more of being enrolled a servant of God than of being entitled a king of Israel. Health and strength, ability and opportunity to fulfill a mission for the Master are much to be desired, but these are not always to be taken as reliable evidence of personal salvation. A man may preach admirably, and he may work marvels in the church, and yet himself not be a partaker of saving grace. Hence, when the disciples came back from preaching, and said, “Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name,” the Lord said, “Never the less, in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” Judas was amongst them; Judas cast out devils; Judas preached the gospel; and yet Judas was a son of perdition, and is lost for ever. Because you cannot do much you must not infer that therefore you are not saved; for if you were to be among the chief of Christian workers it would not prove that you were certainly a child of God. Do not fret, then, because you are shut out from

the cheerful activities in which others share; for, as long as your name is written in heaven, and your heart truly follows after the Lord, you shall have an abundant recompense at the last great day, even though here you are doomed to be a sufferer rather than a worker.

But to me it seems more than possible that some of you, dear friends, whose minds are tinged with melancholy, have painted your own lot in deeper shades than the justice of the case deserves. Is your life indeed a dull routine, which, for lack of busy change and lively enterprise, leaves no record behind? Not so, methinks. "The rich relics of a well-spent hour" do sometimes pour around your path a stream of light that cheers our eyes, though it may escape your notice. Are you patient under your sufferings? Do you try to keep the flesh in subjection, to govern your spirit, to refrain from murmuring, and to foster cheerfulness? That, my friend, is doing a great deal. I am sure that the holy serenity of a suffering child of God is one of the best sermons that can ever be preached in a family. A sick saint has often been more serviceable in a house than the most eloquent divine could have been. They see how sweetly you submit to the divine will, how patiently you can bear painful operations, how the Lord gives you songs in the night. Why, you are greatly useful. I have sometimes been called to visit bedridden persons who have been unable to rise for many, many years, and it has been within my knowledge that their influence has extended over whole parishes. They have been known as poor pious women or as experienced Christian men, and many have gone to visit them. Christian ministers have said that they derived more benefit from sitting half-an-hour talking to poor old Betsy than they did from all the books in their library, and yet Betsy said that she was doing nothing. Look at your case in that light, and you will see that you can praise God upon your bed, and make your chamber to be as vocal for God as this pulpit ever can be.

Besides, dear friends, do you not think we frequently limit our estimate of serving God to the public exercises of the sanctuary, and forget the strong claims that our Lord has upon our private fidelity and obedience? You say, "I cannot serve God," when you cannot teach in the school or preach in the pulpit, when you are unable to sit on a committee or speak on a platform: as if these were the only forms of service to be taken into account. Do you not think that a mother nursing her baby is serving God?

Do you not think that men and women going about their daily toil with patient industry discharging the duties of domestic life are serving God? If you think rightly you will understand that they are. The servant sweeping the room, the mistress preparing the meal, the workman driving a nail, the merchant casting up his ledger, ought to do all in the service of God.

Though, of course, it is very desirable that we should each and all have some definitely religious work before us, yet it is much better that we should hallow our common handicraft, and make our ordinary work chime with the melodies of a soul attuned for heaven. Let true religion be our life, and then our life will be true religion. That is how it ought to be. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him." So, then, let the stream of your common life as it flows on, obscure, unobserved, be holy and courageous; you will find that while "they also serve who only stand and wait," you shall not be neglected or overlooked who simply sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his words when you can do no more. This is service done for him which he can appreciate; complain who may.

Know, too, my dear sister, that by thy sorrows the Lord has drawn out thy sympathies. Thou, my dear brother, know that by the discipline which has chastened thee, thou hast learned to be a comforter. Say you, then, that you cannot do anything? I know a few secrets about you that you forget. You do not reckon yourself up as we reckon you. Did you not try to cheer a poor neighbor the other day by telling of the Lord's goodness to you when you were very sick yourself? How started from your eye that tear most sacred shed for a fellow-creature's pain? Is it not your habit, poor sufferer as you are, to let drop just a few words for your Master to others in a like condition whenever you can? You tell me that you cannot do anything. Why, dear hearts, the refreshing of God's saints is one of the highest works in which anyone can be occupied. God will send prophets to his servants at times when they need to be rebuked; if he wants to comfort them he generally sends an angel to them, for that is angel's work. Jesus Christ himself, we read, had angels sent to minister to him. When? Was it not in the garden of Gethsemane, when he was bowed down with sorrow? Comforting is not ordinary work: it is a kind of angelic work. "There appeared unto him an angel strengthening him." A prophet was sent to warn the Israelites of their sin; but when a Gideon was to be

encouraged to go and fight for his country, it was the angel of the Lord that came to him. So I gather that comforting work is angel's work. You, dear kind Christian men and women, who think that you are not able to do anything but to condole or to console with cheery words some souls cast down and sore dismayed, you are fulfilling a most blessed office, and doing work which many ministers find it difficult to perform. I have known some who have never known suffering or ill-health, and when they try to comfort God's weary people they are dreadfully awkward over it. They are like elephants picking up pins: they can do it, but it is with a wonderful effort. God's tried people comfort each other *con amore*; they take to the work as a fish to water. They understand the art of speaking a word in season to him that is weary, and when this is the case they may not complain that they are doing nothing.

And yet, beloved, you who thought that you did nothing, and now perceive that you are really useful, will, I hope, perceive that there is still a wider region into which you may advance. Breathe to-night the prayer of Jabez, who was more honorable than his brethren, because he was the child of his mother's sorrow; and this was the prayer — "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast"! Ask God to open up to you a larger region of usefulness, and he will do it.

**II.** Now let me address a few words to another class of workers WHO THINK THAT THEY ARE LAID ASIDE.

"Dear sir," says one, "I wish you would encourage me. I used to be useful once; at least, I was recognized as one of a band of men who worked together right heartily, but since I have changed my residence I am unknown in the neighborhood where I am living, and I seem to have dropped out of the ranks. I have done little or nothing lately, and I feel uneasy about it. I wish that I could get to work." My dear brother, I hope you will; but do not waste five minutes in thinking it over. These times need so much Christian effort that when a man asks me, "How shall I do work for Christ"? I am accustomed to say, "Go and do it." "But what is the way to do it"? Start at once. Get at it, my brother. Do not be out of harness a minute. But suppose that you are obliged to desist awhile, do not let your interest in the cause of our Lord and Master decline. Some of the best of God's workers have been laid aside for long periods. Moses

was forty years in the desert, doing nothing. A greater than he, our blessed Savior himself, was thirty years, — I will not say doing nothing, but certainly doing no public work. When you are in a retired and inactive position, be preparing for the time when God brings you out again. If you are put away on the shelf, do not rust there, but pray the Master to brighten you up so that when he comes to use you again you may be fully fitted for the work which he has in hand for you.

While you must be laid aside, I want you to do this, — pray for others that are at work. Help them; encourage them. Do not get into that peevish, miserable frame of mind which grudges and undervalues other men's works. Be not like the dog in the manger. Some people, when they cannot do anything themselves, do not like anybody else to be diligent and laborious. Say, "If I cannot help, I will never hinder, but I will cheer my brethren."

Spend your time in prayer that you may be fit for the Master's use, and, meanwhile, be prompt in helping others. You remember that, at the siege of Gibraltar, when the fleet surrounded it and determined to storm the old rock, the governor fired red-hot shot down upon the men of war. The enemy did not at all admire the governor's warm reception. Think how it was done. Here were gunners on the ramparts firing away, and every man in the garrison would have liked to do the same. What did those do who could not serve a gun? Why, they heated the shot; and that is what you must do. I am master gunner here generally: heat my shot for me, if you will. Keep the furnace going, so that when we do fire off a sermon it may be red-hot, through your earnest prayers. When you see your friends sitting in the Sunday-school, or standing out in the street working for God, if you cannot join them yet say, "Never mind: I will heat the shot for them. My prayers shall not be wanting, if I can contribute nothing else." That is counsel for you who are for awhile laid on the shelf.

**III.** Others there are who are much discouraged because THEY HAVE BUT SMALL TALENT. "Oh," they say, "I wish I could serve Jesus Christ like Paul, or like Whitefield — that I could range the country through proclaiming his dear name and winning thousands of converts. But I am slow of speech and dull of thought, and what I attempt produces little or no effect." Well, brother, mind that you do what you can. Do you not



recollect the parable of the men who had talents entrusted to them? I do not want to lay undue stress upon the fact that it was the man who had one talent who buried it. Yet why is he represented as doing so? I think it was not because the men of two and five talents do not sometimes bury theirs, but because the temptation lies most with the one talent people. They say, "What can I do? What is the use of me? I may be excused." That is the temptation. Brother, do not be entangled in that snare. If your Lord has only given you one talent he does not expect you to make the same interest upon it as the man does with five; but still he does expect his interest, and therefore do not wrap your talent in a napkin. It is but with strength imparted that any of us can serve him. We have nothing to consecrate to him but the gift we have first received from him. You are weak. You feel it; but what says your God to you? "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." He can make you useful though you have no extraordinary endowments. Grape-shot may do great execution, though it cannot compare with grenade or bomb-shell. A sinner may be brought to Christ by the simple earnestness of a peasant or an artisan, without calling in the aid of a professor's learning or a preacher's eloquence. God can bless you far above what you think to be your capacity, for it is not a question of your ability but of his aid. You have no self-reliance, you tell me. Then take refuge in God, I entreat you, for you evidently want more of the divine succor. Go and get it; it is to be had. He girds the weak with strength. "The young men shall faint and be weary, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Why, I think you are more likely to do good than if you had five talents, for now you will pray more and you will depend more upon God than you would have done if you had possessed strength of your own.

One other word. As you are not enriched with many talents, mind you economize those you have. Do you know how merchants and tradesmen who have only a small capital in business manage to compete with those who have larger means? They try to turn their money over every day. The costermonger cannot afford to deal out his goods to gentlemen who will pay him in three months. Not he. He must get his ready money at the door, and then go and buy another stock to-morrow morning, and turn it over, or else he could not pick up his living with so small a capital. If you have only ninepence, make it "nimble," and you will get as much profit

out of a nimble ninepence as another out of a lazy crown. Activity often makes up for lack of ability. If you cannot get force by the weight of the ball, get it by the velocity with which it travels. A little man with one talent all ablaze may become a perfect nuisance to the devil, and a champion for Christ. As for that great divine with his five talents, who marches on so sleepily, Satan can always overmatch him and win the day. If you can but turn over your one talent again and again, in the name of God, you may achieve great wonders. So I would encourage you in the work of the Lord.

**IV.** With workers WHO ARE UNDER GREAT DIFFICULTIES I would now have a word. I have known the day when perplexities pleased me, dilemmas afforded me delight, and instead of declining a difficult task I rather like it. Even now I enjoy puzzling over a problem, and attempting what others decline. Nothing good in this world can be effected without difficulty. The biggest diamonds lie under heavy stones which sluggards cannot turn over. That which is easy to do is hardly worth doing. In the face of difficulty the man of ardent, persevering spirit braces up his nerves, sharpens his wits, and brings all his powers into play to achieve an object that will reward his efforts. Have you great difficulties dear friend? You are not the first worker for God who has had difficulties to encounter. Let us go back to Moses again. He was to bring Israel out of Egypt; but his path did not appear very plain. He must go before Pharaoh and issue God's command. Pharaoh looked him through when he said, "Let my people go." The haughty monarch was greatly surprised to hear anybody, especially a Hebrew, talk like that; and so he bade him begone. But Moses returns with, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go"; and his courage was not even then crowned with immediate success. There must be plague upon plague, plague upon plague, till at last proud Pharaoh's heart was broken, the Israelites were saved from the hand of him that hated them; and Egypt was glad when they departed. This, however, was but the beginning of the mission of Moses. His was a life of difficulty — the meekest man, but the most provoked; and until he got to the top of Pisgah, and his gracious Master kissed away his soul, the prophet of Horeb had never done with difficulties. Any good thing, I say, especially any good thing done for God, must be surrounded with difficulties, and resisted by adversaries. Look at Nehemiah, and Ezra, and Zerubbabel, and those that

built Jerusalem, the second time. These good men wrought zealously, but Sanballat and Tobiah were jeering and jesting, and trying to throw down the wall. If you build a city without difficulty, it is not Jerusalem. Be sure of that. As soon as ever you begin working for God you will find a great power working against you. If you encounter opposition, take it as a good sign. When our young men go to a provincial town to preach, and I want to know how they are getting on, after listening to their story, I ask, "Has somebody slandered you yet? Do the newspapers denounce you as a fool"? If they say "No," I conclude that they are not getting on much. If Christ's cause is prospering the world will reproach the soul-winner; if you do damage to the devil's kingdom he will roar at you. Should your course be smooth, it is because he says, "There is nothing to disturb me in that man's monotonous talk. I need not let fly the fiery dart of calumny at him: he is a chip in the porridge, I will let him alone." Such a man generally goes through life very comfortably. People say, "He is a quiet, inoffensive sort of man." We do not want such soldiers in the service of Christ. "What a disagreeable person"! said a king once of an officer whose sword rattled on the floor. "That sword of his is most offensive." "Sire," said the officer, "that is exactly what your majesty's enemies think." When ungodly persons say that we are troublesome, we are not broken-hearted at being out of their good looks. If the king's enemies think us troublesome, we reckon it to be high praise. When you, my dear brother, meet with opposition, encounter it with prayer. Exercise more faith. Antagonists ought never to hinder your going forward in the cause of Christ. Diamond must cut diamond. There is nothing so hard in this world but you can cut it with something harder. If you ask God to steel your soul up to the conquering point, and to make your resolution like an adamant stone, you can cut your way through an alp of diamond in the service of your Lord and Master.

Let me inspirit you in the face of assailants. The forces ranged against you might be stumbling-blocks to fools, but they shall only prove a stimulus to men. One day your honor shall be the greater and your reward shall be the higher because of these adverse elements. Therefore, be brave and fear not, but advance in the strength of God.

**V.** Fain would I now speak a passing word of comfort to another class of workers — THOSE THAT ARE NOT APPRECIATED. I am not going to say

much, because I have not much sympathy with them. Yet I know that the smallest slight chafes those who are over sensitive. They murmur, "I do my best, and nobody thanks me." You think yourself a martyr, and complain that you are mis-represented. Be it so, dear friend; that was your Master's lot, and it is the lot of all his servants. This is a cross we must all carry, or we shall never wear the crown. Do you fancy that this is a new experience? Look at Joseph. His brethren could not bear him, and yet it was he that saved the family and fed them in time of famine. Look at David. His brothers asked why he had left the charge of the sheep to come down to the battle, suspecting that the pride of his heart had brought him among the soldiers and the standards. Yet nobody could bring back Goliath's head but that young David. Take a lesson from the ruddy hero; take no notice of what your brethren say about you. Go and bring back the giant's head. A good adventure is the best answer to evil accusations. If you are serving the Master let their scandal stir you up to more self-consecration. If they cry out against you as too forward, serve the Lord with more vigor, and you will antidote the venom of their tongues. Did you enter into Christ's work in order to be honored among men? Then retire from it, for you came with a bad motive. But if you enlisted purely to bring honor to Him, and to win his smile, what more do you want? What more do you want? Be not therefore disheartened because you are not applauded. Be certain of this, that to be kept in the rear rank is often necessary to future eminence. If you take a man and put him in front, and pat him on the back and say, "What a great man he is"! he will make a false step before long, and there will be an end of your hero; but when a man is brought forward by God, he is often one whom everybody criticizes, finds fault with, and declaims as an impostor, but the banter he is exposed to serves as ballast for his mind. When he comes off with success he will not be spoiled with conceit, for the grace of God will make him bow with gratitude. The sword that is meant for a princely hand, to split through skull and backbone in the day of battle, must be annealed in the furnace again and again; it cannot be fit for such desperate work until it has passed through the fire full many a time. Do not ask to be appreciated. Never be so mean as that. Appreciate yourself in the serenity of conscience, and leave your honor with your God.

**VI.** I must speak now, in the last place, a little more at length to THOSE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE THEY HAVE HAD SO LITTLE SUCCESS.

It was my great delight a few evenings ago to meet a splendid band of men and women who are the Sunday-school teachers of this church. You will think it strange that I did not till then thoroughly estimate the extent of their work, as I had never added up the total of the various schools; but when I did so, and found that they mounted up to six thousand children, I felt full of joy. I shall run over with delight if they increase to twelve thousand in another twelve months. For so large a district this would not be too many, but still our present number is most encouraging. Now, I know that some of our teachers are working away in back streets, in rooms not connected with any place but this, and we hardly knew of them, because they were pursuing their simple, unobtrusive labors so quietly. Are there any of you who fear that you have toiled in vain and spent your strength for nought? I would entreat you, dear friends, not to be satisfied with casting in the seed unless you reap some good results; yet do not be so faint-hearted as to give up because of a little disappointment. Though you cannot be satisfied without fruit, yet do not cease to sow because one season proves a failure. I would not have our friends the farmers abandon agriculture because this year they have a bad crop: if they were to measure their future prospects by the present failure, it would be a great pity. If you have preached or taught, or done work for Christ with little success until now, do not infer that you will always be unsuccessful. Regret the lack of prosperity but do not relinquish the labor of seeking it. You may reasonably be sorrowful, but you have no right to despair. Non-success is a trial of faith which has been endured by many a trusty servant who has been triumphant in the issue. Did not the disciples toil all night, and catch nothing? Did we not read just now of some who cast the net, and yet took no fish? Did not our Lord say that some seed would fall on stony ground, and some among the thorns, and that from these there would be no harvest? What good did Jeremiah do? I have no doubt he labored, and God blessed him, but the result of his preaching was that he said, "The bellows are burned in the fire." He had blown up the fire till he had burnt the bellows, but no man's heart was melted. "Woe is me"! said he. "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears"! I do not know what was the result of Noah's ministry, but I do know that he was a

preacher of righteousness for a hundred and twenty years, and yet he never brought a soul into the ark except his own family. Poor preaching we may count it judging by the influence it exerted: and yet we know that it was grand preaching, such as God commended. Do not, then, grudge the time, or the strength, you lay out in the service of our great Lord because you do not see your efforts thrive, for better men than you have wept over failure.

Remember, too, that if you really do serve the Lord thoroughly and heartily, he will accept you and acknowledge your service, even though no good should come of it. It is your business to cast the bread on the waters: if you do not find it after many days, that is not your business. It is your business to scatter the seed; but no farmer says to his servant, "John, you have not served me well, for there is no harvest." The man would say, "Could I make a harvest, sir? I have ploughed, and I have sowed. What more could I do"? Even so our good Lord is not austere, nor does he demand of us more than we can do. If you have ploughed and if you have sowed, although there should be no harvest, you are clear and accepted. Did it never strike you that you may be now employed in breaking up ground and preparing the soil from which other laborers who come after you will reap very plentifully. Perhaps your Master knows what a capital ploughman you are. He has a large farm, and he never means to let you become a reaper because you do the ploughing so well. Your Master does not intend you to take part in the harvest because you are such a good hand at sowing; and as he has crops that need sowing all the year round he keeps you at that work. He knows you better than you know yourself. Perchance if he were once to let you get on the top of a loaded wagon of your own sheaves, you would turn dizzy and make a fall of it; so he says, "You keep to your ploughing and your sowing, and somebody else shall do the reaping." Peradventure when your course is run you will see from heaven, where it will be safe for you to see it, that you did not labor in vain nor spend your strength for nought. "One soweth and another reapeth." This is the divine economy. I think that every man that loves his Master will say, "So long as there does but come a harvest, I will not stipulate about who reaps it. Give me faith enough to be assured that the reaping will come, and I will be content." Look at William Carey going to India, his prayer being "India for Christ." What did Carey live to see?

Well, he saw good-speed enough to rejoice his heart: but certainly he did not see the fulfillment of all his prayer. Successive missionaries have since gone and spent their life on that vast field of enterprise. With what result? A result amply sufficient to justify all their toil, but, as compared with the millions that sit in heathendom, utterly inadequate to the craving of the church, much less to the crown of Christ. It does not much matter how any one man fares. The mighty empire will revert to the world's Redeemer, and I can almost trace in the records of the future the writing of "These be the names of the mighty men whom David had," as the valiant deeds of his heroes are chronicled by our Lord. When old St. Paul's cathedral had to be taken down in order to make room for the present noble edifice, some of the walls were immensely strong and stood like rocks. Sir Christopher Wren determined to throw them down by the old Roman battering-ram. The battering-ram began to work, and the men worked at it for hours and hours, day after day, without apparent effect. Blow after blow came on the wall; tremendous thuds that made the bystanders tremble. The wall continued to stand till they thought it was a useless operation. But the architect knew. He continued working his battering-ram till every particle of the wall felt the motion, and at last over it went in one tremendous ruin. Did anybody commend those workmen who caused the final crash, or ascribe all the success to them? Not a bit of it. It was the whole of them together. Those who had gone away to their meals, those who had begun days before, had as much honor in the matter as those who struck the last blow. And it is so in the work of Christ. We must keep on battering, battering, battering, and at last — though it may not be for another thousand years — the Lord will triumph. Though Christ cometh quickly he may not come for another ten thousand years, but in any case idolatry must die, and truth must reign. The accumulated prayers and energies of ages shall do the deed, and God shall be glorified. Only let us persevere in holy effort, and the end is sure. When a certain American general was fighting they said, "What are you doing"? He said, "I am not doing much, but I keep pegging away." That is what we must do. We cannot do much at any one time, but we must keep on. We must keep on pegging away at the enemy, and something will come of it by-and-by.

Possibly, dear friends, some of you who think you have had slender success may have had a great deal more than you know of. Others there may be whose want of success should suggest to them to try somewhere else, or else to try some other method. If we cannot do good in one way we must do it in another. Bring the matter before God in prayer. Cry mightily to him, for he will help you yet to do it, and his shall be the glory. When he has laid you low, when he has taught you how inefficient you are, when he has driven you in despair to rely implicitly upon himself, then it may be that he will give you more trophies and triumphs than you ever dreamed of. Anyhow, whether I prosper in life or not is not my question. To bring souls to Christ is my main endeavor, but it is not the ultimate proof of my ministry. My business is to live for God, to lay aside self, and give myself up wholly to him, and if I do that I shall be accepted whatever else may happen. I wish we had the spirit of that brave old man who was condemned to the stake. They were going to burn him. He knew that the sentence was to be carried out the next morning, but with a soul full of courage, and with a merry heart, he sat the last thing at night talking with his friends — faggots and fire to face in the morning, recollect — and he said to one of them, “I am an old tree in my Master’s orchard. When I was young I bore a little fruit by his grace. It was unripe and sour, but he bore with it: and I have grown mellow in my older days and brought forth some fruit for him by his grace. Now the tree has grown so old that my Master is going to cut it down and burn the old log. Well, it will warm the hearts of some of his family while I am burning”; and he even smiled for joy to think that he might be put to so good a purpose. I want you to have that spirit, and to say, “I will live for Christ while I am young: I will die for him, and warm the hearts of my brethren. You know that the persecutions of those martyr days begat such heroism and gallantry among disciples as prudent people in peaceful times can scarcely credit. It is said of the old Baptist church over in the City that the members went to Smithfield early one morning to see their pastor burnt, and when some one asked the young people what they went there for, they said that they went to learn the way. That is splendid! They went to learn the way. Oh, go to the Master’s cross to learn the way to live and die! See how he spent himself for you, and then sally forth and spend yourselves for him. “Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall ye be glorious in the sight of the Lord.” Though you may think that you do not



succeed, your whole-hearted consecration shall be your honor in the day of the Lord. By your hallowed life, and your humble service, you shall bring glory to his name. O Lord, set us in our charges, and encourage us in the service of thy house! “Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; establish thou the work of our hands: yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.” May the blessing of our covenant God rest upon you, my brethren, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  John 21.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 245, 674, 694.

## LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

BELOVED FRIENDS, — On this first day of a New Year I salute you with hearty good wishes, and pray that every blessing may attend your future steps. I beg also on my own behalf your prayers that through another year my ministry may be more edifying to the saints, more persuasive with sinners, and more acceptable to the Lord. I thank the great Healer that this day smiles upon me, and sees me free from pain, reviving in strength, and restored in spirit. I shall hope soon to be at work again. Oh for an anointing with fresh oil.

Yours to serve in hearty earnest,

*C.H. Spurgeon*

*Menton, Jan. 1, 1880.*

# THE SHEEP BEFORE THE SHEARERS

## SERMON NO. 1543

*“As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” —  
Isaiah 53:7.*

OUR Lord Jesus so took our place that we are in this chapter compared to sheep: “all we like sheep have gone astray,” and he is compared to a sheep also, — “As a sheep before her shearers is dumb.” It is wonderful how complete was the interchange of positions between Christ and his people, so that he became what they were in order that they might become what he is. We can well understand how we should be the sheep and he the shepherd; but to liken the Son of the Highest to a sheep would have been unpardonable presumption had not his own Spirit employed the condescending figure.

Though the emblem is very gracious, its use in this place is by no means singular, for our Lord, had been long before Isaiah’s day typified by the lamb of the Passover. Since then he has been proclaimed as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;” and indeed even in his glory he is the Lamb in the midst of the throne.

**I.** In opening up this divine emblem I would invite you to consider, first, OUR SAVIOR’S PATIENCE, set forth under the figure of a sheep dumb before her shearers.

Our Lord was brought to the shearers that he might be shorn of his comfort, and of his honor, shorn even of his good name, and shorn at last of life itself; but when under the shearers he was as silent as a sheep. How patient he was before Pilate, and Herod, and Caiaphas, and on the cross. You have no record of his uttering any exclamation of impatience at the pain and shame which he received at the hands of these wicked men. You hear not one bitter word. Pilate cries, “Answerest thou nothing? Behold

how many things they witness against thee”; and Herod is wofully disappointed, for he expected to see some miracle wrought by him. All that our Lord does say is in submissive tones, like the bleating of a sheep, though infinitely more full of meaning. He utters sentences like these, — “For this purpose was I born, and came into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth,” and, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Otherwise he is all patience and silence.

Remember, first, that our Lord was dumb and opened not his mouth against his adversaries, and did not accuse one of them of cruelty or injustice. They slandered him, but he replied not; false witnesses arose, but he answered them not. One would have thought he must have spoken when they spat in his face. Might he not have said, “Friend, why doest thou this? For which of all my works dost thou insult me?” But the time for such expostulations was over. When they smote him on the face with the palms of their hands, it would not have been wonderful if he had said, “Wherefore do you smite me so?” But no; he is as though he heard not their revilings. He brings no accusation to his Father. He needed only to have lifted his eye to heaven and legions of angels would have chased away the ribald soldiery; one flash of a seraph’s wing and Herod had been eaten by worms, and Pilate had died the death he well deserved as an unjust judge. The hill of the cross might have become a volcano’s mouth to swallow up the whole multitude who stood there jesting and jeering at him: but no, there was no display of power, or rather there was so great a display of power over himself that he restrained Omnipotence itself with a strength which never can be measured.

Again, as he did not utter a word against his adversaries, so he did not say a word against any one of us. You remember how Zipporah said to Moses, “Surely a bloody husband art thou to me,” as she saw her child bleeding; and surely Jesus might have said to his church, “Thou art a costly spouse to me, to bring me all this shame and bloodshedding.” But he giveth liberally, he openeth the very fountain of his heart, and he upbraideth not. He had reckoned on the uttermost expenditure, and therefore he endured the cross, despising the same.

*“This was compassion like a God,  
That when the Savior knew,  
The price of pardon was his blood,  
His pity ne’er withdrew.”*

No doubt he looked across the ages; for that eye of his was not dim, even when bloodshot on the tree: he must have foreseen your indifference and mine, our coldness of heart, and base unfaithfulness, and he might have left on record some such words as these: “I am suffering for those who are utterly unworthy of my regard; their love will be a miserable return for mine. Though I give my whole heart for them, how lukewarm is their love to me! I am sick of them, I am weary of them, and it is woe to me that I should be laying down my heart’s blood for such a worthless race as these my people are.” But there is not a hint of such a feeling. No. “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end,” and he did not utter a syllable that looked like murmuring at his suffering on their behalf, or regretting that he had commenced the work.

And again, as there was not a word against his adversaries, nor a word against you nor me, so there was not a word against his Father, nor a syllable of repining at the severity of the chastisement laid upon him for our sakes. You and I have murmured when under a comparatively light grief, thinking ourselves hardly done by. We have dared to cry out against God, “My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death; not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure.” But not so the Savior; in his mouth were no complaints. It is quite impossible for us to conceive how the Father pressed and bruised him, yet was there no repining. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” is an exclamation of astonished grief, but it is not the voice of complaint. It shows manhood in weakness, but not manhood in revolt. Many are the Lamentations of Jeremiah, but few are the lamentations of Jesus. Jesus wept, and Jesus sweat great drops of blood, but he never murmured nor felt rebellion in his heart.

Behold your Lord and Savior lying in passive resignation beneath the shearers, as they take away everything that is dear to him, and yet he openeth not his mouth. I see in this our Lord’s complete submission. He gives himself up; there is no reserve about it. The sacrifice did not need binding with cords to the horns of the altar. How different from your case

and mine! He stood there willing to suffer, to be spit upon, to be shamefully entreated, and to die, for in him there was a complete surrender. He was wholly given to do the Father's will, and to work out our redemption. There was complete self-conquest too. In him no faculty arose to plead for liberty, and ask to be exempted from the general strain; no limb of the body, no portion of the mind, no faculty of the spirit started, but all submitted to the divine will: the whole Christ gave up his whole being unto God, that he might perfectly offer himself without spot for our redemption.

There was not only self-conquest, but complete absorption in his work. The sheep, lying there, thinks no more of the pastures, it yields itself up to the shearer. The zeal of God's house did eat up our Lord in Pilate's hall as well as everywhere else, for there he witnessed a good confession. No thought had he but for the clearing of the divine honor, and the salvation of God's elect. Brethren, I wish we could arrive at this, to submit our whole spirit to God, to learn self-conquest, and the delivering up on conquered self entirely to God.

The wonderful serenity and submissiveness of our Lord are still better set forth by our text, if it be indeed true that sheep in the East are even more docile than with us. Those who have seen the noise and roughness of many of our washings and shearings will hardly believe the testimony of that ancient writer Philo-Jud'us when he affirms that the sheep came voluntarily to be shorn. He says; "Woolly rams laden with thick fleeces put themselves into the shepherd's hands to have their wool shorn, being thus accustomed to pay their yearly tribute to man, their king by nature. The sheep stands in a silent inclining posture, unconstrained under the hand of the shearer. These things may appear strange to those who do not know the docility of the sheep, but they are true." Marvellous indeed was this submissiveness in our Lord's case; let us admire and imitate.

**II.** Thus I have feebly set forth the patience of our beloved Master. Now I want you to follow me, in the second place, to VIEW OUR OWN CASE UNDER THE SAME METAPHOR AS THAT WHICH IS USED IN REFERENCE TO OUR LORD.

Did I not begin by saying that because we were sheep he deigns to compare himself to a sheep? Let us look from another point of view: our Lord was a sheep under the shearers, and as he is so are we also in this world. Though we shall never be offered up like lambs in the temple by way of expiation, yet the saints for ages were the flock of slaughter, as it is written, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter!" Jesus sends us forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, and we are to regard ourselves as living sacrifices, ready to be offered up. I dwell, however, more particularly upon the second symbol: we are brought as sheep under the shearers' hands.

Just as a sheep is taken by the shearer, and its wool is all cut off, so doth the Lord take his people and shear them, taking away all their earthly comforts, and leaving them bare. I wish when it came to our turn to undergo this shearing operation it could be said of us as of our Lord, "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." I fear that we open our mouths a great deal, and make no end of complaining without any apparent cause, or with the very slenderest reason. But now to the figure.

First, remember that a sheep rewards its owner for all his care and trouble by being shorn. There is nothing else that I know of that a sheep can do. It yields food when it is killed, but while it is alive the one payment that the sheep can make to the shepherd is to yield its fleece in due season. Some of God's people can give to Christ a tribute of gratitude by active service, and they should do so gladly every day of their lives; but many others cannot do much in active service, and about the only reward they can give to their Lord is to render up their fleece by suffering when he calls upon them to suffer, submissively yielding to be shorn of their personal comfort when the time comes for patient endurance.

Here comes the shearer; he takes the sheep and begins to cut, cut, cut, cut, taking away the wool wholesale. Affliction is often used as the big shears. The husband, or perhaps the wife, is removed, little children are taken away, property is shorn off, and health is gone. Sometimes the shears cut off the man's good name; slander follows; comforts vanish. Well, this is your shearing time, and it may be that you are not able to glorify God to any very large extent except by undergoing this process. If this be the fact,

do you not think that we, like good sheep of Christ, should surrender ourselves cheerfully, feeling, "I lay myself down with this intent, that thou shouldst take from me anything and everything, and do what thou wilt with me; for I am not mine own, I am bought with a price"?

Notice that the sheep is itself benefited by the operation of shearing. Before they begin to shear the sheep the wool is long and old, and every bush and briar tears off a bit of the wool, until the sheep looks ragged and forlorn. If the wool were left, when the heat of summer came the sheep would not be able to bear itself, it would be so overloaded with clothing that it would be as uncomfortable as we are when we have kept on our borrowed wool, our flannels and broadcloths, too late. So brethren, when the Lord shears us, we do not like the operation any more than the sheep do; but first, it is for his glory; and secondly, it is for our benefit, and therefore we are bound most willingly to submit. There are many things which we should have liked to have kept which, if we had kept them, would not have proved blessings but curses. A stale blessing is a curse. The manna, though it came from heaven, was only good so long as God's command made it a blessing, but when they kept it over its due time it bred worms and stank, and then it was no blessing. Many persons would keep their mercies till they turn to corruption; but God will not have it so. Up to a certain point for you to be wealthy was a blessing; it would not have been a blessing any longer, and so the Lord took your riches away. Up to that point your child was a boon, but it would have been no longer so, and therefore it fell sick and died. You may not be able to see it, but it is so, that God, when he withdraws a blessing from his people, takes it away because it would not be a blessing any longer.

Before sheep are shorn they are always washed. Were you ever present at the scene when they drive them down to the brook? Men are placed in rows, leading to the shepherd who stands in the water. The sheep are driven down, and the men seize them, throw them into the pool, keeping their faces above water, and swirl them round and round and round to wash the wool before they clip it off. You see them come out on the other side frightened to death, poor things, wondering whatever is coming. I want to suggest to you, brethren, that whenever a trial threatens to overtake you, you should entreat the Lord to sanctify it to you. If the good Shepherd is going to clip your wool, ask him to wash it before he

takes it off; ask to be cleansed in spirit, soul, and body. That is a very good custom Christian people have of asking a blessing on their meals before they eat bread. Do you not think it is even more necessary to ask a blessing on our troubles before we get into them? Here is your dear child likely to die; will you not, dear parents, meet together and ask God to bless the death of that child, if it is to happen? The harvest fails; would it not be well to say — “Lord, sanctify this poverty, this loss, this year’s bad harvest: cause it to be a means of grace to us.” Why not ask a blessing on the cup of bitterness as well as upon the cup of thanksgiving? Ask to be washed before you are shorn, and if the shearing must come, let it be your chief concern to yield clean wool.

After the washing, when the sheep has been dried, it actually loses what was its comfort. The sheep is thrown down, and the shearers get to work; the poor creature is losing its comfortable fleece. You also will have to part with your comforts. Will you recollect this? The next time you receive a fresh blessing call it a loan. Poor sheep, there is no wool on your back but what will have to come off; child of God, there is no earthly comfort in your possession but what will either leave you, or you will leave it. Nothing is our own except our God. “Why,” says once, “not our sin?” Sin was our own, but Jesus has taken it upon himself, and it is gone. There is nothing our own but our God, for all his gifts are held on lease, terminable at his sovereign will. We foolishly consider that our mercies belong to us, and when the Lord takes them away we half grumble. A loan, they say, should go laughing home, and so should we rejoice when the Lord takes back that which he had lent us. All our possessions are but brief favors borrowed for the hour. As the sheep yields up its wool and so loses its comfort, so must we yield up all our earthly properties; or if they remain with us till we die, we shall part with them then, we shall not take so much as one of them across the stream of death.

The shearers take care not to hurt the sheep: they clip as close as they can, but they do not cut the skin. If possible, they will not draw blood, even in the smallest degree. When they do make a gash, it is because the sheep does not lie still: but a careful shearer has bloodless shears. Of this Thomson sings in his Seasons, and the passage is so good an illustration of the whole subject that I will adorn my discourse with it: —



***“How meek, how patient, the mild creature lies!  
 What softness in its melancholy face,  
 What dumb complaining innocence appears!  
 Fear not, ye gentle tribes! ‘Tis not the knife  
 Of horrid slaughter that is o’er you waved;  
 No, ‘tis the tender swain’s well guided shears,  
 Who having now, to pay his annual care,  
 Borrow’s your fleece, to you a cumbrous load,  
 Will send you bounding to your hills again.”***

It is the kicking and the struggling that make the shearing work at all hard, but if we are dumb before the shearers no harm can come. The Lord may clip wonderfully close: I have known him clip some so close that they did not seem to have a bit of wool left, for they were stripped entirely, even as Job when he cried, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.” Still, like Job, they have added, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Notice that the shearers always shear at a suitable time. It would be a very wicked, cruel, and unwise thing to begin sheepshearing in winter time. There is a proverb which talks about God “tempering the wind to the shorn lamb.” It may be so, but it is a very cruel practice to shear lambs while winds need tempering. Sheep are shorn when it is warm, genial weather, when they can afford to lose their fleeces, and are all the better for being relieved of them. As the summer comes on sheepshearing time comes. Have you ever noticed that whenever the Lord afflicts us he selects the best possible time? There is a prayer that he put into his disciples’ mouths, “Pray that your flight be not in the winter”: the spirit of that prayer may be seen in the seasonableness of our sorrows. He will not send us our worst troubles at our worst times. If your soul is depressed the Lord does not send you a very heavy burden; he reserves such a load for times when you have joy in the Lord to be your strength. It has come to be a kind of feeling with us that when we have much delight a trial is near, but when sorrow thickens deliverance is approaching. The Lord does not send us two burdens at a time; or, if he does, he sends double strength. His shearing time is chosen with tender discretion.

There is another thing to remember. It is with us as with the sheep, there is new wool coming. Whenever the Lord takes away our earthly comforts with one hand, one, two, three, he restores with the other hand six, a score,

a hundred; we are crying and whining about the little loss, and yet it is necessary in order that we may be able to receive the great gain. Yes, it will be so, we shall yet have cause for rejoicing, “joy cometh in the morning.” If we have lost one position, there is another for us: if we have been driven out of one place, a better refuge is prepared. Providence opens a second door when it shuts the first. If the Lord takes away the manna, as he did from his people Israel, it is because they have the old corn of the land of Caanan to live upon. If the water of the rock did not follow the tribes any longer, it was because they drank of the Jordan, and of the brooks. O sheep of the Lord’s fold, there is new wool coming; therefore do not fret at the shearing. I have given these thoughts in brief, that we may come to the last word.

**III.** Let us, in the third place, endeavor to IMITATE THE EXAMPLE OF OUR BLESSED LORD WHEN OUR TURN COMES TO BE SHORN. Let us be dumb before the shearers, submissive, quiescent, even as he was.

I have been giving, in everything I have said, a reason for so doing. I have shown that our shearing by affliction glorifies God, rewards the Shepherd, and benefits ourselves. I have shown that the Lord measures and tempers our affliction, and sends the trial at the right time. I have shown you in many ways that it will be wise to submit ourselves, as the sheep does to the shearer, and that the more completely we do so the better.

We struggle far too much, and we are apt to make excuses for so doing. Sometimes we say, “Oh, this is so painful, I cannot be patient! I could have borne anything else but this.” When a father is going to correct his child, does he select something pleasant? No. The painfulness of the punishment is the essence of it, and even so the bitterness of our sorrow is the soul of our chastening. By the blueness of the wound the heart will be made better. Do not repine because your trial seems strange and sharp. That would in fact be saying, “If I have it all my own way I will, but if everything does not please me I will rebel”; and that is not a fit spirit for a child of God.

Sometimes we complain because of our great weakness. “Lord, were I stronger I would not mind this heavy loss; but I am frail as a sere leaf driven of the tempest.” But who is to be the judge of the suitability of

your trial? You or God? Since the Lord judges this trial to be suitable to your weakness, you may be sure that it is so. Lie still! Lie still! “Alas,” you say, “my grief comes from the most cruel quarter; this trouble did not arise directly from God, it came through my cousin or my brother who ought to have treated me with gratitude. It was not an enemy: then I could have borne it.” My brother, let me assure you that in reality trial comes not from an enemy after all. God is at the bottom of all your tribulation; look through the second causes to the great First Cause. It is a great mistake when we fret over the human instrument which smites us, and forget the hand which uses the rod. If I strike a dog, he bites my stick; poor creature, he knows no better: but if he could think a little he would bite me, or else take the blow submissively. Now, you must not begin biting the stick. After all, it is your heavenly Father that uses the staff; though it be of ebony or of blackthorn, it is in his hand. It is well to have done with picking and choosing our trials, and to leave the whole matter in the hand of infinite wisdom. A sweet singer has put this matter very prettily; let me quote the lines: —

*“But when my Lord did ask me on what side  
I were content,  
The grief whereby I must be purified,  
To me was sent,*

*“As each imagined anguish did appear,  
Each withering bliss Before my soul, I cried,  
‘Oh! Spare me here,  
Oh, no, not this!’*

*“Like one that having need of, deep within,  
The surgeon’s knife,  
Would hardly bear that it should graze the skin,  
Through for his life.*

*“Nay, then, but he, who best doth understand  
Both what we need,  
And what can bear, did take my case in hand,  
Nor crying heed.”*

This is the pith of my sermon: oh, believer, yield thyself! Lie passive in the hands of God! Yield thee, and struggle not! There is no use in struggling, for our great Shearer, if he means to shear, will do it. Did I not say just now that the sheep, by struggling, might be cut by the shears! So

you and I, if we struggle against God, will get two strokes instead of one; and after all there is not half so much trouble in a trouble as there is in kicking against the trouble. The Eastern ploughman has a goad, and pricks the ox to make it move more actively; he does not hurt it much by his gentle prodding, but suppose the ox flings out its leg the moment it touches him, he drives the goad into himself, and bleeds. So it is with us, we shall find it hard to kick against the pricks; we shall endure much more pain by rebelling than would have come if we had yielded to the divine will. What good comes of fretting? We cannot make one hair white or black. You that are troubled, rest with us, for you cannot make shower or shine, foul or fair, with all your groaning. Did you ever bring a penny into the till by groaning. Did you ever bring a penny into the till by fretting, or put a loaf on the table by complaining? Murmuring is wasted breath, and fretting is wasted time. To lie passive in the hand of God brings a blessing to the soul. I would myself be more quiet, calm, and self-possessed. I long to cry habitually, "Lord, do what thou wilt, when thou wilt, as thou wilt, with me, thy servant: appoint me honor or dishonor, wealth or poverty, sickness or health, exhilaration or depression, and I will take all right gladly from thy hand." A man is not far from the gates of heaven when he is fully submissive to the Lord's will.

You that have been shorn have, I hope, received comfort through the ever blessed Spirit of God. May God bless you. Oh that the sinner, too, would humble himself under the mighty hand of God! Submit yourselves unto God, let every thought be brought into captivity to him, and the Lord send his blessing, for Christ's sake. Amen.

# HEARKEN AND LOOK; OR, ENCOURAGEMENT FOR BELIEVERS

SERMON NO. 1596

DELIVERED ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27TH, 1881,

AT EXETER HALL.

(The Annual Sermon on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society)

“Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.” — <sup>250</sup>Isaiah 51:2-3.

THE second verse contains my actual text. It is the argument by which faith is led to look for the blessings promised in the third verse.

It is habitual with some persons to spy out the dark side of every question or fact: they fix their eyes upon the “waste places,” and they study them till they know every ruin, and are familiar with the dragons and the owls. They sigh most dolorously that the former times were better than these, and that we have fallen upon most degenerate days. They speak of “shooting Niagara,” and of all sorts of frightful things. I am afraid that a measure of this tendency to write bitter things dwells in almost all of us at this present season, for certain discouraging facts which cannot be ignored are pressing heavily upon men’s spirits. The habit of looking continually towards the wildernesses is injurious because it greatly discourages; and anything that discourages an earnest worker is a serious leakage for his strength. Perhaps a worse result than honest discouragement comes of

depressing views, for they often afford an apology for indifference and inaction. The smallest peg suffices to hang an excuse upon when we are anxious to escape from the stern service of faith. "I pray thee have me excused," is a request which was supported in the parable by the flimsiest of pretences, and discouragement makes one of the same sort. The sluggard's argument is on this wise, — "I will not attempt the work, for it is far too heavy for my poor strength. I fear the times are ill adapted to any special effort; indeed, I am not quite certain that success will ever attend the general work." It is therefore a dreadful thing when the Christian church begins to be discouraged, and means must be used to stay the evil. Such means we would use this day. Lo, we lift the standard of the divine promise. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people," sounds out like a silver trumpet in the front of the host. Be encouraged, O ye of the faint heart; there are no more difficulties now than there were of old. The cause is no more in jeopardy than it was a thousand years ago. The result, the end, the consummation of all things is absolutely certain: it is in his hand who cannot fail, therefore be of good courage, and in waiting upon the Lord renew your strength.

Remember, ye that are cast down, that there are other voices besides those of the bittern and owl from the "waste places." My text has near to it twice, nay, three times, "HEARKEN TO ME." You have listened long enough to dreary suggestions from within, to gloomy prophecies from desponding friends, to the taunts of foes, and to the horrible whisperings of Satan: now hearken to him who promises to make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert like the garden of the Lord.

O ye whose eyes are quick to discover evil, there are other sights in the world besides waste places and deserts, and hence my text hath near to it twice over the exhortation, "LOOK" — "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn"; "Look unto Abraham your father." Why should your eyes for ever ache over desolations? Probably you have seen as much in the wilderness as you are ever likely to see there. It does not take long to discover all the treasures and comforts of the burning sand; you have probably discovered them all by now. As for the discomforts and wants of the desert, you are perhaps as well acquainted with them as you need to be. Gaze no longer at the thirsty land and the burning sky; turn your eye where the finger of the Lord points by his word. If we enquire what it is that the Lord would have

us observe, he answers, “Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you”; for there we may find comfort. O for the presence of the Holy Spirit, that the word may be full of the dew of heaven to refresh our souls.

**I.** We shall first look towards Abraham that we may see in him THE ORIGINAL OF GOD’S ANCIENT PEOPLE, the foundation stone, as it were, of the dispensation by which God blessed the former ages. In Judah was God known, his name was great in Israel: let us look to the rock whence Israel and Judah were hewn.

We observe, first, that the founder of God’s first people was called out of a heathen family. “Your fathers,” says Joshua, “dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and they served other gods.” Abraham, the founder of the great system in which God was pleased to reveal himself for so long a time, and to whose seed the oracles of God were committed, was a dweller in Ur of the Chaldees, the city of the moon-god. We cannot tell to what extent he was actually engrossed in the superstition of his fathers, but it is certain that the family was years afterwards tainted with idolatry; for in Jacob’s day the teraph was still venerated, and Rachel stole her father’s images. Abraham, therefore, was called out from the place of his birth, and from the household to which he belonged, that in a separated condition, as a worshipper of the one God, he might keep the truth alive in the world. Recollect, then, that the first man from whom sprang that wondrous nation which God hath not even yet cast away was originally himself an idolater, and had to be called out of his sinful state by effectual grace. Why, then, might not the Lord, if the cause of truth were this day reduced to its utmost extremity, again raise up a church out of one man? If an almost universal apostasy should hide the divine light, could he not kindle a torch among the heathen, and by its light illuminate the earth again? He could call out another Abraham, and bless him and increase him, and achieve the whole of his eternal purposes if all of us should sleep in the dust, and the visibly organised church of to-day should pass away as the snow of winter at the advent of spring. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is he not able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham? As to anything like discouragement, it ought to vanish at the thought that not only out of your Sunday-schools, your colleges, and your pulpits can God raise up leaders for his church, but he

can find them in the very center of heathenism. Where Satan's seat is, even there can the Lord raise up advocates for his cause. The thick darkness of superstition shall not prevent the chosen one from seeing the light, neither shall the bondage of sin hold back the captive from finding freedom and proclaiming it to others.

"Ah," you say, "but men are not called now, as Abraham was, by miraculous calls from heaven." I reply, — The statement may be true; but God's visible means of calling men are now so many that there can seldom be need of miracle. The Lord can by his Spirit make one of the millions of Bibles scattered over the world to be as powerful a means of call as though he had sent an angel from heaven; yea, a solitary leaf of a printed tract, if wafted by the wind, or carried by the wave, may be borne where God shall bless it to the calling forth of a champion ordained of old to do great exploits. Where ordinary means are so plentiful wisdom resorts not to signs and wonders. Miracles were of admirable use while they were necessary; but now that they are no longer required the prudence of God forbids an extravagant display of the supernatural. Now that the word of God is scattered "thick as leaves in Valambrosa" everywhere by willing and ready hands, what need can there be of voices of the day or visions of the night? The same Spirit who called Abraham by a supernatural voice can call others by the word of truth. Instead of regarding it as a prodigy that a man should be unexpectedly called out from among the heathen I look for it, and shall not be surprised to hear that in the remoter provinces of China, or in the center of Thibet, or in the recesses of Africa men have been raised up to found churches for our Lord Jesus. God can through the printed page or by hints and rumors passed from hand to hand convey enough instruction to call out more Abrahams and bless them, and increase his kingdom by them. "Omnipotence hath servants everywhere." Let us never dream that the God of Abraham is short of means for calling out chosen men to build up his church. Surely Christian people should never doubt the power of God to raise up lights in dark places when we remember that the greatest preacher of the gospel, namely, the apostle Paul, was drafted into the army of Christ from the ranks of his direst foes. The proud Pharisee, a fanatic of the fanatics, embittered against Christ, and persecuting his people, became the earnest advocate of Christ Jesus. Aforetime his breath was threatening and slaughter, yet on the road to



Damascus he was conquered and transformed. As a lion roareth over his prey, so did Paul rejoice that the saints in Damascus were now in his power; but the Lord struck him down, and turned the lion to a lamb, and henceforth where sin abounded grace did much more abound. First in the ranks of Christian heroes stands the man who called himself the chief of sinners because he persecuted the church of God. My brethren, as Luther came from among the monks, so out of Rome, yea, from the Vatican itself, can God, if he wills, call another Luther. The darkness of the times cannot forbid it, for God is Light. The weakness of the church cannot hinder it, for all power belongeth unto God. There may not be among us to-day one whom God will so greatly honor as to make him a spiritual father of nations; but there may be such a one in the courts of Whitechapel or in the rookeries of St. Giles. The Christ, who was himself called the Galilean, despises no place or people. Our king is not particular as to the mine from which he digs his gold. The great seeker of precious souls full often finds his purest pearls in the deepest and the blackest waters. Take this, then, for encouragement, ye who tremble for the ark of God: he can build up a spiritual house for himself out of dark quarries, and find cedars for his temple in forests untraversed by the feet of missionaries.

“Ah,” say you, “but Abraham was naturally a man of noble mould. Where do you find such a princely spirit as his?” I answer, Who made him? He that made him can make another like him. There is a grace of God which goes before what we are accustomed to call saving grace: I mean a grace of God which, in the creating of the nature, makes it a fit instrument for the grace which is after to be bestowed. By such sovereign favor one man is from his birth endowed with a superior mind and character, being adorned, even as a natural man, with much that is excellent in its own order. How often do you see among certain men of the world a generosity, honesty, open-heartedness, and nobility of disposition which are not grace, but which mark men out as fit to be leaders in all that is good when grace calls them into the divine service? The Lord can just as soon make a man after the type of Abraham as after any other type; and doubtless he has such in store even now, to whom his call will yet come. We may expect to see men of strong convictions converted into believers who “stagger not at the promise through unbelief.” From among priests and pagans we may hope that the Lord will raise up pillars for his church. Is not this hope

encouraged in your breasts as you “Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you”?

Look again and observe that Abraham was but one man. Do not be startled at the sound which seems to have such terrors for certain brethren. I have heard the cant of those who object to a “one-man ministry,” a ministry to which all the while they usually submit in their own meetings; but to my ear there is music, and not terror, in the term “a one-man ministry.” I bless God that all my hope of salvation hangs upon the divine ministry of the One Man. Is not Christ, as the servant of God, the very pattern of all ministries which are of God? Working out the Father’s eternal purpose by a life which was necessarily unique in many points, he trod the wine-press alone; in this, however, he causes many of his people to have fellowship with him, even as in the case of Paul, who says, “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me.” I am bold also to say that the Lord has as a rule wrought more nobly by one man than by bands and corporations of men. He in whose seed all nations are blessed was but one. “I called him,” saith he, “alone, and blessed him, and increased him.” Nor is this a solitary instance. When the earth was utterly corrupt God conserved the race by a solitary preacher of righteousness, who prepared an ark for the saving of his house. See how one Joseph saved whole nations from famine, and one Moses brought out a race from bondage. Who was there to keep Israel right when Moses fell on sleep but the one man Joshua? What were the prosperous times in the era of the Judges but days when one man was to the front as a leader? When all the rest hid away in dens and caves, some Barak or Gideon, or Jephthah, or Samson came boldly forward and delivered Israel. One man, standing like a figure at the head of many ciphers, soon headed victorious thousands, through faith in God. What was there but one man in the days of David? The Philistines had still triumphed over the land if the one lad had not brought back Goliath’s head, and if the one man had not again and again smitten the uncircumcised in the name of the Lord. Beloved, if we should ever be reduced, as we shall not be, to one man, yet by one man will God preserve his church, and work out his great purposes. I hope we shall never go into our chamber, and shut to the door, and cry with Elias, “I only am left, and they seek my life!” No, my brother, there are more faithful men in this world than you. The Lord has yet reserved to himself his thousands that

have not bowed the knee to Baal. We are this day, not one man, but many, and we all desire to live for the glory of God, and for the spread of his gospel; but if our hosts were so diminished that we could be numbered by a little child upon his fingers, still there would be no excuse for dismay, for the God of Abraham still liveth, even he who created a people to his praise by one man, of whom he says, "I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him."

Think, my brethren, of the power for good or evil which may be enshrined in a single human life. What mischievous results may come of one man! One sinner destroyeth much good, and if there were but one person left who had knowledge of the ways of vice and the words of blasphemy that one man would suffice to infect the race with his abominations. If evil be so mighty, is not good with God in it quite as powerful? We may rightly measure quantities in reference to many things, but with others it is absurd. It would be ridiculous to measure the power of fire by the quantity which burns on pour hearth. Give us fit materials and a single match, and you shall see what fire can do. If ordinary fire, that may so readily be extinguished, is thus powerful, who shall venture to measure the power of the fire from heaven, which neither men nor devils can quench, the fire which fell at Pentecost, and burns among us still. Ye carry fire, ye servants of God; ye work with a heaven-sent force of boundless energy. Why, therefore, should you despair? If all the lights in the world were put out except a solitary lamp, there is enough fire in one wick to kindle all the lamps in the universe. What inch of ground remains for despair to stand upon?

Furthermore, we are bound to notice that this one man was a lone man. He had not only to do the work of God, but he had nobody to help him. "I called him alone." True, he was attended by Lot — a poor miserable lot he was, costing his noble uncle more trouble than he ever brought him profit. How little did he maintain or adorn the righteousness which, nevertheless, had saved him; true type of many a feeble professor in these days. Abraham was not backed by any society when he crossed the Euphrates and afterwards traversed the desert to sojourn in Canaan as a pilgrim and a stranger. If ever man was fairly cut adrift and cast upon the Lord it was the great father of the faithful. He certainly found no patronage in his onward course save the all-sufficient patronage of the Lord his God. When

he came near to kings it was a source of trouble to him; it led to contention, and once to war; or else he felt bound to refuse their offers of gifts, and say as he did to the king of Sodom, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich. "That same boastful sentence might be uttered by the State concerning some churches that I know of, but not concerning us: may God preserve us, my brethren, from every desire to come under obligations to earthly sovereignties, lest, becoming indebted to them, we should be bound to render suit and service at their bidding, such service being already due to "another king, one Jesus."

Abraham had no prestige of parentage, rank, or title. If you had looked at the stately patriarch when he trod the plains of Mamre you would have seen about him a presence, a calm dignity, a truly regal manner; but that came to him solely through his faith in God and his communion with heaven. Abraham was distinguished from other men only by the grace of God. What grander difference can there be than that which is established by the existence of faith in the heart? Thus Abraham was in the fullest sense a lone man, unsupported by any of those outward distinctions which enable some men to do more than others.

The fulfillment of his calling rested on his loneliness; for he must get away from his kindred, and wander up and down with his flocks, even as the church of God now does, dwelling in a strange land, and feeding her flock apart. When he was alone God blessed Abraham, — "I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." The blessing did not come to him in Charran while he still had some connection with the old stock; he was not yet become thoroughly nonconformist, but held in some small degree to the old house at home, and till the last link was snapped the blessing could not come. And now, my brother, if in the town or district where you live you seem to lose all your helpers; if they die one by one, and it seems as if nobody would be left to you; if even the prayer-meeting fails for want of earnest, pleading men, still persevere, for it is the lone man that God will bless. "He setteth the solitary in families." In your present forlorn condition you are learning sympathy with that lone man in Gethsemane, with that lone man upon the cross, who there vanquished all your foes. Remember that your enemies are thus beaten before you encounter them, and therefore you may readily overcome through the blood of the Lamb.

Oh, be not afraid. Thus saith the Lord — “I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.” Grasp that, ye that dwell remote from human sympathy. Oh that our missionaries abroad may feel the rich comfort of this fact; for they full often, like lone sentinels, keep watch with eyes that long to see a friend. They are separated from intercourse with brethren, they miss the friendships which tend to comfort and confirm, but it is God that calls them alone, and he will bless them and increase them. The purer churches of to-day, standing alone as they do, because they dare not make unholy alliances with any, — standing alone, I say, in simple trust in the living Lord — ought not to be afraid with any amazement, but attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.

Once more, I cannot help asking your attention to the fact that Abraham was not only a man called from heathendom, one man, and a lone man; but he was a man who had to be stripped yet further. The blessing was — “Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee,” but the manifest fulfillment of it was not by-and-by. As we have already seen, he must come away from his kindred and his father’s house, and he must dwell in Palestine till the promised seed was born. But how long he waited for the expected heir! Twenty, yes, almost thirty years rolled away, and the man Abraham was ninety years old and nine. He is very old; and yet he is to be blessed with a son. He must number the full tale of a hundred years before Isaac can be born. This promised child was to be according to promise, and therefore it could not be born till nature was recognised as spent. As for Sarah — it was not possible that she should become a mother at her advanced age, and yet it must be so, for God had said it.

The believing pair had waited on till in an evil hour Sarah suggested a desperate attempt to fulfill the promise, in which she still firmly believed. That artifice broke down; it was a part of the divine plan that it should do so. The covenant promise was not to the seed after the flesh. When that scheme had been set aside, the Lord in his own time fulfilled his word.

Joy! joy! in the house of Abraham and Sarah. What a feast there was that Isaac was born, filling the house with laughter. But he must die! “Get thee up,” said God, “and take thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will

tell thee of.” The grand old man will do it. He will get up early in the morning, and the father and the son will journey together silently; for the aged heart is too full to talk. He believes God, and is sure that even if he should actually slay his son at God’s command the promise would somehow be kept. Abraham could not tell how, but it was no business of his to tell how; he was fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform. God had said to him “In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” and he believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead, or in some other way achieve the promise. Thus he grasped the resurrection. He laid hold on a truth which was deeper than he knew of: by his faith he realised resurrection for Isaac though as yet the Lord Jesus had not shown the way by his own rising from the dead. What a stripping Abraham had endured! Who can describe what would have been the wretchedness of that aged parent if it had not been for his faith! Men intensely love the children of their old age. See how a grandchild is fondled by his grandsire, and thus must Isaac have been loved of Abraham and yet he must die by his father’s own hand. Oh, most miserable among the miserable must he have been who stood there on Mount Moriah, called to such a duty, his heart breaking while his soul obeyed. Such, doubtless, would have been the case had not faith been his stay. Look, then, to Abraham your father, and say is he not the greatest of men, the grandest human representative of the great Father God himself, who in the fullness of time spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all? Likeliest to God among mortal men art thou Abraham, and therefore well mightest thou be his friend! In thy trial brought to such a stripping we may yet envy thee as we hear the Lord saying, “Now know I that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” Now, if in all these trials Abraham was yet blessed, and God’s purposes were accomplished in him, can we not believe that the same God can work by us also, despite our downcastings and humiliations? When we are utterly broken and crushed may not the Lord’s strength be made perfect in our weakness? Let us not question the promise because of our personal deadness and inability, but believe God without wavering, for he hath said, “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

Now, brothers and sisters, here is the sum and substance of this first head of my discourse: in looking to the rock whence we are hewn, we have to

see the Lord working the greatest results from apparently inadequate causes. This teaches us to cease from calculating means, possibilities, and probabilities, for we have to deal with God, with whom all things are possible. Almighty God can assuredly do whatever he says he will do. Who is to hinder him? Let the voice ring out over all the earth, and let it be heard in hell itself — who shall stay the arm of God when he wills to achieve a thing? He fears no opposition, and he needs no help. Of what did he make the world? With whom took he counsel? Who instructed him? And, if all the things that are have been spoken into existence by God alone, by his mere word, can he not yet build up his church, even if on her earthly side there should seem to be no material with which to raise her walls? Consider creation and remark what God hath wrought. See how all the millions of mankind have sprung from a single pair, because God blessed them in the beginning. But I must not multiply illustrations from nature or from history, for they rise spontaneously before your own minds. Refresh your faith by a reference to our own island history. If you would firmly believe in the conversion of the heathen remember what your fathers were when bloody rites were performed in the oak woods or amid the huge monoliths of Stonehenge. The Druidic system was as cruel and degrading as any that now curses a savage people; but the heralds of Jesus conquered. Where are the gods of the Druids now? Who reverences the golden sickle and the sacred oak? The thing is gone, as though it never had been. Why, then, should not other evil idolatries pass away? Look again at the triumph of Protestantism in this country. What was it at first? A thing utterly despised and hunted down. The stakes of Smithfield cannot be forgotten by those who dwell so near the spot. Yet, despite all, the gospel of God triumphed, and rood, and pyx, and image were broken in contempt. Let the days of the Puritans, the palmy days when God was known in England, tell how thoroughly Bible truth won the victory. Why not again? Why not everywhere? If you desire another illustration, look at our own body of Christians? History has hitherto been written by our enemies, who never would have kept a single fact about us upon the record if they could have helped it, and yet it leaks out every now and then that certain poor people called Anabaptists were brought up for condemnation. From the days of Henry II. to those of Elizabeth we hear of certain unhappy heretics who were hated of all men for the truth's sake which was in them. We read of poor men and women, with their garments cut short, turned

out into the fields to perish in the cold, and anon of others who were burnt at Newington for the crime of Anabaptism. Long before your Protestants were known of, these horrible Anabaptists, as they were unjustly called, were protesting for the “one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.” No sooner did the visible church begin to depart from the gospel than these men arose to keep fast by the good old way. The priests and monks wished for peace and slumber, but there was always a Baptist or a Lollard tickling men’s ears with holy Scripture, and calling their attention to the errors of the times. They were a poor, persecuted tribe. The halter was thought to be too good for them. At times ill-written history would have us think that they died out, so well had the wolf done his work on the sheep. Yet here we are, blessed and multiplied; and Newington sees other scenes from Sabbath to Sabbath. As I think of your numbers and efforts, I can only say in wonder — What a growth! As I think of the multitudes of our brethren in America, I may well say, What hath God wrought? Our history forbids discouragement. Never cause more hopeless once; none more hopeful to-day! It matters little what may yet happen, the cause is safe. What if all our Baptist organisations expire! What if but one man should be left faithful to the old banner, our Captain would yet triumph gloriously, for he saveth not by many nor by few. Though all else faileth, the Lord shall reign for ever and ever. This is the lesson which, I pray, we may all of us learn, and then, by faith, go forth to act upon it.

**II.** With great brevity, I shall dwell for a moment upon the second point, namely — THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF THIS CHOSEN MAN. The text says, “Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you,” and it must mean, — consider him and see what he was, that you may learn from him. You perceive at once that his grand characteristic was his faith. In this faith many other most brilliant qualities are comprehended, but his faith lay at the bottom of all. Here is his epitaph: — “Abraham believed God.” That was a mainspring of all his acts, the glory of his life, “Abraham believed God.” The men that God will work by, whatever else they have not, must have faith in God. Though it is to be desired that the believer should have every mental and moral qualification, yet it is astounding how, if there be real faith, a multitude of imperfections are swallowed up, and the man is still a power. I would mention Samson as an extreme case. He was the feeblest of men, and the least fitted to be a judge



in Israel; but oh, what faith! And what wonders it achieved! A thousand men! He is like a child in his belief that God is with him. He never calculates at all; it is all the same to him whether there are a thousand or one. He flings himself upon the host, and has slain them before we can realize the deadly odds. A sword; no, he has no sword: an old jawbone of an ass is quite enough for an arm which God strengthens. See how he smites them, hip and thigh, till they lie in heaps before him. I do not suppose that it would have signified to Samson if there had been a million Philistines: with a thousand to one, a man is so thoroughly outnumbered that numbers cease to count. Here was an impossibility before him, and what could be worse. Brethren, when you do get off your feet, and must swim, you may as well have fifty fathoms of water beneath you as not, for you can but drown. In the case of faith, drowning is out of the question, and swimming is good in deep water, for there is no fear of striking against a rock. Faith glories in difficulties and infirmities, because the power of God doth rest upon her. If the work is barely possible to her strength faith hardly likes it; but she gets into her sphere when in trials far beyond human strength she laughs at impossibility, and cries, "It shall be done."

Abraham's faith was such that it led him to obedience. He was called to go out, and he went, not knowing whither he went. His faith through grace led him to perseverance; for once in God's way he did not leave it, but still abode a sojourner with God. His faith led him to expectancy; he looked for the promised seed, and not only for an Isaac but for the Messiah. So clear was the vision of his expectancy that before his eyes Christ was set forth, visibly. Did not the Savior, who knew all things, say, "Abraham saw my day; he saw it, and was glad"?

The like faith also dwelt in the breast of Sarah; and, as we are told in the text to look to Sarah as well as Abraham, let us not fail to do so. The faith of Sarah was not little when she left home with her husband; forsaking her kith and kin from love to God, and to him whom she called "lord." She acted as if she had said to the great patriarch, "Where thou goest I will go; where thou dwellest I will dwell, for thy God is my God." Nor did the trial of her faith end with the moving, she had to take up with tent-life and all its inconveniences. It is the woman that knows the discomfort of domestic life under such circumstances. We never hear that she complained

for a moment, though the cold of winter and the heat of summer are neither of them warded off by a tent. How readily she entertained her husband's guests. Though they might drop in at most unseasonable hours, or call her to bake bread in the heat of the day, she was glad to welcome strangers, for like her husband she was given to hospitality. I saw you smile, dear friends, when I mentioned domestic matters; but to me it is the solemnity of faith that men and women can not only pray and sing, but can put up with household discomforts out of obedience to God. Certain people look upon faith as a fine, airy, sentimental thing with which to roam among the stars, anticipate millenniums, and enjoy yourself in lofty contemplation. I believe far more in a faith which, whether it eats or drinks, does all to the glory of God; faith which like Sarah dwells in the tent and works there; faith which is cheerful over a scanty meal and drives away the fear of want; faith which can come down in life from the mansion to the cottage, if providence so decrees. From Abraham's comfortable home at Ur to his gipsy wanderings in Palestine the change must have been great, but Abraham may not have felt it one half as much as Sarah, for men can rough it and live out of doors, but the housewife knows all about it, and great was her Faith that she never raised a question about the propriety of her husband's course of life: and though she laughed when she was told that she should bear a son, yet remember that in the eleventh of Hebrews it is written — "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength." She was the mother of Isaac, not in the power of the flesh, but through the energy of faith, therefore look at her as the text bids you.

Christian men and Christian women, mark well this fact — that the characteristic of the person whom God will bless is that he believes and acts upon his belief. Without faith it is impossible to please God; but the man of faith is God's man. And why is this? I answer, because faith is the only faculty of our spirit which can grasp God's ideal. The greatest man, without faith, cannot tread in the divine footsteps. The ideas of God are as high above us as the heavens are above the earth: and therefore it is not by any fancied vastness of our feeble minds that we can ever rise into fellowship with God. Faith in the sight of God's thought whispers to herself — "I cannot understand this great thing, nor need I wish to do so. What is my understanding? Perhaps I trust to it too much already. I am called to do what God bids me, without knowing why, and I am glad it is

so, for now I can worship him by bowing before his sovereign will.” There is a capacity about faith for grasping divine promises and purposes, a width, a breadth, a height, a depth, which can hold the infinite truth as no other power can do. Love alone can rival it, for it embraces the infinite God himself. With the far-reaching plans and promises of God faith alone is fit to deal; carnal reason is altogether out of the lists.

Faith, too, has a great power of reception, and therein lies much of her adaptation to the divine purpose. Self-confidence, courage, resolution, cool reasoning, whatever else they are good at, are bad at humbly receiving. Those vessels which are full already are of no use as receivers; but faith presents her emptiness to God, and opens her mouth that God may fill it. Mercy needs not a jewel, but a casket into which to put her gems, and faith is exactly what she wants.

Then, again, faith always uses the strength that God gives her. Pride would vapor with it, and doubt would evaporate it; but faith is practical, and economically uses the talent entrusted to her. Faith has already spent all her own strength, and she so yearns to achieve her purposes that she uses all the power that God will lend her. Faith eats her manna and leaves not a morsel for worms to breed in.

Faith, too, can wait the Lord’s time and place. When faith is weak men are in a dreadful hurry, but strong faith does not judge the Lord to be slack concerning his promise. As God achieves his purpose with infinite leisure, he loves a faith that is patient and looks not for its reward this day or the next. “He that believeth shall not make haste”: that is to say, he shall not be ashamed or confounded by present trials so as to rush upon unbelieving actions. Faith leaves times and seasons with God to whom they belong.

God loveth faith and blesseth it too, because it giveth him all the glory. The true believer will not allow a trace of self-glory to linger on his hands. “Where is boasting then?” was a question once asked in the house of faith, and the searchers examined every nook and corner in every chamber to find it, but they found it not. Then they said to faith, “Where is boasting?” She answered, “I shut him out.” “It is excluded,” shut out, and the door fastened in its face. You do not believe God if you boast of what you are doing: least of all do you believe if you pride yourself in your faith, for faith is not mistrustful of her God but of herself. Faith looks to God to

keep her alive as well as to fulfill the promise that he has made to her. This then is the kind of faith which was characteristic of Abraham, and the question is, have we got it? Have we so much of it that God can largely bless us? The comfort is that, if we have it not, the author of faith can give it to us, and if we have it in scant measure he can increase our faith.

Is not this a solid reason why you and I should take heart? You who do not believe that missions will succeed; you who readily become discouraged and discourage others; I beg you go home and seek more faith. We cannot go down to the battle with such soldiers as you; you do but encumber the host. The men that lapped are the only ones that Gideon will take to war. Send the fearful ones to the rear and let them take care of the baggage, so that when the battle is won they may have a share of the spoil, according to David's law. For actual service and warfare we must have men of faith. Cromwell found that when his men came dressed in all sorts of suits and colors they were apt to injure one another in the melee, and so he put them all in uniform. The uniform of the Prince Immanuel is faith: no man may call himself a soldier of the cross who hath it not. This is the victory which overcometh the world, even your faith. Brother ministers, let us take heed lest we be found qualified for our ministry in all respects except this one. You have learning, eloquence, industry, honesty, but do you so believe in God as to expect his word to act divinely on men's hearts. Do you preach believingly? Do you pray believingly? I leave the question with you.

**III.** I have shown you, dear friends, that God effected his purpose, and raised up a chosen nation out of one man, whose chief characteristic was his faith: and now I want you to notice OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THAT ONE MAN. I dwelt upon that while reading the chapter (Romans 4.) There is a relation between us and Abraham even as Paul assures us in the epistle to the Galatians, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Something, surely, is expected of the children of such a man as Abraham. O, for shame, thou unbelieving one! Is Abraham thy father? Art thou one of the faithful seed? Great mountains are often succeeded by low valleys. Perhaps that is the case with you; but it should not be so. The natural seed were cut off because they had no faith, let not those who are grafted in, think to do without it. It is by faith that you are a son at all. You disprove your pedigree if you tolerate

unbelief. Oh! let nobody find fault with Abraham through you, and surely they may do so if they find you staggering. That staggering is a shocking business: staggering at God's promises is terrible. Abraham staggered not at the promise through unbelief. May we never dishonor the right noble grace of faith, but so believe that all men may know Abraham's God to be our God. O for abounding spiritual life, for the God of Abraham is not the God of the dead but of the living; and we can only live unto God by faith.

Brethren, because we are the seed of Abraham, the apostle declares that the blessing of Abraham has come upon us also. I pray that all the friends and laborers in our Missionary Society may grasp the blessing of Abraham. What is it? It is a covenant favor that belongs to all who are the servants of God by faith. Here is the substance of it: "Surely blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thee." That is the grand old covenant promise and it belongs to the church. Note that the blessing is attended with multiplying. Some friends are afraid of statistics which represent the increase of the churches; I am far more afraid of those statistics which will show that we do not increase as we could wish. The blessing of the church is the increase of the church. The two go together: "Blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thee." How much are Christians to be multiplied in the world? At the present moment we do not seem to be increasing as fast as the population. I am afraid that the number of converted persons relatively to the population is scarcely as great as it was thirty years ago; we long to be multiplied at a very different rate from this — and we shall be if we have faith in our God. Hear ye the covenant word: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." These are lines from the covenant, which is sure to all the seed and can never be broken. We have been called and blessed, and it is of necessity that we increase also. We are bound to increase; we are destined to overrun the nations; the Hittites, the Hivites, the Amorites, of Popery, Mahometanism, and Idolatry are in the land, but their false systems are utterly to perish. Jesus at the head of his people shall drive them out — I mean not the men, but their evil beliefs. They may take notice to quit, for he is coming before whom all men must bow. O that ere he himself shall appear his spiritual presence in the midst of his church might suffice for victory, that all

mankind might call him blessed. We are bound to increase, till the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for us, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Upon the church in her vigor shall yet descend the blessings of the tribes of Joseph. "His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth." The success of truth is the battle of the Lord, and the increase of his church is according to his own promise, therefore in quietness we may possess our souls.

**IV.** Last of all consider for a minute OUR POSITION BEFORE ABRAHAM'S GOD. Do not let anything that I have said about Abraham for a moment take your mind off from the Lord himself, because the pith of it all lies here, — "I called him alone." Look to Abraham, but only as to the rock from which the Lord quarried his people:" your main thought must be Jehovah himself. "I, I called him alone, and blessed him." "I the Lord do all these things." Look unto the everlasting God who doeth great wonders, and stay yourselves upon him.

Let us joyfully recollect that the Lord our God has not changed, nay, not in one jot or tittle. He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." There is so far a change in the revelation of him, that it is brighter now in the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, than it could have been through seer and vision; but that should be a motive for increased faith. "His arm is not shortened that he cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear." This God of Abraham is still almighty, and still in the midst of the covenanted ones. If the ages that have passed over his awful brow could wrinkle it and his strength could decay, then might we also decline in our confidence; but it is not so. He fainteth not, neither is weary. Our behavior towards him, therefore, should resemble that of Abraham; and especially, representing, as we do many of us, the churches of Jesus Christ as ministers or deacons, we must never dishonor the Lord by unbelief. Doubt everything but God. Let God be true and every man a liar. This the everlasting decree which none can change, — Christ must reign; he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied; the kings of the earth must bow before him. Do not doubt it, for God hath sworn by his own life that all flesh shall see his glory. Here is the grand argument for strong faith.

Notice next that the covenant of God has not changed. God hath not recalled his words, nor taken a pen and struck out his promises from the record. Read the covenant words, and write them upon the doorposts of your mission-house, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." This is the covenant with the one spiritual seed of Abraham, that is the marrow of it, and it has never been revoked. As I have said before, we read it now in clearer light, and understand better the fullness of its provisions, but the covenant is not disannulled. Let us go to God with any one promise of it, and we can say to him, "This is thy promise in Christ Jesus; and thou hast not spoken in secret in a dark place and withdrawn thy word and said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain." Such pleading will prevail. He will never run back from his word. Has he said, and will he not do it? Therefore let us cry, "Remember thy word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope."

But there is this also to be added, that this work which we desire the Lord to do is in some respects even less than that which he has done with Abraham. What ask we? Not that he should begin with one man to build up a nation, or create a church? No, but that Zion being builded, he should comfort her, and cause her waste places to rejoice. The field is the world, and the seed is ready for the sowing. The gospel is in the hands of those who have the best means of spreading it. Everything is ready for its ultimate triumph. The train is laid; we only need the heavenly fire to touch it, and the deed is accomplished. O that the work of the Lord may be speedily done; that the Lord may carry on his work of righteousness and make a short work in the earth. I say that if God has done this greater thing, if he has excavated a nation from the quarry of Abraham, we may well expect the self-same God to keep his covenant, to multiply his church, and build her up after the similitude of a palace. The time to favor Zion, even the set time, has come. Beside that; we have been already visited by God as Abraham had not been when first he was called. Abraham had not known the Lord till he called him, but our Sion is familiar with God, for she is the city of the great king. He dwelleth in our midst by his Holy Spirit, and holy hymn and prayer rise every day from the multitudes that fear him. The Lord hath redeemed, and justified, and saved

his people, and surely we may look to him to refresh and revive his heritage.

What marvellous things hath God done on the face of the earth since Abraham's days! — the stupendous marvel of incarnation, the height and depth of which none of us can measure; the wondrous work of redemption, the highest, grandest, divinest achievement of the Deity — all this is done; what may we not expect after this? You know more of God than Abraham could know; I beseech you then, trust him, at least up to the level of the patriarch. How shall we forge an excuse if we do not? What can excuse us if we distrust so glorious a God.

Brethren, it remains for me only to add this practical word. Let us throw ourselves more and more upon our God. If you have any work appointed you of the Lord, and it is within the compass of your strength, shame upon you if you do not perform it at once; but if it be beyond you, herein will God be glorified if you do it by his power. If there remaineth no might, wit, or wisdom in you, if you are deeply conscious of your weakness you are by this experience made the more fit to be used of the Lord, for when we are weak then are we strong. If you have confidence in God all things are possible to him that believeth. Oh, when will the church cast herself upon her God as men throw themselves into the stream when they mean to swim? They seek no longer for foothold, their foot leaves the spot whereon it rested, and they throw themselves trustfully upon the wave. The everlasting ocean of love and power is ready to upbear us: we shall swim gallantly to shore if we will but trust this blessed sea of love.

Let us begin to believe God and then let us act in daily life as if we believed him. The just shall live by faith. Some people have a faith which is for show, a Sunday faith, faith that cannot bear the wear and tear of every day life; varnished and gilded, but with no pure metal in it. The faith of Abraham could lead strings of camels and flocks of sheep away from Haran to Canaan. His was the faith which could drive the tent-pin into a foreign soil, or roll up the canvas and seek another unknown halting place. The faith of Abraham is a faith that saith to wayfaring men, "Turn in, and I will get you a little water and wash your feet." It is a practical, active, living, week-day, everyday faith. I will speak very broadly and plainly, and say we need a bread-and-cheese faith, that is to say, a faith which



believes that God who feeds the ravens will send us our daily bread; a faith which believes that the heavenly Father who clothes the lilies will much more clothe his children; the faith that can believe God about the things that are actually around it, and that does not live in the region of fiction. See how God blessed Abraham with flocks and herds, and everything temporal as well as spiritual, because he walked in reference to these things along the line of faith; gave Lot his choice of pasturage, refused the offer of the king of Sodom, and resolutely paid the children of Heth the full price for the cave and the field. If we walk by faith in business life God may not in every case bless us with abundance of temporal mercies, but assuredly we shall be blessed. He may send us adversity, and poverty, but in these things faith is more than conqueror, glorying in tribulations also.

In the Lord's work of evangelising the world you must have a downright, practical faith; not a faith that will sing when the organ begins to play, and then be so busy fumbling the hymn paper as to forget the collection: not the faith of those who boast of Carey, and Marshman, and Knibb, but whose own names never appear in the subscription list for a single shilling: not a faith which sings —

***“Fly abroad thou mighty Gospel.”  
but never lends a bit of down to make a feather for its wings.***

Let us hear the scripture, as it says, “Hearken! “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, “Hearken!” for you may hear the Sabbath bells ringing in the everlasting peace, and angel songs welcoming the reign of grace over all nations. Let the ears of deaf unbelief be unstopped, for the whole earth echoes with the praises of the Lord. Say not that the day is distant. Hearken! Let faith be the listener, and she will hear across the ages which divide us from the gladsome period. Then shall you listen all day and all night long for many a year, but never hear the roll of drum or roar of cannon. Hearken! Ye shall hear from the islands of the sea, and from the once benighted continents, psalms and hymns, and holy songs, ascending unto the one Jehovah and to his Christ. Hearken! for ears were never gladdened with sweeter music.

Then look! till you see the temples of false gods crumbling into dust. See how the shrines are tottering, and the idols breaking as though smitten

with a rod of iron. Mohammed's crescent wanes, never to wax again; and she, of the Seven Hills, is hated of the kings, and they burn her with fire. "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth! "Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. They fall! They fall! They are as the slain. The day breaketh, and the shadows flee away. O ye watchers that look for the dawning, fall not asleep through sorrowful weariness. The morning cometh. It shall not tarry. Do you doubt it? Know ye not that the Lord reigneth? Is he not the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." If you doubt it, dissolve your Missionary Society, and do not pretend to do a work in which you have no faith; but if you believe in the triumph of God's work, and that you are called to it, behave worthily to so divine an enterprise. God do so to you as you deal with him in this matter. Amen.

# A GREATER THAN SOLOMON

## SERMON NO. 1600

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING,  
FEBRUARY 6TH, 1881,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

*“Behold a greater than Solomon is here” — ~~John~~ Luke 11:31.*

OUR FIRST thought is that no mere man would have said this concerning himself unless he had been altogether eaten up with vanity; for Solomon was among the Jews the very ideal of greatness and wisdom. It would be an instance of the utmost self-conceit if any mere man were to say of himself — “A greater than Solomon is here.” Any person who was really greater and wiser than Solomon would be the last man to claim such preeminence. A wise man would never think of it; a prudent man would never say it. The Lord Jesus Christ, if we regard Him as a mere man, would have never uttered such an expression, for a more modest, self-forgetting man was never found in all our race. View it on the supposition that the Christ of Nazareth was a mere man, and I say that His whole conduct was totally different from the spirit which would have suggested an utterance like this — “A greater Solomon is here.” For men to compare themselves with one another is not wise, and Christ was wise; it is not humble, and Christ was humble. He would not have thus spoken if there had not been cause and reason in His infinitely glorious nature. It was because the divinity within Him must speak out. For God to say that He is greater than all His creatures is no boasting; for what are they in His sight? All worlds are but sparks from the anvil of His omnipotence. Space, time, eternity, all these are as nothing before Him; and for Him to compare or even to contrast Himself with one of His own creatures is supreme condescension, let Him word the comparison how He may. It was the divine within our Lord which made Him say — and not even then with a view to exalt Himself, but with a view to point the moral that He was

trying to bring before the people — “A greater than Solomon is here.” He did as good as say, “‘The queen of the south came from a distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but you refuse to hear me. She gave attention to a man, but you will not regard your God. You will not listen to me incarnate Deity who tells you words of infinite, infallible wisdom.’” Our Lord Jesus is aiming at His hearers’ good, and where the motive is so disinterested there remains no room for criticism. He tells them that He is greater than Solomon, to convince them of the greatness of their crime in refusing to listen to the messages of love with which His lips were loaded. Foreigners came from afar to Solomon; but I, says He, have come to your door, and brought infinite wisdom into your very gates, and yet you refuse me. Therefore the queen of the south shall rise up in judgment against you, for, in rejecting me, you reject a greater than Solomon.

The second thought that comes to one’s mind is this: notice the self-consciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He knows who He is, and what He is, and He is not lowly in spirit because He is ignorant of His own greatness. He was meek and lowly in heart — “*Servus servorum*,” as the Latins were wont to call Him, “Servant of servants,” but all the while He knew that He was *Rex regum*, or King of kings. He takes a towel and He washes His disciples’ feet; but all the while He knows that He is their Master and their Lord. He associates with publicans and harlots, and dwells with the common people; but all the while He knows that He is the only begotten of the Father. He sits as a child, in the temple hearing and asking questions of the rabbis; He stands among His disciples as though He were one of themselves, conversing with the ignorant and foolish of the day, seeking their good; but He knows that He is not one of them; He knows that He has nothing to learn from them: He knows that he is able to teach senates and to instruct kings and philosophers, for he is greater than Solomon. He wears a peasant’s garb, and has not where to lay His head; but He knows that, whatever the lowliness of His condition, He is greater than Solomon; He lets us perceive that he knows it, that all may understand the love which brought Him down so low. It is grand humility on Christ’s part that He condescends to be our servant, our Savior, when He is so great that the greatest of men are as nothing before Him. “He counted it not robbery to be equal with God”: mark that; and yet “He made himself of no reputation.” Some people do

not know their own worth, and so, when they stoop to a lowly office it is no stoop to their minds, for they do not know their own abilities. They do not know to what they are equal; but Christ did know: He knew all about His own Deity, and His own wisdom and greatness as man. I admire, therefore, the clear understanding which sparkles in His deep humiliation, like a gem in a dark mine. He is not one who stoops down according to the old rhyme —

As needs he must who cannot sit upright; but He is One who comes down wittingly from His throne of glory, marking each step and fully estimating the descent which He is making. The cost of our redemption was known to Him, and He endured the cross, despising the shame. Watts well sings

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*This was compassion like a God,  
That when the Savior knew  
The price of pardon was his blood,  
His pity ne'er withdrew.*

Brethren, if our Savior Himself said that He was greater than Solomon, you and I must fully believe it, enthusiastically own it, and prepare to proclaim it. If others will not own it, let us be the more prompt to confess it. If He Himself had to say, before they would own it, “A greater than Solomon is here,” let it not be necessary that the encomium should be repeated, but let us all confess that He is indeed greater than Solomon. Let us go home with this resolve in our minds, that we will speak greater things of Christ than we have done, that we will try to love Him more and serve Him better, and make Him in our own estimation and in the world’s greater than He has ever been. Oh for a glorious high throne to set Him on, and a crown of stars to place upon His head! Oh to bring nations to His feet! I know my words cannot honor Him according to His merits: I wish they could. I am quite sure to fail in my own judgment when telling out His excellence; indeed, I grow less and less satisfied with my thoughts and language concerning Him. He is too glorious for my feeble language to describe Him. If I could speak with the tongues of men and of angels, I could not speak worthily of Him. If I could borrow all the harmonies of heaven, and enlist every harp and song of the glorified, yet were not the music sweet enough for His praises. Our glorious Redeemer is ever blessed: let us bless Him. He is to be extolled above the highest heavens;

let us sound forth His praises. Oh for a well-tuned harp! May the Spirit of God help both heart and lip to extol Him at this hour.

First, then, we shall try to draw a parallel between Jesus and Solomon; and, secondly, we will break away from all comparisons, and show where there cannot be any parallel between Christ and Solomon at all.

**I.** First, then, BETWEEN CHRIST AND SOLOMON there are some points of likeness.

When the Savior Himself gives us a comparison it is a clear proof that a likeness was originally intended by the Holy Spirit, and therefore we may say without hesitation that Solomon was meant to be a type of Christ. I am not going into detail, nor am I about to refine upon small matters; but I shall give you five points in which Solomon was conspicuously like to Christ, and in which our Lord was greater than Solomon. O for help in the great task before me.

And, first, in wisdom. Whenever you talked about Solomon to a Jew his eyes began to flash with exultation; his blood leaped in his veins with national pride. Solomon — that name brought to mind the proudest time of David's dynasty, the age of gold. Solomon, the magnificent, why, surely, his name crowns Jewish history with glory, and the brightest beam of that glory is his wisdom. In the east, and I think I may say in the west, it still remains a proverb, "To be as wise as Solomon." No modern philosopher or learned monarch has ever divided the fame of the son of David, whose name abides as the synonym of wisdom. Of no man since could it be said as of him, "And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart." He intermeddled with all knowledge, and was a master in all sciences. He was a naturalist: "and he spoke of trees from the cedar trees that are in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." He was an engineer and architect, for he wrote: "I made me great works; I built me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees." He was one who understood the science of government — politician of the highest order.

He was everything, in fact. God gave him wisdom and largeness of heart, says the Scripture, like the sand of the sea: “and Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezralite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.” Yes; but our Savior knows infinitely more than Solomon. I want you tonight to come to Him just as the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, only for weightier reasons. You do not want to learn anything concerning architecture or navigation, agriculture or anatomy. You want to know only how you shall be built up a spiritual house, and how you shall cross those dangerous seas which lie between this land and the celestial city. Well, you may come to Jesus and He will teach you all that you need to know, for all wisdom is in Christ. Our divine Savior knows things past and present and future: the secrets of God are with Him. He knows the inmost heart of God, for no one knoweth the Father save the Son and He to whom the Son shall reveal Him. To Him it is given to take the book of prophetic decree and loose the seven seals thereof. Come, then, to Christ Jesus if you want to know the mind of God, for it is written that He “is made unto us wisdom.” Solomon might have wisdom, but he could not be wisdom to others; Christ Jesus is that to the full. In the multifarious knowledge which He possesses — the universal knowledge which is stored up in Him — there is enough for your guidance and instruction even to the end of life, however intricate and overshadowed your path may be.

Solomon proved his wisdom in part by his remarkable inventions. We cannot tell what Solomon did not know. At any rate, no man knows at this present moment how those huge stones, which have lately been discovered, which were the basis of the ascent by which Solomon went up to the house of the Lord, were ever put into their places. Many of the stones of Solomon’s masonry are so enormous that scarcely could any modern machinery move them; and without the slightest cement they are put together so exactly that the blade of a knife could not be inserted between them. It is marvelous how the thing was done. How such great stones were brought from their original bed in the quarry — how the whole building of the temple was executed — nobody knows. The castings in brass and silver are scarcely less remarkable. No doubt many inventions

have passed away from the knowledge of modern times, inventions as remarkable as those of our own age. We are a set of savages that are beginning to learn something, but Solomon knew and invented things which we shall, perhaps, rediscover in 500 years time. By vehement exertion this boastful nineteenth century, wretched century as it is, will crawl towards the wisdom which Solomon possessed ages ago. Yet is Jesus greater than Solomon. As for inventions, Solomon is no inventor at all compared with Him who said, "Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom." O Savior, didst thou find out the way of our salvation? Didst thou bring into the world and carry out and execute the way by which hell-gate should be closed, and heaven-gate, once barred, should be set wide open? Then, indeed, art thou wiser than Solomon. Thou art the deviser of salvation, the architect of the church, the author and finisher of our faith.

Solomon has left us some very valuable books — the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the matchless Song. But, oh, the words of Solomon fall far short of the words of Jesus Christ, for they are spirit and life.. The power of the word of Jesus is infinitely greater than all the deep sayings of the sage. Proverbial wisdom cannot match His sayings, nor can "The Preacher" rival His sermons, and even the divine Song itself would remain without a meaning — an allegory never to be explained — if it were not that Christ Himself is the sum and substance of it. Solomon may sing of Christ, but Christ is the substance of the song. He is greater than Solomon in His teachings, for His wisdom is from above, and leads men up to heaven. Blessed are they that sit at His feet.

Again, Solomon showed His wisdom in difficult judgments. You know how he settled the question between the two women concerning the child; many other puzzles Solomon solved, and many other knots Solomon was able to untie. He was a great ruler and governor — a man wise in politics, in social economy, and in commerce — wise in all human respects. But a greater than Solomon is present where Christ is. There is no difficulty which Christ cannot remove, no knot which He cannot untie, no question which He cannot answer. You may bring your hard questions to Him, and He will answer them; and if you have any difficulty on your heart tonight, do but resort to the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer, and search His word, and



you shall hear a voice as from the sacred oracle, which shall lead you in the path of safety.

My point at this time, especially as we are coming to the Communion table, is this: I want you that love the Lord Jesus Christ to believe in His infinite wisdom, and come to Him for direction. I fear that when you are in trouble, you half suppose that the great keeper of Israel must have made a mistake. You get into such an intricate path that you say, "Surely, my Shepherd has not guided me aright." Never think so. When you are poor and needy still say, "This my poverty was ordained by a greater than Solomon." What if you seem to be deprived of every comfort, and you are brought into a strange and solitary way, where you find no city to dwell in? Yet a guide is near, and that guide is not foolish; but a greater than Solomon is here. I think I look tonight into a great furnace. It is so fierce that I cannot bear to gaze into its terrible blaze. For fear my eyeballs should utterly fail me and lose the power of sight through the glare of that tremendous flame, I turn aside, for the fury of its flame overpowers me. But when I am strengthened to look again I see ingots of silver refining in the white heat, and I note that the heat is tempered to the last degree of nicety. I watch the process to the end, and I say, as I behold those ingots brought out all clear and pure, refined from all dross, and ready for the heavenly treasury, "Behold, a greater than Solomon was in that furnace work." So you will find it, O sufferer. Infinite wisdom is in your lot. Come, poor child, do not begin to interfere with your Savior's better judgment, but let it order all things. Do not let your little "Know" ever rise up against the great knowledge of your dear Redeemer. Think of this when you wade in deep waters and comfortably whisper to yourself — "A greater than Solomon is here."

I have not time to enlarge, and therefore I would have you notice, next, that our Lord Jesus Christ is greater than Solomon in wealth. This was one of the things for which Solomon was noted. He had great treasures: he "made gold to be as stones, and as for silver it was little accounted of," so rich did he become. He had multitudes of servants. I think he had 60,000 hewers in the mountains hewing out stones and wood, so numerous were the workmen he employed. His court was magnificent to the last degree. When you read of the victuals that were prepared to feed the court, and of the stately way in which everything was arranged from the stables of the

horses upwards to the ivory throne, you feel, like the queen of Sheba, utterly astonished, and say, "The half was not told me." But, oh, when you consider all the wealth of Solomon, what poor stuff it is compared with the riches that are treasured up in Christ Jesus. Beloved, He who died upon the cross, and was indebted to a friend for a grave; He who was stripped even to the last rag ere He died; He who possessed no wealth but that of sorrow and sympathy, yet had about Him the power to make many rich, and He has made multitudes rich — rich to all the intents of everlasting bliss; and therefore He must be rich Himself. Is He not rich who enriches millions? Why, our Lord Jesus Christ, even by a word, comforted those that were bowed down. When He stretched out His hand He healed the sick with a touch. There was a wealth about His every movement. He was a full man, full of all that man could desire to be full of; and now, seeing that He has died and risen again, there is in Him a wealth of pardoning love, a wealth of saving power, a wealth of intercessory might before the Father's throne, a wealth of all things by which He enriches the sons of men, and shall enrich them to all eternity.

I want this truth to come home to you: I want you to recognize the riches of Christ, you that are His people; and, in addition, to remember the truth of our hymn —

*Since Christ is rich can I be poor?  
What can I want besides?*

I wish we could learn to reckon what we are by what Christ is. An old man said, "I am very old; I have lost my only son; I am penniless; and, worst of all, I am blind. But," added he, "this does not matter, for Christ is not infirm; Christ is not aged; Christ has all riches; and Christ is not blind; and Christ is mine; and I have all things in Him." Could you not get hold of that somehow, brothers and sisters? Will not the Holy Spirit teach you the art of appropriating the Lord Jesus and all that He is and has. If Christ be your representative, why, then you are rich in Him. Go to Him to be enriched. Suppose I were to meet a woman, and I knew her husband to be a very wealthy man, and that he loved her very much, and she were to say to me, "I am dreadfully poor; I do not know where to get raiment and food." "Oh," I should say, "That woman is out of her mind." If she has such a husband, surely she has only to go to him for all that she needs.

And what if nothing is invested in her name, yet it is in his name, and they are one, and he will deny her nothing." I should say, "My good woman, you must not talk in that fashion, or I will tell your husband of you." Well, I think that I shall have to say the same of you who are so very poor and cast down, and yet are married to Jesus Christ. I shall have to tell your Husband of you, that you bring such complaints against Him, for all things are yours, for ye are Christ's and Christ is God's; wherefore, "lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees"; use the knees of prayer and the hand of faith, and your estate will well content you. Do not think, that you are married to Rehoboam, who will beat you with scorpions, for you are joined to a greater than Solomon. Do not fancy that your heavenly Bridegroom is a beggar. All the wealth of eternity and infinity is His; how can you say that you are poor while all that He has is yours?

Now, thirdly, and very briefly indeed. There was one point about Solomon in which every Israelite rejoiced, namely that he was the prince of peace. His name signifies peace. His father, David, was a great warrior, but Solomon had not to carry on war. His power was such that no one dared to venture upon a conflict with so great and potent a monarch. Every man throughout Israel sat under his vine and figtree, and no man was afraid. No trumpet of invader was heard in the land. Those were halcyon days for Israel when Solomon reigned. Ah, but in that matter a greater than Solomon is here; for Solomon could not give his subjects peace of mind, he could not bestow upon them rest of heart, he could not ease them of their burden of guilt, or draw the arrow of conviction from their breast and heal its smart. But I preach to you tonight that blessed divine Man of Sorrows who has wrought out our redemption, and who is greater than Solomon in His peace-giving power. Oh, come and trust Him. Then shall your "peace be as a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea." Am I addressing one of God's people who is sorely troubled, tumbled up and down in his thoughts? Brother or sister, do not think that you must wait a week or two before you can recover your peace. You can become restful in a moment, for "He is our peace" — even He Himself, and He alone. And, oh, if you will but take Him at once, laying hold upon Him by the hand of faith as your Savior, this Man shall be the peace even when the Assyrian shall come into the land. There is no peace like the

peace which Jesus gives; it is like a river, deep, profound, renewed, ever flowing, overflowing, increasing and widening into an ocean of bliss. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and mind, through Jesus Christ." Oh, come to Him. Come to Him at this moment. Do not remain an hour away from your Noah, or rest, for with Him in the ark your weary wing shall be tired no longer. You shall be safe and restful the moment you return to Him. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. I want you to get that joy and to enter into this peace. Blessed combination, joy and peace! Peace, peace, there is music in the very word: get it from Him who is the Word, and whose voice can still a storm into a calm. A greater than Solomon is here to give you that peace; beat the sword of your inward warfare, into the plow-share of holy service; no longer sound an alarm, but blow up the trumpet of peace in this day of peace.

A fourth thing for which Solomon was noted was his great works. Solomon built the temple; which was one of the seven wonders of the world in its time. A very marvelous building it must have been, but I will not stay to describe it, for time fails us. In addition to this he erected for himself palaces, constructed fortifications, and made aqueducts and great pools to bring streams from the mountains to the various towns. He also founded Palmyra and Baalbed — those cities of the desert — to facilitate his commerce with India, Arabia, and other remote regions. He was a marvelous man. Earth has not seen his like. And yet a greater than Solomon is here, for Christ has brought the living water from the throne of God right down to thirsty men, being Himself the eternal aqueduct through which the heavenly current streams. Christ has built fortresses and munitions of defense, behind which His children stand secure against the wrath of hell; and He has founded and is daily finishing a wondrous temple, His church, of which His people are the living stones, fashioned, polished, rendered beautiful — a temple which God Himself shall inhabit, for He "dwelleth not in temples made with hands, that is to say, of this building"; but He dwells in a temple which He Himself doth pile, of which Christ is architect and builder, foundation, and chief corner-stone. But Jesus builds for eternity, an everlasting temple, and, when all visible things pass away, and the very ruins of Solomon's temple and Solomon's aqueduct are scarcely to be discerned, what a sight will be seen in that New Jerusalem! The twelve courses of its foundations are of precious

stones, its walls bedight with diamonds rare, its streets are paved with gold, and its glory surpasses that of the sun. I am but talking figures, poor figures, too; for the glory of the city of God is spiritual, and where shall I find words with which to depict it? There, where the Lamb Himself is the light, and the Lord God Himself doth dwell — there the whole edifice, the entire New Jerusalem — shall be to the praise and the glory of His grace who gave Jesus Christ to be the builder of the house of His glory, of which I hope we shall form a part for ever and ever.

Now, if Christ does such great works, I want you to come to Him, that He may work in you the work of God. That is the point. Come and trust Him at once. Trust Him to build you up. Come and trust Him to bring the living water to your lips. Come and trust Him to make you a temple of the living God. Come, dear child of God, if you have great works to do, come and ask for the power of Christ with which to perform them. Come, you that would leave some memorial to the honor of the divine name, come to Him to teach and strengthen you. He is the wise master-builder; come and be workers together with Christ. Baptize your weakness into His infinite strength, and you shall be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His mind. God help you to do so.

Once more. I draw the parallel upon the fifth point, and I have done with it. Solomon was great as to dominion. The kingdom of the Jews was never anything like the size before or after that Solomon made it. It appears to have extended from the river of Egypt right across the wilderness far up to the Persian Gulf. We can scarcely tell how far Solomon's dominions reached; they are said to have been "from sea to sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the earth." By one mode or another he managed to bring various kings into subjection to him, and he was the greatest monarch that ever swayed the scepter of Judah. It has all gone now. Poor, feeble Rehoboam dropped from his foolish hands the reins his father held. The kingdom was rent in pieces, the tributary princes found their liberty, and the palmy days of Israel were over. On the contrary, our Lord Jesus Christ at this moment has dominion over all things. God has set Him over all the works of His hands. Ay, tell it out among the heathen that the Lord reigneth. The feet that were nailed to the tree are set upon the necks of His enemies. The hands that bore the nails sway at this moment the scepter of all words: Jesus is King of kings, and Lord of lords! Hallelujah! Let

universal sovereignty be ascribed to the Son of man: to Him who was “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Tell it out, ye saints, for your own comfort. The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof Everything that happens in providence is under His sway still, and the time is coming when a moral and spiritual kingdom will be set up by Him which shall encompass the whole world. It does not look like it, does it? All these centuries have passed away, and little progress has been made. Ah, but He cometh; and when He cometh, or ere He cometh, He shall overturn, overturn, overturn, for His right it is, and God will give it Him. And, as surely as God lives, unto Him shall every man bow the knee, “and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Do not be afraid about it. Do not measure difficulties, much less tremble at them. What is faith made for but to believe that which seems impossible? To expect universal dominion for Christ when everything goes well is but the expectation of reason; but to expect it when everything goes ill, is the triumph of Abrahamic confidence. Look upon the great mountain and say, “Who art thou, O great mountain? Before the true Zerubbabel thou shall become a plain.” In the blackest midnight, when the ebon darkness stands thick and hard as granite before you, believe that, at the mystic touch of Christ, the whole of it shall pass away, and at the brightness of His rising the eternal light shall dawn, never to be quenched. This is to act the part of a believer; and I ask you to act that part, and believe to the full in Christ the Omnipotent. What means this stinted faith in an almighty arm? What a fidget we are in and what a worry seizes us if a little delay arises! Everything has to be done in the next ten minutes, or we count our Lord to be slack. Is this the part of wisdom? The Eternal has infinite leisure, who are we that we should hasten Him?

*His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour.*

A day is long to us: but a thousand years to Him are but the twinkling of a star. Oh, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, for the time shall come when the God of Israel shall put to rout His adversaries, and the Christ of the cross shall be the Christ of the crown. We shall one day hear it said — The great Shepherd reigns; and His unsuffering kingdom now hath come, Then rocks and hills, and vales and islands of the sea shall all

be vocal with the one song, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor and glory and power and dominion and might forever and ever!”

Thus have I tried to draw the parallel, but I pray you to see the Lord Jesus for yourself, and know whether I have spoken the truth about Him. You have heard the report; now, like the Queen of Sheba, go and see for yourself. Get to Christ, as to His dominion, come under His sway and own His scepter. Go and trust your King; love your King; praise your King; delight in your King. How courtiers delight to be summoned to court! How glad they are to see the queen’s face. How pleased they are if she gives them but a kindly word! Surely, their fortune is made, or at least their hopes are raised and their spirits lifted up. Shall we not sun ourselves in the presence of the blessed and only Potentate? Let us come into the presence of our King tonight, or else let us sit here and weep. Let us come to His table to feed upon Himself. Let us live on His Word. Let us delight in His love; and we shall surely say, “A greater than Solomon is here.”

**II.** I shall not detain you longer than a minute or two while I remark that we must rise beyond all parallels, if we would reach the height of this great argument, for BETWEEN CHRIST AND SOLOMON THERE IS MUCH MORE CONTRAST THAN COMPARISON — much more difference than likeness.

In His nature the Lord Jesus is greater than Solomon. Alas, poor Solomon! The strongest man that ever lived, namely, Samson, was the weakest of men; and the wisest man that ever lived, was, perhaps, the greatest, certainly the most conspicuous, fool. How different is our Lord! There is no infirmity in Christ, no folly in the incarnate God. The backsliding of Solomon finds no parallel in Jesus, in whom the prince of this world found nothing though he searched Him through and through.

Our Lord is greater than Solomon because He is not mere man. He is man, perfect man, man to the utmost of manhood, sin excepted; but still He is more, and infinitely more, than man. “In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” He is God Himself, “The Word was God.” God dwells in Him, and He Himself is God.

As in nature He was infinitely superior to Solomon, and not to be compared with him for a moment, so was He in character. Look at Christ and Solomon for a minute as to real greatness of character, and you can

hardly see Solomon with a microscope, while Christ rises grandly before you, growing every moment till He fills the whole horizon of your admiration. Principally let me note the point of self-sacrifice. Jesus lived entirely for other people; He had never a thought about Himself. Solomon was, to a great extent, wise unto himself, rich unto himself, strong unto himself; and you see in those great palaces, and in all their arrangements, that he seeks his own pleasure, honor, and emolument; and, alas! that seeking of pleasure leads him into sin, that sin into a still greater one. Solomon, wonderful as he is, only compels you to admire him for his greatness, but you do not admire him for his goodness. You see nothing that makes you love him, you rather tremble before him than feel gladdened by him. Oh, but look at Christ. He does not have a thought for Himself. He lives for others. How grandly magnificent He is in disinterested love. He “loved his church and gave himself it.” He pours out even His heart’s blood for the good of men: and hence, dear friends, at this moment our blessed Lord is infinitely superior to Solomon in His influence. Solomon has little or no influence today. Even in his own time he never commanded the influence that Christ had in His deepest humiliation. I do not hear of any that were willing to die for Solomon; certainly nobody would do so now. But how perpetually is enthusiasm kindled in 10,000 breasts for Christ! They say that if again there were stakes in Smithfield we should not find men to burn at them for Christ. I tell you, it is not so. The Lord Jesus Christ has at this moment a remnant according to the election of His grace who would fling themselves into a pit of fire for Him, and joy to do it. “Who can separate us” — even us poor pygmies — “from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” “Oh,” says one, “I do not think I could suffer martyrdom.” You are not yet called to do so, my brother, and God has not given You the strength to do it before the need arises; but you will have strength enough if ever it comes to your lot to die for Jesus. Did you never hear of the martyr who, the night before he was to be burnt, sat opposite the fire, and, taking his shoe off, he held his foot close to the flame till he began to feel the burning of it? He drew it back and said, “I see God does not give me power to bear such suffering as I put upon myself, but I make none the less doubt,” said he, “that I shall very well stand the stake tomorrow morning, and burn quick to the death for Christ without starting back.” And so he did, for he was noticed never to stir at all while the flames were



consuming him. There is a great deal of difference between your strength today and what your strength would be if you were called to some tremendous work or suffering. My Lord and Master, let me tell you, wakes more enthusiasm in human breasts at this moment than any other name in the universe. Napoleon once said, "I founded a kingdom upon force, and it will pass away"; but "Christ founded a kingdom upon love, and it will last forever and ever." And so it will. Blot out the name of Christ from the hearts of His people? Strike you sun from the firmament, and quench the stars; and when you have achieved that easy task, yet have you not begun to remove the glory of the indwelling Christ from the hearts of His people. Some of us delight to think that we bear in our body the marks of the Lord Jesus. "Where?" says one. I answer, it is all over us. We have been buried into His name, and we belong to Him, in spirit, soul, and body. That watermark, which denotes that we are His, can never be taken out of us. We are dead with Him, wherein also we were buried with Him and are risen again with Him; and there is nothing at this moment that stirs our soul like the name of Jesus. Speak for yourselves. Is it not so? Have you never heard of one who lay dying, his mind wandering, and his wife said to him, "My dear, do you not know me?" He shook his head; and they brought near his favorite child. "Do you not know me?" He shook his head. One whispered, "Do you know the lord Jesus Christ?" and he said, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." Oh, blessed name! Blessed name! Some years ago I was away from this place for a little rest, and I was thinking to myself, "Now, I wonder whether I really respond to the power of the gospel as I should like to do? I will go and hear a sermon and see." I would like to sit down with you, in the pews sometimes and hear somebody else preach — not everybody, mark you, for when I hear a good many I want to be doing it myself. I get tired of them if they do not glow and burn. But that morning I thought I would drop into a place of worship such as there might be in the little town. A poor, plain man, a countryman, began preaching about Jesus Christ. He praised my Master in very humble language, but he praised Him most sincerely. Oh, but the tears began to flow. I soon laid the dust all round me where I sat, and I thought, "Bless the Lord! I do love Him." It only wants somebody else to play the harp instead of me, and my soul is ready to dance to the heavenly tune. Only let the music be Christ's sweet, dear, precious name, and my heart leaps at the sound. Oh, my brethren, sound out the praises of Jesus

Christ! Sound out that precious name! There is none like it under heaven to stir my heart. I hope you can all say the same. I know you can if you love Him; for all renewed hearts are enamored of the sweet Lord Jesus. “A greater than Solomon is here.” Solomon has no power over your hearts, but Jesus has. His influence is infinitely greater; his power to bless is infinitely greater; and so let us magnify and adore Him with all our hearts.

Oh, that all loved Him! Alas that so many do not! What strange monsters! Why, if you do not love Christ, what are you at? You hearts of stone, will you not break? If His dying love does not break them, what will? If you cannot see the beauties of Jesus, what can you see? You blind bats! O you that know not the music of His name, you are deaf. O you that do not rejoice in Him, you are dead. What are you at, that you are spared through the pleadings of His love, and yet do not love Him? God have mercy upon you, and bring you to delight yourselves in Christ, and trust him! As for us who do trust Him, we mean to love Him and delight in Him more and more, world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~300~~ Colossians 1.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 390, 389, 416.

# FARM LABORERS

## SERMON NO. 1602

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry.” — ~~4186~~ 1 Corinthians 3:6-9.

I SHALL begin at the end of my text, because I find it to be the easiest way of mapping out my discourse. We shall first remark that the church is God’s farm: “Ye are God’s husbandry.” In the margin of the revised version we read, “Ye are God’s tilled ground,” and that is the very expression for me. “Ye are God’s tilled ground,” or farm. After we have spoken of the farm we will next say a little upon the fact that the Lord employs laborers on his estate; and when we have looked at the laborers — such poor fellows as they are — we will remember that God himself is the great worker: “We are laborers together with God.”

**I.** We begin by considering that THE CHURCH IS GOD’S FARM. The Lord has made the church his own by his sovereign choice. He has also secured it unto himself by purchase, having paid for it a price immense. “The Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.” Every acre of God’s farm cost the Savior a bloody sweat, yea, the blood of his heart. He loved us, and gave himself for us: that is the price he paid. Henceforth the church is God’s freehold, and he holds the title deeds of it. It is our joy to feel that we are not our own, we are bought with a price. The church is God’s farm by choice and purchase.

And now he has made it his by enclosure. It lay exposed aforetime as part of an open common, bare and barren, covered with thorns and thistles, and the haunt of every wild beast; for we were “by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” Divine foreknowledge surveyed the waste, and

electing love marked out its portion with a full line of grace, and thus set us apart to be the Lord's own estate for ever. In due time effectual grace came forth with power, and separated us from the rest of mankind, as fields are hedged and ditched to part them from the open heath. Hath not the Lord declared that he hath chosen his vineyard and fenced it?

*“We are a garden wall'd around,  
Chosen and made peculiar ground;  
A little spot, enclosed by grace  
Out of the world's wide wilderness.”*

The Lord has also made this farm evidently his own by cultivation. What more could he have done for his farm? He has totally changed the nature of the soil: from being barren he hath made it a fruitful land. He hath ploughed it, and digged it, and fattened it, and watered it, and planted it with all manner of flowers and fruits. It hath already brought forth to him many a pleasant cluster, and there are brighter times to come, when angels shall shout the harvest home, and Christ “shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”

This farm is preserved by the Lord's continual protection. Not only did he enclose it, and cultivate it by his miraculous power, to make it his own farm, but he continually maintains possession of it. “I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” If it were not for God's continual power her hedges would soon be thrown down, and wild beasts would devour her fields. Wicked hands are always trying to break down her walls and lay her waste again, so that there should be no true church in the world; but the Lord is jealous for his land, and will not allow it to be destroyed. A church would not long remain a church if God did not preserve it unto himself. What if God should say, “I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down”? What a wilderness it would become. What saith he? “Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.” Go ye to Jerusalem, where of old was the city of his glory and the shrine of his indwelling, and what is left there to-day? Go ye to Rome, where once Paul preached the gospel with power: what is it now but the center of idolatry? The Lord may remove the candlestick, and leave a place

that was bright as day to become black as darkness itself. Hence God's farm remains a farm because he is ever in it to prevent its returning to its former wildness. Omnipotent power is as needful to keep the fields of the church under cultivation as to reclaim them at the first.

Inasmuch as the church is God's own farm, he expects to receive a harvest from it. The world is waste, and he looks for nothing from it; but we are tilled land, and therefore a harvest is due from us. Barrenness suits the moorland, but to a farm it would be a great discredit. Love looks for returns of love; grace given demands gracious fruit. Watered with the drops of the Savior's bloody sweat, shall we not bring forth a hundredfold to his praise? Kept by the eternal Spirit of God, shall there not be produced in us fruits to his glory? The Lord's husbandry upon us has shown a great expenditure of cost, and labor, and thought; ought there not to be a proportionate obedience, a harvest of holiness, a harvest of usefulness, a harvest of praise? Shall it not be so? I think some churches forget that an increase is expected from every field of the Lord's farm, for they never have a harvest or even look for one. Farmers do not plough their lands or sow their fields for amusement; they mean business, and plough and sow because they desire a harvest. If this fact could but enter into the heads of some professors, surely they would look at things in a different light; but of late it has seemed as if we thought that God's church was not expected to produce anything, but existed for her own comfort and personal benefit. Brethren, it must not be so; the great Husbandman must have some reward for his husbandry. Every field must yield its increase, and the whole estate must bring forth to his praise. We join with the bride in the Song in saying, "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred."

But I come back to the place from which I started. This farm is, by choice, by purchase, by enclosure, by cultivation, by preservation, entirely the Lord's. See, then, the injustice of allowing any of the laborers to call even a part of the estate his own. When a great man has a large farm of his own, what would he think if Hodge the ploughman should say, "Look here, I plough this farm, and therefore it is mine: I shall call this field Hodge's Acres"? "No," says Hobbs, "I reaped that land last harvest, and therefore it is mine, and I shall call it Hobbs's Field." What if all the other laborers became Hodgeites and Hobbsites, and so parcelled out the farm among

them? I think the landlord would soon eject the lot of them. The farm belongs to its owner, and let it be called by his name; but it is absurd to call it by the names of the men who labor upon it. Shall insignificant nobodies rob God of his glory? Remember how Paul put it: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos?" "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" The entire church belongs to him who has chosen it in his sovereignty, bought it with his blood, fenced it by his grace, cultivated it by his wisdom, and preserved it by his power. There is but one church on the face of the earth, and those who love the Lord should keep this truth in mind. Paul is a laborer, Apollos is a laborer, Cephas is a laborer; but the farm is not Paul's, not so much as a rood of it, nor does a single parcel of land belong to Apollos, or the smallest allotment to Cephas; for "Ye are Christ's." The fact is that in this case the laborers belong to the land, and not the land to the laborers: "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas." "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

**II.** We have not to notice, as our second head, that THE GREAT HUSBANDMAN EMPLOYS LABORERS. By human agency God ordinarily works out his designs. He can, if he pleases, by his Holy Spirit get directly at the hearts of men, but that is his business, and not ours; we have to do with such words as these: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The Master's commission is not, "Sit still and see the Spirit of God convert the nations;" but, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Observe God's method in supplying the race with food. In answer to the prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," he might have bidden the clouds drop manna, morning by morning, at each man's door; but he sees that it is for our good to work, and so he uses the hands of the ploughman and the sower for our supply. God might cultivate his chosen farm, the church, by miracle, or by angels; but in great condescension he blesses her through her own sons and daughters. He employs us for our own good; for we who are laborers in his fields receive much more good for ourselves than we bestow. Labour develops our spiritual muscle and keeps us in health. "Unto me," says Paul, "who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Our great Master means that every laborer on his farm should receive some benefit from it, for he never muzzles the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. The labourer's daily bread comes out of the soil. Though he works not for himself, but for his Master, yet still he has his portion of food. In the Lord's granary there is seed for the sower, but there is also bread for the eater. However disinterestedly we may serve God in the husbandry of his church we are ourselves partakers of the fruit. It is a great condescension on God's part that he uses us at all, for we are poor tools at the best, and more hindrance than help.

The laborers employed by God are all occupied upon needful work. Notice: "I have planted, Apollos watered." Who beat the big drum, or blew his own trumpet? Nobody. On God's farm none are kept for ornamental purposes. I have read some sermons which could only have been meant for show, for there was not a grain of gospel in them. They were ploughs with the share left out, drills with no wheat in the box, clod-crushers made of butter. I do not believe that our God will ever pay wages to men who only walk about his grounds to show themselves. Orators who display their eloquence in the pulpit are more like gipsies who stray on the farm to pick up chickens, than honest laborers who work to bring forth a crop for their master. Many of the members of our churches live as if their only business on the farm was to pluck blackberries or gather wild flowers. They are great at finding fault with other people's ploughing and mowing; but not a hand's turn will they do themselves. Come on, my good fellows. Why stand ye all the day idle? The harvest is plenteous, and the laborers are few. You who think yourselves more cultivated than ordinary people, if you are indeed Christians, must not strut about and despise those who are hard at work. If you do, I shall say, "That person has mistaken his master; he may probably be in the employ of some gentleman farmer, who cares more for show than profit; but our great Lord is practical, and on his estate his laborers attend to needful labor." When you and I preach or teach it will be well if we say to ourselves, "What will be the use of what I am going to do? I am about to teach a difficult subject: will it do any good? I have chosen an abstruse point of theology: will it serve any purpose?" Brethren, a laborer may work very hard at a whim of his own, and yet it may be all waste labor. Some discourses do little more than show the difference between tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee, and what

is the use of that? Suppose we sow the fields with sawdust, or sprinkle them with rosewater, what of that? Will God bless our moral essays, and fine compositions, and pretty passages? Brethren, we must aim at usefulness: we must as laborers together with God be occupied with something that is worth doing. “I,” says one, “have planted”: it is well, for planting must be done. “I,” answers another, “have watered:” that also is good and necessary. See to it that ye can each bring in a solid report; but let no man be content with the mere child’s-play of oratory, or the getting up of entertainments and such like.

On the Lord’s farm there is a division of labor. Even Paul did not say, “I have planted and watered.” No, Paul planted. And certainly Apollos could not say, “I have planted as well as watered.” No, it was enough for him to attend to the watering. No man has all gifts. How foolish, then, are they who say, “I enjoy So-and-so’s ministry because he edifies the saints in doctrine; but when he was away the other Sunday I could not profit by the preacher because he was all for the conversion of sinners.” Yes, he was planting; you have been planted a good while, and do not need planting again; but you ought to be thankful that others are made partakers of the benefit. One soweth and another reapeth, and therefore instead of grumbling at the honest ploughman because he did not bring a sickle with him, you ought to have prayed for him that he might have strength to plough deep and break up hard hearts.

Observe that, on God’s farm, there is unity of purpose among the laborers. Read the text. “Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one.” One Master has employed them, and though he may send them out at different times, and to different parts of the farm, yet they are all one in being used for one end, to work for one harvest. In England we do not understand what is meant by watering, because the farmer could not water all his farm; but in the East a farmer waters almost every inch of his ground. He would have no crop if he did not use all means for irrigating the fields. If you have ever been in Italy, Egypt, or Palestine, you will have seen a complete system of wells, pumps, wheels, buckets, channels, little streamlets, pipes, and so on, by which the water is carried all over the garden to every plant, otherwise in the extreme heat of the sun it would be dried up. Planting needs wisdom, watering needs quite as much, and the piecing of these two works together needs that the laborers should be of



one mind. It is a bad thing when laborers are at cross purposes, and work against each other, and this evil is worse in the church than anywhere else. How can I plant with success if my helper will not water what I have planted; or what is the use of my watering if nothing is planted? Husbandry is spoiled when foolish people undertake it, and quarrel over it; for from sowing to reaping the work is one, and all must be done to one end. Let us pull together all our days, for strife brings barrenness.

We are called upon to notice in our text that all the laborers put together are nothing at all. "Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth." The workmen are nothing at all without their master. All the laborers on a farm could not manage it if they had no one at their head, and all the preachers and Christian workers in the world can do nothing unless God be with them. Remember that every laborer on God's farm has derived all his qualifications from God. No man knows how to plant or water souls except the Lord teaches him from day to day. All these holy gifts are grants of free grace. All the laborers work under God's direction and arrangement, or they work in vain. They would not know when or how to do their work if their Master did not guide them by his Spirit, without whose help they cannot even think a good thought. All God's laborers must go to him for their seed, or else they will scatter tares. All good seed comes out of God's granary. If we preach, it must be the true word of God, or nothing can come of it. More than that, all the strength that is in the labourer's arm to sow the heavenly seed must be given by the Master. We cannot preach except God be with us. A sermon is vain talk and dreary word-spinning unless the Holy Spirit enlivens it. He must give us both the preparation of the heart and the answer of the tongue, or we shall be as men who sow the wind. When the good seed is sown the whole success of it rests with God. If he withhold the dew and the rain the seed will never rise from the ground; and unless he shall shine upon it the green ear will never ripen. The human heart will remain barren, even though Paul himself should preach, unless God the Holy Ghost shall work with Paul and bless the word to those that hear it. Therefore, since the increase is of God alone, put the laborers into their place. Do not make too much of us; for when we have done all we are unprofitable servants.

Yet, though inspiration calls the laborers nothing, it says that they shall be rewarded. God works our good works in us, and then rewards us for them.

Here we have mention of a personal service, and a personal reward: "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." The reward is proportionate, not to the success, but to the labor. Many discouraged workers may be comforted by that expression. You are not to be paid by results, but by endeavors. You may have a stiff bit of clay to plough, or a dreary plot of land to sow, where stones, and birds, and thorns, and travelers, and a burning sun may all be leagued against the seed; but you are not accountable for these things; your reward shall be according to your work. Some put a great deal of labor into a little field, and make much out of it. Others use a great deal of labor throughout a long life, and yet they see but small result, for it is written, "One soweth, and another reapeth"; but the reaping man will not get all the reward, the sowing man shall receive his portion of the joy. The laborers are nobodies, but they shall enter into the joy of their Lord.

Unitedly, according to the text, the workers have been successful, and that is a great part of their reward. "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." Frequently brethren say in their prayers, "A Paul may plant, an Apollos may water, but it is all in vain unless God gives the increase." This is quite true; but another truth is too much overlooked, namely, that when Paul plants and Apollos waters, God does give the increase. We do not labor in vain. There would be no increase without God; but then we are not without God: when such men as Paul and Apollos plant and water, there is sure to be an increase; they are the right kind of laborers, they work in a right spirit, and God is certain to bless them. This is a great part of the labourers' wages.

**III.** So much upon the laborers. Now for the main point again. GOD HIMSELF IS THE GREAT WORKER. He may use what laborers he pleases, but the increase comes alone from him. Brethren, you know it is so in natural things: the most skillful farmer cannot make the wheat germinate, and grow, and ripen. He cannot even preserve a single field till harvest time, for the farmer's enemies are many and mighty. In husbandry there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip; and when the farmer thinks, good easy man, that he shall reap his crop, there are blights and mildews lingering about to rob him of his gains. God must give the increase. If any man is dependent on God it is the husbandman, and through him we are all of us dependent upon God from year to year for the food by which we

live. Even the king must live by the produce of the field. God gives the increase in the barn and the hayrick; and in the spiritual farm it is even more so, for what can man do in this business? If any of you think that it is an easy thing to win a soul I should like you to attempt it. Suppose that without divine aid you should try to save a soul — you might as well attempt to make a world. Why, you cannot create a fly, how can you create a new heart and a right spirit? Regeneration is a great mystery, it is out of your reach. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.” What can you and I do in this matter? It is far beyond our line. We can tell out the truth of God; but to apply that truth to the heart and conscience is quite another thing. I have preached Jesus Christ with my whole heart, and yet I know that I have never produced a saving effect upon a single unregenerate man unless the Spirit of God has opened the heart and placed the living seed of truth within it. Experience teaches us this. Equally is it the Lord’s work to keep the seed alive when it springs up. We think we have converts, and we are not long before we are disappointed in them. Many are like blossoms on our apple trees; they are fair to look upon, but they do not come to anything; and others are like the many little apples which fall off long before they have come to any size. He who presides over a great church, and feels an agony for the souls of men, will soon be convinced that if God does not work there will be no work done: we shall see no conversion, no sanctification, no final perseverance, no glory brought to God, no satisfaction for the passion of the Savior, unless the Lord be with us. Well said our Lord, “Without me ye can do nothing.”

Briefly I would draw certain practical lessons out of this important truth: the first is, if the whole farm of the church belongs exclusively to the great Master Worker, and the laborers are worth nothing without him, let this promote unity among all whom he employs. If we are all under one Master, do not let us quarrel. It is a miserable business when we cannot bear to see good being done by those of a different denomination who work in ways of their own. If a new laborer comes on the farm, and he uses a hoe of a new shape, shall I become his enemy? If he does his work better than I do mine, shall I be jealous? Do you not remember reading in the Scriptures that, upon one occasion, the disciples could not cast out a

devil? This ought to have made them humble; but to our surprise we read a few verses further on that they saw one casting out devils in Christ's name, and they forbade him because he followed not with their company. They could not cast out the devil themselves, and they forbade those who could. A certain band of people are going about winning souls, but because they are not doing it in our fashion, we do not like it. It is true they have odd ways; but they do really save souls, and that is the main point. Instead of cavilling, let us encourage all on Christ's side. Wisdom is justified of her children, though some of them are far from handsome. The laborers ought to be satisfied with the new ploughman if their Master smiles upon him. Brother, if the great Lord has employed you, it is no business of mine to question his choice. Can I lend you a hand? Can I show you how to work better? Or can you show me how I can improve? This is the proper behavior of one workman to another.

This truth, however, ought to keep all the laborers very dependent. Are you going to preach, young man? "Yes, I am going to do a great deal of good." Are you? Have you forgotten that you are nothing? "Neither is he that planteth anything." A divine is coming brimful of the gospel to comfort the saints. If he is not coming in strict dependence upon God, he, too, is nothing. "Neither is he that watereth anything." Power belongeth unto God. Man is vanity and his words are wind; to God alone belongeth power and wisdom. If we keep our places in all lowliness our Lord will use us; but if we exalt ourselves he will leave us to our nothingness.


Next notice that this fact ennobles everybody who labors in God's husbandry. My soul is lifted up with joy when I mark these words, "For we are laborers together with God:" mere laborers on his farm, and yet laborers with him. Does the Lord work with us? We know he does by the signs following. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," is language for all the sons of God as well as for the great Firstborn. God is with you, my brethren, when you are serving him with all your heart. Speaking to your class concerning Jesus, it is God that speaks by you; picking up that stranger on the way, and telling him of salvation by faith, Christ is speaking through you even as he spoke with the woman at the well; addressing the rough crowd in the open air, young man, if you are preaching pardon through the atoning blood, it is the God of Peter who is testifying of his Son, even as he did on the day of Pentecost. But, lastly,

how this should drive us to our knees. Since we are nothing without God, let us cry mightily unto him for help in this our holy service. Let both sower and reaper pray together, or they will never rejoice together. If the blessing be withheld, it is because we do not cry for it and expect it.

Brother laborers, come to the mercy-seat, and we shall yet see the reapers return from the fields bringing their sheaves with them, though, perhaps, they went forth weeping to the sowing. To our Father, who is the husbandman, be all glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

# WHAT THE FARM LABORERS CAN DO AND WHAT THEY CANNOT DO

## SERMON NO. 1603

“And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.” —  Mark 5:26-29.

THERE is a lesson for “laborers together with God.” It is a parable for all who are concerned in the kingdom of God. It will be of little value to those who are in the kingdom of darkness, for they are not bidden to sow the good seed: “Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?” But all who are commissioned to scatter seed for the Royal Husbandman, will be glad to know how the harvest is preparing for him whom they serve. Listen, then, ye that sow beside all waters; ye that with holy diligence seek to fill the garners of heaven, — listen, and may the Spirit o God speak into your ears as you are able to bear it.

**I.** We shall, first, learn from our text WHAT WE CAN DO AND WHAT WE CANNOT DO. Let this stand as our first head.

“So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground:” this the gracious worker can do. “And the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how:” this is what he cannot do: seed once sown is beyond human jurisdiction, and man can neither make it spring nor grow. Yet ere long the worker comes in again: — “When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle.” We can reap in due season, and it is both our duty and our privilege to do so. You see, then, that there

is a place for the worker at the beginning, and though there is no room for him in the middle passage, yet another opportunity is given him further on when that which he sowed has actually yielded fruit.

Notice, then, that we can sow. Any man who has received the knowledge of the grace of God in his heart can teach others. I include under the term "man" all who know the Lord, be they male or female. We cannot all teach alike, for all have not the same gifts; to one is given one talent, and to another ten; neither have we all the same opportunities, for one lives in obscurity and another has far-reaching influence; yet there is not within the family of God an infant hand which may not drop its own tiny seed into the ground. There is not a man among us who needs to stand idle in the market-place, for work suitable to his strength is waiting for him. There is not a saved woman who is left without a holy task; let her do it and win the approving word, "She hath done what she could."

We need never quarrel with God because we cannot do everything, if he only permits us to do this one thing; for sowing the good seed is a work which will need all our wit, our strength, our love, our care. Holy seed sowing should be adopted as our highest pursuit, and it will be no inferior object for the noblest life. You will need heavenly teaching that you may carefully select the wheat, and keep it free from the darnel of error. You will require instruction to winnow out of it your own thoughts and opinions; for these may not be according to the mind of God. Men are not saved by our word, but by God's word. We need grace to learn the gospel aright, and to teach the whole of it. To different men we must, with discretion, bring forward that part of the word of God which will best bear upon their consciences; for much may depend upon the word being in season.

Having selected the seed, we shall have plenty of work if we go forth and sow it broadcast everywhere, for every day brings its opportunity, and every company furnishes its occasion. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand." "Sow beside all waters."

Still, wise sowers discover favorable opportunities for sowing, and gladly seize upon them. There are times when it would clearly be a waste to sow; for the soil could not receive it, it is not in a fit condition. After a shower, or before a shower, or at some such time as he that hath studied husbandry

prefers, then must we be up and doing. While we are to work for God always, yet there are seasons when it were casting pearls before swine to talk of holy things, and there are other times when to be silent would be a great sin. Sluggards in the time for ploughing and sowing are sluggards indeed, for they not only waste the day, but throw away the year. If you watch for souls, and use hours of happy vantage, and moments of sacred softening, you will not complain of the scanty space allowed for agency. Even should you never be called to water, or to reap, your office is wide enough if you fulfill the work of the sower.

For little though it seem to teach the simple truth of the gospel, yet it is essential. How shall men hear without a teacher? Servants of God, the seed of the word is not like thistle-down, which is borne by every wind; but the wheat of the kingdom needs a human hand to sow it, and without such agency it will not enter into men's hearts, neither can it bring forth fruit to the glory of God. The preaching of the gospel is the necessity of every age; God grant that our country may never be deprived of it. Even if the Lord should send us a famine of bread and of water, may he never send us a famine of the word of God. Faith cometh by hearing, and how can there be hearing if there is no teaching? Scatter ye, scatter ye, then, the seed of the kingdom, for this is essential to the harvest.

This seed should be sown often, for many are the foes of the wheat, and if you repeat not your sowing you may never see a harvest. The seed must be sown everywhere, too, for there are no choice corners of the world that you can afford to let alone, in the hope that they will be self-productive. You may not leave the rich and intelligent under the notion that surely the gospel will be found among them, for it is not so: the pride of life leads them away from God. You may not leave the poor and illiterate, and say, "Surely they will of themselves feel their need of Christ." Not so: they will sink from degradation to degradation unless you uplift them with the gospel. No tribe of man, no peculiar constitution of the human mind, may be neglected by us; but everywhere we must preach the word, in season and out of season. I have heard that Captain Cook, the celebrated circumnavigator, in whatever part of the earth he landed, took with him a little packet of English seeds, and scattered them in suitable places. He would leave the boat and wander up from the shore. He said nothing, but quietly scattered the seeds wherever he went, so that he belted land.



Imitate him wherever you go; sow spiritual seed in every place that your foot shall tread upon.

Let us now think of what you cannot do. You cannot, after the seed has left your hand, cause it to put forth life. I am sure you cannot make it grow, for you do not know how it grows. The text saith, "And the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how." That which is beyond the range of our knowledge is certainly beyond the reach of our power. Can you make a seed germinate? You may place it under circumstances of damp and heat which will cause it to swell and break forth with a shoot, but the germination itself is beyond you. How is it done? We know not. After the germ has been put forth, can you make it further grow, and develop its life into leaf and stem? No; that, too, is out of your power. And when the green, grassy blade has been succeeded by the ear, can you ripen it? It will be ripened; but can you do it? You know you cannot; you can have no finger in the actual process, though you may promote the conditions under which it is carried on. Life is a mystery; growth is a mystery; ripening is a mystery: and these three mysteries are as fountains sealed against all intrusion. How comes it that there is within the ripe seed the preparations for another sowing and another growth? What is this vital principle, this secret reproducing energy? Knowest thou anything about this? The philosopher may talk about chemical combinations, and he may proceed to quote analogies from this and that; but still the growth of the seed remains a secret, it springs up, he knoweth not how. Certainly this is true of the rise and progress of the life of God in the heart. It enters the soul, and roots itself we know not how. Naturally men hate the word, but it enters and it changes their hearts, so that they come to love it; yet we know not how. Their whole nature is renewed, so that instead of producing sin it yields repentance, faith, and love; but we know not how. How the Spirit of God deals with the mind of man, how he creates the new heart and the right spirit, how we are begotten again unto a lively hope, we cannot tell. The Holy Ghost enters into us; we hear not his voice, we see not his light, we feel not his touch; yet he worketh an effectual work upon us, which we are not long in perceiving. We know that the work of the Spirit is a new creation, a resurrection, a quickening from the dead; but all these words are only covers to our utter ignorance of the mode of his working, with which it is not in our power to meddle. We

do not know how he performs his miracles of love, and, not knowing how he works, we may be quite sure that we cannot take the work out of his hands. We cannot create, we cannot quicken, we cannot transform, we cannot regenerate, we cannot save.

This work of God having proceeded in the growth of the seed, what next? We can reap the ripe ears. After a season God the Holy Spirit uses his servants again. As soon as the living seed has produced first of all the blade of thought, and afterwards the green ear of conviction, and then faith, which is as full corn in the ear, then the Christian worker comes in for further service, for he can reap. "When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle." This is not the reaping of the last great day, for that does not come within the scope of the parable, which evidently relates to a human sower and reaper. The kind of reaping which the Savior here intends is that which he referred to when he said to his disciples, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." After he had been sowing the seed in the hearts of the Samaritans, and it had sprung up, so that they began to evince faith in him, the Lord Jesus cried, "The fields are white to harvest." The apostle saith, "One soweth, and another reapeth." Our Lord said to the disciples, "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor." Is there not a promise, "In due season we shall reap, if we faint not"?

Christian workers begin their harvest work by watching for signs of faith in Christ. They are eager to see the blade, and delighted to mark the ripening ear. They often hope that men are believers, but they long to be sure of it; and when they judge that at last the fruit of faith is put forth, they begin to encourage, to congratulate, and to comfort. They know that the young believer needs to be housed in the barn of Christian fellowship, that he may be saved from a thousand perils. No wise farmer leaves the fruit of the field long exposed to the hail which might beat it out, or to the mildew which might destroy it, or to the birds which might devour it. Evidently no believing man should be left outside of the garner of holy fellowship; he should be carried into the midst of the church with all the joy which attends the home-bringing of sheaves. The worker for Christ watches carefully, and when he discerns that his time is come, he begins at once to fetch in the converts, that they may be cared for by the brotherhood, separated from the world, screened from temptation, and laid

up for the Lord. He is diligent to do it at once, because the text saith, “immediately he putteth in the sickle.” He does not wait for months in cold suspicion; he is not afraid that he shall encourage too soon when faith is really present. He comes with the word of promise and the smile of brotherly love at once, and he says to the new believer, “Have you confessed your faith? Is not the time come for an open confession? Hath not Jesus bidden the believer to be baptized? If you love him, keep his commandments.” He does not rest till he has introduced the convert to the communion of the faithful. For our work, beloved, is but half done when men are made disciples and baptized. We have then to encourage, to instruct, to strengthen, to console, and succor in all times of difficulty and danger. What saith the Savior? “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Observe, then, the sphere and limit of agency. We can introduce the truth to men, but that truth the Lord himself must bless; the living and growing of the word within the soul is of God alone. When the mystic work of growth is done, we are able to garner the saved ones in the church. For Christ to be formed in men the hope of glory is not of our working, that remains with God; but, when Jesus Christ is formed in them, to discern the image of the Savior and to say, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without?” this is our duty and delight. To create the divine life is God’s, to cherish it is ours. To cause the hidden life to grow is the work of the Lord; to see the uprising and development of that life, and to harvest it is the work of the faithful, even as it is written, “When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”

This, then, is our first lesson; we see what we can do and what we cannot do.

**II.** Our second head is like unto the first, and consists of **WHAT WE CAN KNOW AND WHAT WE CANNOT KNOW.**

First, what we can know. We can know when we have sown the good seed of the word that it will grow; for God has promised that it shall do so. Not

every grain in every place; for some will go to the bird, and some to the worm, and some to be scorched by the sun; but, as a general rule, God's word shall not return unto him void, it shall prosper in the thing whereto he hath sent it. This we can know. And we can know that the seed when once it takes root will continue to grow; that it is not a dream or a picture that will disappear, but a thing of force and energy, which will advance from a grassy blade to corn in the ear, and under God's blessing will develop to actual salvation, and be as the "full corn in the ear." God helping and blessing it, our work of teaching will not only lead men to thought and conviction, but to conversion and eternal life.

We also can know, because we are told so, that the reason for this is mainly because there is life in the word. In the word of God itself there is life, for it is written — "The word of God is quick and powerful," — that is, "living and powerful." It is "the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever." It is the nature of living seeds to grow; and the reason why the word of God grows in men's hearts is because it is the living word of the living God, and where the word of a king is there is power. We know this, because the Scriptures teach us so. Is it not written, "of his own will begat he us by the word of truth"?

Moreover, the earth, which is here the type of the man, "bringeth forth fruit of herself." We must mind what we are at in expounding this, for human hearts do not produce faith of themselves; they are as hard rock on which the seed perishes. But it means this, — that as the earth under the blessing of the dew and the rain is, by God's secret working upon it, made to take up and embrace the seed, so the heart of man is made ready to receive and enfold the gospel of Jesus Christ within itself. Man's awakened heart wants exactly what the word of God supplies. Moved by a divine influence the soul embraces the truth, and is embraced by it, and so the truth lives in the heart, and is quickened by it. Man's love accepts the love of God; man's faith wrought in him by the Spirit of God believes the truth of God; man's hope wrought in him by the Holy Ghost lays hold upon the things revealed, and so the heavenly seed grows in the soil of the soul. The life comes not from you who preach the word, but it is placed within the word which you preach by the Holy Spirit. The life is not in your hand, but in the heart which is led to take hold upon the truth by the Spirit of God. Salvation comes not from the personal authority of the

preacher, but through the personal conviction, personal faith, and personal love of the hearer. So much as this we may know, and is it not enough for all practical purposes?

Still, there is a something which we cannot know, a secret into which we cannot pry. I repeat what I have said before: you cannot look into men's inward parts and see exactly how the truth takes hold upon the heart, or the heart takes hold upon the truth. Many have watched their own feelings till they have become blind with despondency, and others have watched the feelings of the young till they have done them rather harm than good by their rigorous supervision. In God's work there is more room for faith than for sight. The heavenly seed grows secretly. You must bury it out of sight, or there will be no harvest. Even if you keep the seed above ground, and it does sprout, you cannot discover how it grows; even though you microscopically watched its swelling and bursting, you could not see the inward vital force which moves the seed. Thou knowest not the way of the Spirit. His work is wrought in secret. "Explain the new birth," says somebody. My answer is, "Experience the new birth, and you shall know what it is." There are secrets into which we cannot enter, for their light is too bright for mortal eyes to endure. O man, thou canst not become omniscient, for thou art a creature, and not the Creator. For thee there must ever be a region not only unknown but unknowable. So far shall thy knowledge go, but no further; and thou mayest thank God it is so, for thus he leaves room for faith, and gives cause for prayer. Cry mightily unto the Great Worker to do what thou canst not attempt to perform, that so, when thou seest men saved, thou mayest give the Lord all the glory evermore.

**III.** Thirdly, our text tells us WHAT WE MAY EXPECT IF WE WORK FOR GOD, AND WHAT WE MAY NOT EXPECT. According to this parable we may expect to see fruit. The husbandman casts his seed into the ground: the seed springs and grows, and he naturally expects a harvest. I wish I could say a word to stir up the expectations of Christian workers; for I fear that many work without faith. If you had a garden or a field, and you sow seed in it, you would be very greatly surprised and grieved if it did not come up at all; but many Christian people seem quite content to work on without expectation of result. This is a pitiful kind of working — pulling up empty buckets by the year together. Surely, I must either see

some result for my labor and be glad, or else, failing to see it, I must be ready to break my heart if I be a true servant of the great Master. We ought to have expected results; if we had expected more we should have seen more; but a lack of expectation has been a great cause of failure in God's workers.

But we may not expect to see all the seed which we sow spring up the moment we sow it. Sometimes, glory be to God, we have but to deliver the word, and straightway men are converted: the reaper overtakes the sower, in such instances; but it is not always so. Some sowers have been diligent for years upon their plots of ground, and yet apparently all has been in vain, at last the harvest has come, a harvest which, speaking after the manner of men, had never been reaped if they had not persevered to the end. This world, as I believe, is to be converted to Christ; but not to-day, nor tomorrow, peradventure not for many an age; but the sowing of the centuries is not being lost, it is working on towards the grand ultimatum. A crop of mushrooms may soon be produced; but a forest of oaks will not reward the planter till generations of his children have mouldered in the dust. It is ours to sow, and to hope for quick reaping; but still we ought to remember that "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain," and so must we. We are to expect results, but not to be dispirited if we have to wait for them.

We are also to expect to see the good seed grow, but not always after our fashion. Like children, we are apt to be impatient. Your little boy sowed mustard and cress yesterday in his garden. This afternoon Johnny will be turning over the ground to see if the seed is growing. There is no probability that his mustard and cress will come to anything, for he will not let it alone long enough for it to grow. So is it with hasty workers; they must see the result of the gospel directly, or else they distrust the blessed word. Certain preachers are in such a hurry that they will allow no time for thought, no space for counting the cost, no opportunity for men to consider their ways and turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart. All other seeds take time to grow, but the seed of the word must grow before the speaker's eyes like magic, or he thinks nothing has been done. Such good brethren are so eager to produce blade and ear there and then, that they roast their seed in the fire of fanaticism, and it perishes. They make

men think that they are converted, and thus effectually hinder them from coming to a saving knowledge of the truth. Some men are prevented from being saved by being told that they are saved already, and by being puffed up with a notion of perfection when they are not even broken in heart. Perhaps if such people had been taught to look for something deeper they might not have been satisfied with receiving seed on stony ground; but now they exhibit a rapid development, and an equally rapid decline and fall. Let us believingly expect to see the seed grow; but let us look to see it advance after the manner of the preacher, — firstly, secondly, thirdly: first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.

We may expect also to see the seed ripen. Our works will by God's grace lead up to real faith in those he hath wrought upon by his word and Spirit; but we must not expect to see it perfect at first. How many mistakes have been made here. Here is a young person under impression, and some good, sound brother talks with the trembling beginner, and asks profound questions. He shakes his experienced head, and knits his furrowed brows. He goes into the corn-field to see how the crops are prospering, and though it is early in the year, he laments that he cannot see an ear of corn; indeed, he perceives nothing but mere grass. "I cannot see a trace of corn," says he. No, brother, of course you cannot; for you will not be satisfied with the blade as an evidence of life, but must insist upon seeing everything at full growth at once. If you had looked for the blade you would have found it; and it would have encouraged you. For my own part, I am glad even to perceive a faint desire, a feeble longing, a degree of uneasiness, or a measure of weariness of sin, or a craving after mercy. Will it not be wise for you, also, to allow things to begin at the beginning, and to be satisfied with their being small at the first? See the blade of desire, and then watch for more. Soon you shall see a little more than desire; for there shall be conviction and resolve, and after that a feeble faith, small as a mustard seed, but bound to grow. Do not despise the day of small things. Do not examine the new-born babe to see whether he is sound in doctrine after your idea of soundness; ten to one he is a long way off sound, and you will only worry the dear heart by introducing difficult questions. Speak to him about his being a sinner, and Christ a Savior, and you will in this way water him so that his grace in the ear will become the full corn in the ear. It may be that there is not much that looks like wheat about him

yet; but by-and-by you shall say, "Wheat! Ah, that it is, if I know wheat. This man is a true ear of corn, and gladly will I place him among my Master's sheaves." If you cut down the blades, where will the ears come from? Expect grace in your converts; but do not look to see glory in them just yet.

**IV.** Under the last head we shall consider WHAT SLEEP WORKERS MAY TAKE, AND WHAT THEY MAY TAKE; for it is said of this sowing man, that he sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed springs and grows up he knoweth not how. They say a farmer's trade is a good one because it is going on while he is abed and asleep; and surely ours is a good trade, too, when we serve our master by sowing good seed; for it is growing even while we are asleep.

But how may a good workman for Christ lawfully go to sleep? I answer, first, he may sleep the sleep of restfulness born of confidence. You are afraid the kingdom of Christ will not come, are you? Who asked you to tremble for the ark of the Lord? Afraid for the infinite Jehovah that his purposes will fail? Shame on you! Your anxiety dishonors your God. Shall Omnipotence be defeated? You had better sleep than wake to play the part of Uzzah. Rest patiently; God's purpose will be accomplished, his kingdom will come, his chosen will be saved, and Christ shall see of the travail of his soul. Take the sweet sleep which God gives to his beloved, the sleep of perfect confidence, such as Jesus slept in the hinder part of the ship when it was tossed with tempest. The cause of God never was in jeopardy, and never will be; the seed sown is insured by omnipotence, and must produce its harvest. In patience possess your soul, and wait till the harvest comes, for the pleasure of the Lord must prosper in the hands of Jesus.

Also take that sleep of joyful expectancy which leads to a happy waking. Get up in the morning and feel that the Lord is ruling all things for the attainment of his own purposes, and the highest benefit of all who put their trust in him. Look for a blessing by day, and close your eyes at night calmly expecting to meet with better things to-morrow. If you do not sleep you will not wake up in the morning refreshed, and ready for more work. If it were possible for you to sit up all night and eat the bread of carefulness you would be unfit to attend to the service which your Master



appoints for the morning; therefore take your rest and be at peace, and work with calm dignity, for the matter is safe in the Lord's hands. Is it not written, "So he giveth his beloved sleep"?

Take your rest because you have consciously resigned your work into God's hands. After you have spoken the word, resort to God in prayer, and commit the matter into God's hand, and then do not fret about it. It cannot be in better keeping, leave it with him who worketh all in all.

But do not sleep the sleep of unwatchfulness. The farmer sows his seed, but he does not therefore forget it. He has to mend his fences, to drive away birds, to remove weeds, or to prevent floods. He does not watch the growth of the seed, but he has plenty else to do. He sleeps, but it is only in due time and measure, and is not to be confounded with the sluggard's slumbers. He never sleeps the sleep of indifference, or even of inaction, for each season has its demand upon him. He has sown one field, but he has another to sow. He has sown, but he has also to reap; and if reaping is done, he has to thresh and to winnow. A farmer's work is never done, for in one part or the other of the farm he is needed. His sleep is but a pause that gives him strength to continue his occupation. The parable teaches us to do all that lies within our province, but not to intrude into the domain of God: in teaching to the ear we are to labor diligently, but with regard to the secret working of truth upon man's mind, we are to pray and rest, looking to the Lord for the inward power.

# THE MINSTREL

## SERMON NO. 1612

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 7TH, 1881,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,**

The text is a somewhat singular one, but I hope it will suggest a profitable idea.

*“But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.” — ~~2~~ 2 Kings 3:15.*

ELISHA needed that the Holy Spirit should come upon him to inspire him with prophetic utterances. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” We need that the hand of the Lord should be laid upon us, for we can never open our mouths in wisdom except we are under the divine touch. Now, the Spirit of God works according to his own will. “The wind bloweth where it listeth,” and the Spirit of God operates as he chooseth. Elisha could not prophesy just when he liked; he must wait until the Spirit of God came upon him, and the Spirit of God could come or not even as he pleased. Elisha had noticed that the Spirit of God acted upon him most freely when his mind was restful and subdued. He found himself best prepared for the heavenly voice when the noise within his soul was hushed, and every disturbing emotion was quieted. Having ascertained this fact by observation he acted upon it. He could not create the wind of the Spirit, but he could set his sail to receive it, and he did so.

At the particular time alluded to in the text Elisha had been greatly irritated by the sight of Jehoram, the king of Israel, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. In the true spirit of his old master, Elijah, the prophet let Jehoram know what he thought of him; and having delivered his soul, he very naturally felt agitated and distressed, and unfit to be the mouthpiece for the Spirit of God. He knew that the hand of the Lord would not rest upon him while he

was in that state, and therefore he said, “Bring me a minstrel.” The original Hebrew conveys the idea of a man accustomed to play upon the harp. Listening to the dulcet tones which were produced by a skillful harper, who very likely sang one of David’s psalms to the music, the prophet waited awhile, and then the hand of the Lord came upon him. Under the influence of minstrelsy his mind grew quiet, his agitation subsided, his thoughts were collected, and the Spirit of God spake through him. It was a most commendable thing for him to use the means which he had found at other times helpful, though still his sole reliance was upon the hand of the Lord. It would seem from a passage in the First Book of Samuel that Elisha was not the only prophet who had found music helpful, for we read, “Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy.” Elisha, like his predecessors, only used a natural means for putting himself into readiness for receiving supernatural help.

Let us see if we can bring forth the practical lesson which this incident may teach us.

**I.** First: here is a lesson to those who wish to serve God, and to speak in his name. **LET US STRIVE TO BE IN A FIT STATE FOR THE LORD’S WORK.** If we know of anything that will put our mind into such a condition that the Spirit of God is likely to work upon us and speak through us, let us make use of it. Elisha cried, “Bring me a minstrel”; let us also say — “bring me that which will be helpful to me.” The harper could be of no service to Elisha for bringing him inspiration; but by putting him into a calm, equable state of mind he prepared him for the heavenly communication, and removed from his soul that which would have hindered the divine working.

It is very evident that we, too, like the prophet, have our hindrances. We are at times unfit for the Master’s use. Our minds are disarranged, the machinery is out of order, the sail is furled, the pipe is blocked up, the whole soul is out of gear. The hindrance in Elisha’s case came from his surroundings. He was in a camp; a camp where three nations mixed their discordant voices; a noisy, ill-disciplined camp, and a camp ready to perish for thirst. There was no water, and the men-at-arms were perishing; the confusion and clamor must have been great. Prophetic thought could

scarcely command itself amid the uproar, the discontent, the threatening from thousands of thirsty men. Three kings had waited on the prophet; but this would not have disconcerted him had not one of them been Jehoram, the son of Ahab, and Jezebel. What memories were awakened in the mind of Elijah's servant by the sight of the man in whom the proud dame of Sidon and her base-minded consort lived again. Naboth's vineyard must have come to his mind, and the stern threat of Elijah — "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." "For there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up."

Elisha acted rightly, and bravely. When he saw Jehoram coming, to him for help, he challenged him thus — "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the Prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother." When the king, humbly and with bated breath confessed that he saw the hand of Jehovah in bringing the three kings together, the prophet scarcely moderated his tone, but exclaimed, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." It was fit that he should be in that temper; the occasion demanded it. Still it was not a fit preface to the inward whisper of the Spirit of God, and the prophet did not feel ready for his work: the circumstances were not soothing or elevating, and so he said, "Bring me a minstrel." Do you not occasionally find yourself in an unhappy position? You have to preach, or to teach a class in school, or to carry an edifying word to a sick person; but everything distracts you. What with noise, or domestic trouble, or sinful neighbors, or the railing words of some wicked man, you cannot get into a fit frame of mind. You have had a duty to do which has caused you much pain and disquietude, and you cannot get over it, for everything conspires to worry you. Little things grieve great minds. The very sight of some individuals will throw a preacher off the rails. I know that the height of the pulpit, the thinness of the audience, the sleepiness of a hearer, or the heaviness of the atmosphere, may put the preacher's heart out of tune, and incapacitate him for the blessing. Yes, we have our hindrances even as Elisha had.

Elisha's hindrances lay mainly in his inward feelings: he could not feel the hand of the Lord upon him until the inner warfare had been pacified. He

burned with-indignation at the sight of the son of Jezebel, and flashed words of flame into his face, and, as I have already said, he was justified in so doing; but still the excitement marred the holy peace in which he usually lived, and he did not feel in a right condition to speak in the name of the Lord. Anger, even if it be of the purest kind, is a great disturber of the heart; it ruffles all our garments, and makes us unfit to minister before the Lord. I know of nothing that is more likely to put a man out of order for the communications of the Spirit of God than indignation. Even though we may be able to say, "I do well to be angry," yet it is a very trying emotion. The unruffled lake reflects the skies, but if it be tossed with tempest even the purest water becomes a broken mirror; even thus in the quiet of the soul the thoughts of God's Spirit are reflected, while in the rush of indignation they are broken and confused.

Doubtless, also, the prophet's spirits were depressed. He saw before him the king of Edom, an idolater; the king of Israel, a votary of the calves of Jeroboam; and Jehoshaphat, the man of God, in confederacy with them. This last must have pained him as much as anything. What hope was there for the cause of truth and holiness when even a godly prince was in alliance with Jezebel's son? This burdened the heart of the man of God. Everything was wrong, and going worse and worse. The warnings of Elijah and his own teachings seemed to go for nothing; the honor of God was forgotten, and the cause of evil triumphed.

Moreover, the servant of God must have been the subject of a fierce internal conflict between two sets of thoughts. Indignation and pity strove within his heart. His justice and his piety made him feel that he could have nothing to do with two idolatrous kings; but pity and humanity made him wish to deliver the army from perishing by thirst. Like a patriot, he sympathised with his people; but, like a prophet, he was jealous for his God. The men of Judah and Israel, whatever they might be in character, were the Lord's people by covenant; he could not let them die: yet they had broken that covenant, and how could he help them? The prophet was perplexed, and his heart grew heavy. How can we do the Lord's work when we are cast down in spirit? The joy of the Lord is our strength, and when we lose it our hands are feeble. When the heart is torn with inner conflict how can we speak words of comfort to those who are weary? We have need to escape from this inward strife before we can become sons of

consolation to others. While rent with conflicting feeling, there was no rest in the prophet's spirit; and the hand of the Lord did not come upon him. Most wisely he did not attempt to speak in the name of the Lord, but sought for a means by which his excitement could be allayed. In the face of many hindrances we shall be wise if we imitate him. When we feel ourselves cumbered with much serving we shall act discreetly if we pause in it, and take Mary's place, for awhile, at least, and sit at Jesus' feet; or, if the service must be done at once, it will be well to use the readiest means for preparing the mind for doing it. It may be that some simple natural means will be helpful, and if so, we must not be so ultra-spiritual as to disdain to cry, "Bring me a minstrel." It is often pride which makes us decline the use of natural means. David went against Goliath in the name of the Lord, but he took his sling and his stone with him; even our Lord, who could open men's eyes with a word, did not refuse to use clay, or to send his patient to the pool of Siloam to wash. If you and I are out of order we must do our best to get right. If I go to do the Lord's work with a vexed or distracted mind, I shall do it badly. Perhaps I shall do more harm than good. I shall spill the cup of consolation if I am all in a tremble myself. God's servants should serve their Master well: the best we can render falls short of his deservings; but it would be a pity to do less than our very best. Occasionally we are quite out of form, cannot think, or feel, or speak aright; we have to confess that we are all in confusion, and, what is worse, we dare not even expect God come and help us till we are in a less excited condition. I know what I mean better than I can tell you. Some of our brethren are always even and calm, but others of us go dangerously up and sadly down, and are at times unfit either to receive the heavenly word or to convey it to others. At such times let us remember our text. The prophet said "Bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."

But what are our helps when we are pressed with hindrances? Is there anything which in our case may be as useful as a harp? "Bring me a minstrel," said the prophet, for his mind was easily moved by that charming art. Music and song soothed and calmed, and cheered him.

*"Through every pulse the music stole,  
And held high converse with his soul."*

On the wings of melody his mind rose above the noisy camp, and floated far away from the loathed presence of Jehoram; the melting mystic strain laid all his passions asleep, and his soul was left in silence to hear the voice of the Lord. Well did Luther say, "Music is the art of the prophets, the only art that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us."

Among our own helps singing holds a chief place; as saith the apostle, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in Your heart to the Lord." Note how he connects it with peace in his epistle to the Colossians: "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts . . . teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." "I cannot sing," says one. You need not sing as sweetly as Asaph and Heman, and other sweet birds of paradise whose names we read in Scripture; but we should all sing better if we sang more. Those with cracked voices would be kind if they would not sing quite so loudly in the congregation, for they grievously disturb other people; but they might get alone and have good times with themselves, where nobody could complain of their strong voices and lusty tones. It is good to sing praises unto the Lord, and a part of its goodness lies in the comfort which it brings. It is not without significance, that after supper, before our Lord went to his great sacrifice, he sang a hymn. Did not even he find refreshment in that holy exercise? My mind dwells sweetly on a season which I have often mentioned to you when a new lie had been forged against me, a lie of peculiar bitterness, and it vexed me. I was never particularly pleased at being slandered, though I have had my fair share of it. Well, I went alone awhile, and sung over to myself in my own poor way, —

*"If on my face, for thy dear name,  
Shame and reproaches be,  
I'll hail reproach, and welcome shame,  
If thou remember me."*

By that means the sting was removed, and I felt merry again. "Bring me a minstrel:" the restoring means may be a little thing, but if you do not look to the linchpin of a cartwheel the wheel may come off, and down will go the cart, and what is the poor horse to do then? If you can get your mind right again by such a simple thing as singing, pray do not neglect it.

Suppose, however, that singing has no such power over you; let me recommend to you the quiet reading of a chapter of God's word. Go upstairs and open the Book, and think upon a few verses. If you are much perplexed, read that blessed chapter which begins, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." Those verses act like a charm upon many minds: many and many a time a storm has subsided into a calm by the reading of those words. Some such passage read quietly will often operate as the harper acted upon Elisha. If time be pressing, see what is the text for the day in the almanac; or choose out some one precious promise which in other days was sweet to you. It is wonderful the effect of a single verse of Scripture when the Spirit of God applies it to the soul. There is music to a miser in the jingling of his money bag: but what music can equal this — "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"? If you are in poverty, what melody lies in this: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." What power would come upon the soul to calm and quiet it, and make it ready for the hand of God, if we would grasp a single line of Scripture and suck the honey out of it till our soul is filled with sweetness.

You will find it equal to bringing a minstrel, and perhaps even more efficient, if you will get alone to pray. That horrible Rabshakeh's letter — you read it, and then you wished you had never seen it. You put it behind the glass, but you fetch it out again, and read it again, and cry, "What a trial is this! who can bear it?" There is a kind of basilisk power in an abominable letter, so that you feel compelled to read it again and again. Can you not break the spell? What is the wisest course? Go upstairs, open it wide, spread it before the Lord, and say, "O Lord, thou hast seen letters like this before; for thy servant Hezekiah showed thee one." I would say of every sorrow, "Pray over it." An old divine, after he had heard a young minister preach a poor discourse, said to him, "Sir, I beg you to try and pray that sermon over." He replied that he could not pray it over. Now, a sermon that cannot be prayed over ought never to be preached at all, and a trouble that you cannot pray over is a trouble which you ought not to have. It must be a grief of your own making; it cannot be a trial of God's sending. Tell the Lord your affliction, and the bitterness of it will be past, and you will go back to your daily service calm and quiet, fitted for the



hand of the Lord to be laid upon you. Men will wonder whence your joy has come, and what makes your face to shine. The secret is that you have waited upon the Lord, and renewed your strength.

It may be you will find fittest help in Christian association. I commend this to those believers who are seldom fit for God to use because they are morose and fault-finding. You ought to say, "Bring me a minstrel:" — find me some praying sister whom I may talk with, or find me some genial brother who rejoices in the Lord, and let me converse with such." It may be that the Master will join you and make a third, and then shall your heart be glad. Much misery is caused by Christians attempting to go to heaven alone. You remember how Mr. Bunyan describes Christian as journeying alone at first; he soon picked up with Hopeful, and then he was more cheery. As for Christiana and Mercy, and the family, they scarcely could have gone on pilgrimage at all if it had not been for Mr. Greatheart: but when they all went in company, with Mr. Greatheart to lead the band, they could sing all the way to the gates of the Celestial City. You, my friend, who are hindered in the service of Christ, might often be put right, so that God could use you, if you would become a companion of all them that fear God, and of them that keep his precepts. Holy converse acts as a minstrel to the spirit.

What is the duty that arises out of this? It is this: if you get into a bad state, don't stick there. "Ah," says one, "it is very close weather, and I feel depressed, so that the Spirit of God does not work upon my mind." Then cry at once, "Bring me a minstrel." Do not say "I cannot help being stupid." You need not be: at least, not more so than you are by nature. You may get out of your dullness by making an effort, and you ought to make it. Did I not hear you say "Everybody has gone away for a holiday, and I cannot leave my work. Trade is dull, and so am I"? But you need not be dull. Why should you always be heavy? You say, "I do not feel fit to go to my class," or, "I do not feel fit to preach." Should you, therefore, cease from the work of the Lord? By no means. Rouse yourself. Think of the way in which God has aforetime helped you, and use the same means again. While you are helping yourselves God will help you, and the hand of the Lord will come upon you.

Do not give way to feelings which unhinge you. Fight against them and cry with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" Still, do not rush into God's service in an unfit condition. Resort to such means as are within reach for calming the lower faculties, and the Spirit of God will move upon your higher powers. Act rationally. Use your best judgement and most prudent endeavors, or we shall suspect that you have no particular wish to do the Lord's work, or fancy that anything is good enough for your God. Say to yourself, "Being in an unsuitable condition, I cannot expect God to use me. I must therefore get right. Here is my harp, but every string is out of tune. I cannot expect the Holy Spirit to play upon it until it is put in order. What can I do to help myself in this matter, for that I will do, and thus prove the sincerity of my prayer when I ask God the Holy Spirit to help me."

This, then, is the first lesson, and I am sure there is real practical teaching in it, though some superior persons may despise it.

**II.** My second word is to those who have not yet found the Lord. WE SHOULD USE EVERY MEANS TO OBTAIN THE TOUCH OF THE DIVINE HAND. There are some here present who do not yet know whether they are believers in Christ or not: and I am sure I cannot tell them. I hope they are believers, for they are sincerely desirous of eternal salvation, but sometimes I am afraid they are not, for they do not appear to understand the meaning of the finished work of Christ. What are those, who are earnestly seeking the Lord, to do? There is but one answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Faith is the one and only course commanded. But some one replies, "Alas, I cannot get at that." But, my friend, you must get at it, or perish. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Still, to help you, let me urge you to do this which lies near at hand if you cannot feel that the Spirit of God will bless you as you are, call for some minstrel, who may aid you in your search after the blessing. If there be any subordinate means which may be helpful, use it with a view to the higher and better thing. I would first say — If you feel that you have not the faith which you ought to have, use what faith you have. It is wonderful what an immense amount of possibility lie in a mustard seed of faith. It is a very small, tiny thing; but sow it and it will grow. You have

not enough faith to believe that Christ will save you, but you have enough to feel sure that Christ can save you. That is something: hold to it and follow it out to its fair conclusions. If a man has not money enough to pay for a week's provisions, let him not starve; but let him spend what he has, hoping that more will come. Have you a small dust of faith? use that, and it will multiply.

If you want to feel the hand of the Lord, I would next say, Go and hear a sound, earnest, lively preacher. I am advising you to do as I acted myself. I was muddled, and could not exercise faith, and so resolved to obey that other precept, "Hear, and your soul shall live."

If you long for faith, listen to the preacher who preaches the gospel most simply and most forcibly. Perhaps you say, "I have been listening to a very clever minister, a very intellectual minister, and his word has never been blessed to my soul." Then shift your place, and say. "Bring me a minstrel;" for then it may be that the hand of the Lord may be upon you. It is better to go a hundred miles to hear a faithful minister than to listen to a man from whom you get no good because he happens to preach near you. Men go many miles to a skillful physician, or a healing fountain. When we are in earnest to find Christ we shall have the sense to go where he is most honored and most spoken of.

"But suppose I have attended such a ministry, and have found no good; what shall I do?" Why, the Scripture says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ ' and thou shalt be saved." Still, if you cannot get at this for the moment, attend earnest meetings where souls have been converted, and many have been brought to Jesus' feet. Trust not to preachers or meetings; but, still, go where the rain is falling, and there may be a drop for you. If a ministry is blessing others, resort to it, praying, "O Lord, bless me." Our immediate need is the hand of the Lord, and we may be made ready to receive it by hearing the gospel; therefore let us diligently incline our ear to the heavenly word.

Let me also advise you to read gracious books. Ask Christian people what writings were blessed to their conversion, and carefully study the same. There is no book for saving souls like the Bible. Say, "Bring me a minstrel," and read the Scriptures again and again. The Lord Jesus feedeth among the lilies: get among the beds of lilies, and you will find him there.

Oh, how many have found Christ when they have been searching the Scriptures to see “whether those things were so.”

I would also strongly recommend you to get a good deal alone. You poor souls, who cannot find Christ, and do not seem to understand what it is to believe in him, should think much, and meditate much, upon Jesus and his cross. David said, “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.” If you want a minstrel, think of your sin, your sin against your God, till it breaks your heart; then think of Christ, his nature, his work, his love, his deeds of mercy: think of the Holy Spirit, and his power to renew, regenerate, comfort, sanctify: think over those precious truths of the word of God, which are set there on purpose to be beacons to light souls to Christ, and while you are thinking of these it shall be to you as when the minstrel played, and the hand of the Lord came upon his prophet. Get much alone; but still recollect there is no hope for you if you trust in being alone, or trust in reading the Scriptures, or trust in hearing, or trust in anything but Christ. What you want is the hand of Jesus laid upon you: one touch from him, and you will be made whole. If you can but touch the hem of his garment, virtue shall come out of him to you. I am merely mentioning these things because sometimes they lead up to the one thing, and when a man is in earnest to obtain the one thing needful, he will be willing to attend to anything by which he will be likely to attain it, and to attend to any secondary means which God has blessed in the case of others. He will be willing to be taught by a child, if peradventure God will bless him in that manner. He will say, “Bring me a minstrel;” “Bring me a good book;” “Bring me a godly minister;” “Bring me a Christian man accustomed to speak to troubled hearts;” “Bring me an aged Christian whose testimony shall confirm my spirit, and be the means of working faith in me: for I must get to God; I must get salvation. Tell me, tell me, where Christ is to be obtained, and I will find him if I ransack the globe to discover him.” I do not believe any person who has desires to find Christ will seek in vain. I am certain that when people hunger and thirst after Christ they shall be filled, and when they say, “We will do anything by which we may be led to Jesus,” they are not far from the kingdom of heaven, and the Holy Spirit is at work in them.


**III.** Thirdly, WE SHOULD MORE ABUNDANTLY USE HOLY MINSTRELSY. Saints and sinners, too, would find it greatly to their benefit if they said,

“Bring me a minstrel.” This is the world’s cry whenever it is merry, and filled with wine. The art of music has been prostituted to the service of Satan. Charles Wesley well said, —

*Listed into the cause of sin,  
Why should a good be evil?  
Music, alas! too long has been  
Press’d to obey the devil.  
Drunken, or lewd, or light, the lay  
Flow’d to the soul’s undoing;  
Widen’d, and strew’d with flowers the way  
Down to eternal ruin.”*

It is for us to use singing in the service of God, and to make a conquest of it for our Redeemer. Worldlings want the minstrel to excite them; we want him to calm our hearts and still our spirits. That is his use to us, and we shall do well to employ the harper to that end.

Let us give instances: I will suppose that this morning you were thinking about coming up to the assembly of God’s people, and you felt hardly up to the mark. It would have been wise to do as I did this morning. I read at family prayer the eighty-fourth Psalm, “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God.”

What a sweet piece of Sabbath minstrelsy it is! How often have we been quieted and prepared for sanctuary worship by  Psalm 84: —

*“How did my heart rejoice to hear  
My friends devoutly say,  
‘In Zion let us all appear  
And keep thy holy day!’“*

When the house is full of trouble, and your heart is bowed down, is it not well to say — “Bring me a minstrel, and let him sing to me the twenty-seventh Psalm. ‘The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me,

my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.”” You need not confine the harper to that one strain; for David has written many psalms for burdened hearts. It is wonderful what provision God has made of sacred minstrels to play us up out of the depths into the heights if we will but make a right use of them.

I will suppose you are in a state of alarm; it may be there is a thunderstorm, or possibly a disease is stalking through the land. Did you ever sing in such times that forty-sixth Psalm:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and  
though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though  
the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains  
shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams  
whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the  
tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall  
not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.”

Such music is like the breath of heaven. How comforting are the words of the ninety-first Psalm when diseases are abroad, or when the thunder rolls through the sky:

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide  
under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my  
refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.”

I remember being in a family one night when I was but a lad, when everybody in the house, strong men though some of them were, trembled and were afraid. A child was upstairs and must be brought down, but no one dared pass by the window on the staircase. Well do I remember fetching the child, awed but not alarmed, and then I sat down and read aloud the ninety-first Psalm, and saw how it quieted both men and women. Ah, my brethren, David as a musician is one of a thousand; we need no other minstrel. The word of God hushes the tempest of the soul, and refreshes the heart with a celestial dew. “Bring me a minstrel,” but let him sing us one of the songs of Zion.

Do you ever get depressed in spirit, beloved friends? I fear you do; and are you ever troubled because you seem to have more affliction than anybody else? Have you watched the wicked and seen them prosperously sailing while you have been tossed to and fro on a raging sea of troubles? Do you want to get peace to your mind by the power of the Holy Spirit? Then say, “Bring me a minstrel” and let him sing that thirty-seventh Psalm, “Fret not thyself because of evildoers.” Or if you would have a change from the thirty-seventh, turn the figures round, and let him sing the seventy-third, and the notes will run thus: “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.” You will not be long before you will rise to the note —

“Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

Happily, you are not always depressed: there are times of great joy with you, and then you long to have communion with God. If you wish to have fellowship with Jesus, you will find it helpful to say, “Bring me a minstrel;” and when he asks, “What shall I sing?” say to him, “Sing the Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.” Then shall you find utterance for your heart in some such canticles as these: “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?” Possibly your tongue will take up notes like these: “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.” “My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the daybreak, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of division.” The whole book is full of utterances which may seem strange to worldly minds, but which exactly suit those who know the Well-beloved. Read that third verse of the eighth chapter of the Song. Did you ever sing it? “His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.” “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the

floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.”

When we come to die we will breathe our last breath to music. Then will we say, “Bring me a harper,” and like Jacob and Moses we will sing ere we depart. Our song is ready. It is the twenty-third Psalm: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

This is the kind of minstrel for me. Say you not so, my brethren? When you are in trouble or distress, will you not remember your son in the night? If such be the strain, I am of the same mind as Martin Luther, whose words I have copied out to read to you. His language is always strong. Luther speaks thunderbolts. “One of the finest and noblest gifts of God is music. This is very hateful to the devil, and with it we may drive off temptations and evil thoughts. After theology I give the next place and highest honor to music. It has often aroused and moved me so that I have won a desire to preach. We ought not to ordain young men to the office of preacher if they have not trained themselves and practiced singing in the schools.” That is pretty strong. I fear many would not have been preachers if they must first have been singers. Still, there is a power about song; and to sing the praises of God in psalms such as those I have read to you is most consoling.

Suppose you have done with the minstrelsy which I have now mentioned, there is next the music of gospel doctrine. I confess to you that, when depressed in spirit, I love a little of thorough Calvinistic doctrine. I turn to Coles on Divine Sovereignty, and relish his plain speaking upon sovereign grace. The doctrine of election is noble music: predestination is a glorious hallelujah. Grace abounding, love victorious, truth unchanging, faithfulness invincible: these are melodies such as my ear delights in. The truth of God is fit music for angels. The harps of the redeemed never resound with more noble music than the doctrines of grace. Every truth has its melody, every doctrine is a psalm unto God. When my heart is faint, “Bring me a minstrel,” and let him sing of free grace and dying love.

If these do not charm you, fetch a minstrel from experience. Think how God has dealt with you in times of sorrow and darkness long gone by, and



then you will sing, “His mercy endureth for ever.” That one hundred and third Psalm might last a man from now till he entered heaven, he need not change the strain, — “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” He may keep on chanting it until his song melts into the hymn of the angels, and he adds another voice to the chorus of the redeemed above.

If you want music, there is yet a sweeter store. Go fetch a minstrel from Calvary. Commend me for sweetness to the music of the cross. At Calvary I hear one piece of music set to the minor key which bred more joy beneath the skies than all else. Hear it: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Jesus deserted is the comfort of deserted souls: Jesus crying, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” is the joy of the spirit that has lost the light of God’s countenance. That grave and solemn note can lift despair into delight.

But if you want another hymn of the cross to be sung with the accompaniment of the high-sounding cymbals, or with trumpet and sound of cornet, let me commend you to this other song of the cross, “IT IS FINISHED.” All music lies there. Condensed into those three words you have the harmonies of eternity, the melodies of the infinite. Angels themselves when on their loftiest key did never sing a canticle so sweet. “Consummatum est” is the consummation of song. “It is finished;” sin is blotted out, reconciliation is complete, everlasting righteousness is brought in, and believing souls are saved. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! “Till the day break, and the shadows flee away,” “Bring me a minstrel,” and let us sing unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Portions Of Scripture Read Before Sermon — ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 136; ~~2 Kings~~ 2 Kings 3:1-15.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 136 (Song II.), 166, 229.

# LOVE'S LABORS

## SERMON NO. 1617

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
SEPTEMBER 4TH, 1881,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,**

*“Charity beareth all things, believeth all things,  
hopeth all things, endureth all things.” — ~~1~~ 1 Corinthians 13:7.*

THE grace of charity, or love, of which so much is most admirably spoken in this chapter, is absolutely essential to true godliness. So essential is it that, if we have everything beside, but have not charity, it profiteth us nothing. The absence of charity is absolutely fatal to vital godliness; so saith the Holy Ghost in this chapter. When, then, you read the apostle's high encomiums of charity, do not say, “This is a fancy virtue to which certain special saints have attained, and we are bound to admire them for it, but we need not imitate them.” Far from it. This charity is the common, everyday livery of the people of God. It is not the prerogative of a few; it must be the possession of all. Do not, therefore, however lofty the model may be, look up to it as though you could not reach it: you must reach it. It is put before you not only as a thing greatly desirable, but as absolutely needful; for if you excelled in every spiritual gift, yet if you had not this all the rest would profit you nothing whatever. One would think that such excellent gifts might benefit us a little, but no, the apostle sums them all up, and saith of the whole, “it profiteth me nothing.” I pray that this may be understood of us at the very beginning, lest we should manage to slip away from the truth taught us by the Holy Ghost in this place, and should excuse ourselves from being loving by the notion that we are so inconsiderable that such high virtue cannot be required of us, or so feeble that we cannot be expected to attain to it. You must attain it, or you cannot enter into eternal life, for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his, and the Spirit of Christ is sure to beget the charity of our

text, which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

What does this teach us at the outset, but that a salvation which leads to this must be of God, and must be wrought in us by his power? Such a comely grace can never grow out of our fallen nature. Shall such a clean thing as this be brought out of an unclean? This glorious salvation unto pure love must be grasped by faith, and wrought in us by the operation of the Spirit of God. If we consider salvation to be a little thing, we bring it, as it were, within the sphere of human possibility, but if we set it forth in its true proportions as involving the possession of a pure, loving, elevated state of heart, then we perceive that it is a divine wonder. When we estimate the renewed nature aright we cry, “This is the finger of God,” and right gladly do we then subscribe to Jonah’s creed, “Salvation is of the Lord.” If charity be in any man and abound, God must have the glory of it; for assuredly it was never attained by mere natural effort, but must have been bestowed by that same hand which made the heavens. So then, brethren, I shall hope when I conclude to leave upon your minds the impression of your need of the grace of God for the attainment of love. I would not discourage you, but I would have you feel how great a labor lies before you, and how impossible it will be unless you are girt with a strength beyond your own. This shall be your solace that if it cannot be the outcome of your own effort, yet “the fruit of the Spirit is love,” and the Spirit is ready and willing to bear fruit in us also.

Notice then, first, the multitude of love’s difficulties; it has to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things: secondly, observe the triumph of love’s labor; it does all these four things, it “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things”: and then, thirdly, this will bring us back to the point we have started from, the sources of love’s energy, and how it is she is able thus to win her fourfold victory over countless difficulties.

**I.** Consider well THE MULTITUDE OF LOVE’S DIFFICULTIES. When the grace of God comes into a man he is born at once to love. He that loveth is born of God, and he that is born of God loveth. He loveth him that begat, even God, and he loveth him that is begotten of him, even all the saved ones. He commences to obey the great command to love his neighbor as

himself. His motto is no longer that of an earthly kingdom, *Dieu et mon droit* — God and my right; but he bears another word on his escutcheon, *Dieu et mon frere* — God and my brother.

No sooner is love born than she finds herself at war. Everything is against her, for the world is full of envy, hate, and ill-will. I would warn the most loving-hearted that they have entered upon a war for peace, a strife for love: they are born to hate hatred, and to contend against contention. As the lily among thorns, so is love among the sons of men. As the hind among the dogs, so is charity among the selfish multitude.

Evidently the difficulties of love are many, for the apostle speaks of them as “all things,” and as if this were not enough he repeats the words, and sets forth the opposing armies as four times “all things.” I do not know whether you can calculate this mighty host. “All things” would seem to comprehend as much as can be, but here in the text you have this amount multiplied by four. For, my brother, you will have to contend with all that is within yourself. Nothing in your original nature will help you. God has put within you a new life, but the old life seeks to smother it. You will find it a severe struggle to master yourself, and if you succeed therein you will be a conqueror indeed. Besides that you will have to contend with “all things” in the persons whom you are called upon to love. You must have fervent charity towards the saints, but you will find very much about the best of them which will try your patience; for, like yourself, they are imperfect, and they will not always turn their best side towards you, but sometimes sadly exhibit their infirmities. Be prepared, therefore, to contend with “all things” in them. As for the ungodly whom you are to love to Christ, you will find everything in them that will oppose the drawings of your love, for they, like yourself, by nature are born in sin, and they are rooted in their iniquities. When you have mastered that kind of “all things” you will have to contend with “all things” in the world, for the world lieth in the wicked one, and all its forces run towards self, and contention, and hate. Every man’s hand is against his fellow, and few there be who honor the gentle laws of love; they know not that divine charity which “seeketh not her own.” The seed of the serpent is at enmity with all that is kind, and tender, and self-sacrificing, for these are the marks of the woman’s seed. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. And then remember that “all things” in hell are against you. What a seething mass of

rebellious life, all venomous with hate, is seen in the regions of darkness. The prince of the power of the air leads the van, and the host of fallen spirits eagerly follow him, like bloodhounds behind their leader. All these evil spirits will endeavor to create dissension, and enmity, and malice, and oppression among men, and the soldier of love must wrestle against all these. See, O my brother, what a battle is yours! Speak of crusades against the Paynim, what a crusade is this against hate and evil. Yet we shrink not from the fray.

Happily, though love has many difficulties, it overcomes them all, and overcomes them four times. There is such vitality in evil that it leaps up from the field whereon it seemed to be slain, and rages with all its former fury. First, we overcome evil by patience, which “beareth all things.” Let the injury be inflicted, we will forgive it, and not be provoked: even seventy times seven will we bear in silence. If this suffice not, by God’s grace we will overcome by faith: we trust in Jesus Christ, we rely upon our principles, we look for divine succor, and so we “believe all things.” We overcome a third time by hope: we rest in expectation that gentleness will win, and that long-suffering will wear out malice, for we look for the ultimate victory of everything that is true and gracious, and so we “hope all things.” We finish the battle by perseverance: we abide faithful to our resolve to love, we will not be irritated into unkindness, we will not be perverted from generous, all-forgiving affection, and so we win the battle by steadfast non-resistance. We have set our helm towards the port of love, and towards it we will steer, come what may. Baffled often, love “endureth all things.”

Yes, brethren, and love conquers on all four sides. Love does, as it were, make a hollow square, and she sets the face of her warriors towards all quarters of the compass. Does God seem himself to smite love with afflictions? She “beareth all things.” Do her fellow Christians misrepresent her, and treat her ill? She believes everything that is good about them, and nothing that is injurious. Do the wicked rise against her? When she tries to convert them, do they return evil for good? She turns her hopefulness to the front in that direction, and hopes that yet the Spirit of God will bring them to a better mind. And does it happen that all her spiritual foes attack her with temptations and desperate insinuations? She lifteth up the banner of patience against them, and by the power of God’s grace she putteth the

infernally enemy to the rout, for she “endureth all things.” What a brave mode of battle is this! Is not love a man-of-war? Is it not invincible? Hear love’s heroic cry as she shouts her defiance —

*“Come one, come all, this rock shall fly,  
From its firm base as soon as I.”*

If once taught in the school of Christ to turn love to every point of the compass, and so to meet every assault against our heart, we have learned the secret of victory.

It seems to me that I might read my text as if it said that love conquers in all stages of her life. She begins in conversion, and straightway those that mark her birth are angry, and the powers of evil are at once aroused to seek her destruction. Then she “beareth all things.” Let them mock, love never renders railing for railing: Isaac is not to be provoked by Ishmael’s jeers.

She gathers strength and begins to tell out to others what she knows of her Lord and his salvation. She “believeth all things,” and so she confesses her faith, and her fellow Christians are confirmed by her witness. It is her time of energy, and so she tries to woo and win others, by teaching them the things which she believes.

She advances a little farther; and, though often disappointed by the unbelief of men and the coldness of her fellow Christians, she nevertheless “hopes all things,” and pushes on in the expectation of winning more of them. Her dove’s eyes see in the dark, and she advances to victory through ever-growing conflict.

Ay, and when infirmities thicken upon her, and old age comes, and she can do little else but sit still, and bear and believe and hope, she still perseveres, and accepts even the stroke of death itself without complaining, for love “endureth all things.”

I do not think I need say more upon the difficulties of love. I am sure that every experienced person knows that these difficulties are supreme, and that we require superlative grace if we are to master them. Love does not ask to have an easy life of it: self-love makes that her aim. Love denies herself, sacrifices herself, that she may win victories for God, and bring

blessings on her fellow-men. Hers is no easy pathway, and hers shall be no tinsel crown.

**II.** Secondly, let us survey THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE'S LABOR. Her labors are fourfold.

First, in bearing all things. The word here rendered "bear" might as correctly have been translated "cover." You that have the Revised Version will find in the margin, "Love covereth all things." "Covereth" is the meaning of the word in ordinary Greek, but Paul generally uses the word in the sense of "bear." Our translators, therefore, had to choose between the usual meaning and the Pauline usage, and they selected Paul's meaning, and put it down in the first place as "beareth," giving us in the margin the other sense of "covereth." The two ideas may be blended, if we understand it to mean that love bears all things in silence, concealing injuries as much as possible even from herself.

Let us just think of this word "covers" in reference to the brethren. True love refuses to see faults, unless it be that she may kindly help in their removal. Love has no wish to see faults. Noah's younger son discovered and declared the shame of his father, but his other sons took a garment and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father: after this fashion does love deal with the sins of her brethren. She painfully fears that there may be something wrong, but she is loath to be convinced of it: she ignores it as long as she can, and wishes that she could deny it altogether. Love covers; that is, it never proclaims the errors of good men. There are busybodies abroad who never spy out a fault in a brother but they must needs hurry off to their next neighbor with the savory news, and then they run up and down the street as though they had been elected common criers. It is by no means honorable to men or women to set up to be common informers. Yet I know some who are not half so eager to publish the gospel as to publish slander. Love stands in the presence of a fault, with a finger on her lip. If anyone is to smite a child of God, let it not be a brother. Even if a professor be a hypocrite, love prefers that he should fall by any hand rather than her own. Love covers all injuries by being silent about them, and acting as if they had never been. She sitteth alone, and keepeth silence. To speak and publish her wrong is too painful for her, for

she fears to offend against the Lord's people. She would rather suffer than murmur, and so, like a sheep before her shearers, she is dumb under injury.

I would, brothers and sisters, that we could all imitate the pearl oyster. A hurtful particle intrudes itself into its shell, and this vexes and grieves it. It cannot eject the evil, and what does it do but cover it with a precious substance extracted out of its own life, by which it turns the intruder into a pearl. Oh, that we could do so with the provocations we receive from our fellow Christians, so that pearls of patience, gentleness, long-suffering, and forgiveness might be bred within us by that which else had harmed us. I would desire to keep ready for my fellow Christians, a bath of silver, in which I could electroplate all their mistakes into occasions for love. As the dripping well covers with its own deposit all that is placed within its drip, so would love cover all within its range with love, thus turning even curses into blessings. Oh that we had such love that it would cover all, and conceal all, so far as it is right and just that it should be covered and concealed.

As to bearing all, taking the words as they stand in our version, I wish to apply the text mainly to our trials in seeking the conversion of the unconverted. Those who love the souls of men must be prepared to cover much when they deal with them, and to bear much from them in silence. When I begin to seek the conversion of anyone, I must try as much as ever I can to ignore any repulsiveness that there may be in his character. I know that he is a sinner, else I should not seek his salvation; but if he happens to be one who has fallen very low in the esteem of others, I must not treat him as such, but cover his worst points. You cannot possibly bring the Samaritan woman who has had five husbands into a right state of mind by "wondering that he spake with the woman." Thus the disciples acted, but not so their Master, for he sat on the well and talked with her, and made himself her willing companion that he might be her gracious Savior; he ignored her sin so far as to converse with her for her good.

You will not long have begun this holy work before you will discover in the heart you seek to win much ignorance of the gospel. Bear with it, and bring forward the text which sheds light on that darkness, and teach the truth which will remove that error. Ere long you will have to contend with hardness of heart, for when a man knows the truth he is not always willing



to receive it. Bear it, and be not vexed. Did you not expect the heart to be hard? Do not you know what business you are upon? You are sent to turn men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. Be not astonished if these things should not prove to be child's play. In addition to this perhaps you will have ridicule poured upon you; your attempts to convert will be converted into jests. Bear it; bear all things! Remember how the multitude thrust out the tongue at your Lord and Master when he was dying, and be not you so proud as to think yourself too good to be laughed at. Still speak concerning Christ, and whatever happens, bear all things. I will not attempt to make a catalogue of your provocations, you shall make one yourself after you have tried to convert men to Christ; but all that you can possibly meet with is included in my text, for it says, "beareth all things." If you should meet with some extraordinary sinner who opens his mouth with cruel speeches such as you have never heard before, and if by attempting to do him good you only excite him to ribaldry and blasphemy, do not be astonished; have at him again, for charity "beareth all things," whatever they may be. Push on and say, "Yes, all this proves to me how much you want saving. You are my man; if I get you to Christ there will be all the greater glory to God." O blessed charity, which can thus cover all things and bear all things for Christ's sake.

Do you want an example of it? Would you see the very mirror and perfection of the charity that beareth all things? Behold your divine Lord. Oh, what he has covered! It is a tempting topic, but I will not dwell on it. How his glorious righteousness, his wondrous splendor of love, has covered all our faults and all their consequences, treating us as if he saw no sin in Jacob, neither perversity in Israel. Think what he bore when he came unto his own and his own received him not! What a covering was that when he said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." What a pitying sight of the fearful misery of man our Lord Jesus had when holy tears bedewed those sacred eyes! What a generous blindness to their infamous cruelty he manifested when he prayed for his bloodthirsty enemies. O beloved, you will never be tempted, and taunted, and tried as he was; yet in your own shorter measure may you possess that love which can silently bear all things for the elect's sake and for Christ's sake,

that the multitude of the redeemed may be accomplished, and that Christ through you may see of the travail of his soul.

Now let us look at the second of love's great labors. You have heard of the labors of Hercules, but the fabulous hero is far outdone by the veritable achievements of love. Love works miracles which only grace can enable her to perform. Here is the second of them — love "believeth all things." In reference, first, to our fellow Christians, love always believes the best of them. I wish we had more of this faith abroad in all the churches, for a horrid blight falls upon some communities through suspicion and mistrust. Though everything may be pure and right, yet certain weak minds are suddenly fevered with anxiety through the notion that all is wrong and rotten. This unholy mis-trust is in the air, a blight upon all peace: it is a sort of fusty mildew of the soul by which all sweet perfume of confidence is killed. The best man is suspected of being a designing knave, though he is honest as the day, and the smallest fault or error is frightfully exaggerated, till we seem to dwell among criminals and to be all villains together. If I did not believe in my brethren I would not profess to be one of them. I believe that with all their faults they are the best people in the world, and that, although the church of God is not perfect, yet she is the bride of One who is. I have the utmost respect for her, for her Lord's sake. The Roman matron said "Where my husband is Caias I am Caia"; where Christ is King, she who stands at his right hand is "the queen in gold of Ophir." God forbid that I should rail at her of whom her Lord says, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee." True love believes good of others as long as ever it can, and when it is forced to fear that wrong has been done, love will not readily yield to evidence, but she gives the accused brother the benefit of many a doubt. When the thing is too clear, love says, "Yes, but the friend must have been under very strong temptation, and if I had been there I dare say I should have done worse;" or else love hopes that the erring one may have offended from a good though mistaken motive; she believes that the good man must have been mistaken, or he would not have acted so. Love, as far as she can, believes in her fellows. I know some persons who habitually believe everything that is bad, but they are not the children of love. Only tell them that their minister or their brother has killed his wife, and they would believe it immediately, and send out for a policeman: but if you tell

them anything good of their neighbor, they are in no such hurry to believe you. Did you ever hear of gossips tittle-tattling approval of their neighbors? I wish the chatterers would take a turn at exaggerating other people's virtues, and go from house to house trumping up pretty stories of their acquaintances. I do not recommend lying even in kindness, but that side of it would be such a novelty that I could almost bear with its evils for a change. Love, though it will not speak an untruth in praise of another, yet has a quick eye to see the best qualities of others, and it is habitually a little blind to their failings. Her blind eye is to the fault, and her bright is for the excellence. Somewhere or other I met with an old legend — I do not suppose it to be literally true, but its spirit is correct. It is said that, once upon a time, in the streets of Jerusalem, there lay a dead dog, and everyone kicked at it and reviled it. One spoke of its currish breed, another of its lean and ugly form, and so forth; but one passed by who paused a moment over the dead dog, and said, "What white teeth it has." Men said, as he went on his way, "That is Jesus of Nazareth." Surely it is ever our Lord's way to see good points wherever he can. Brethren, think as well as you can even of a dead dog. If you should ever be led into disappointments and sorrows by thinking too well of your fellow-men, you need not greatly blame yourself. I met, in Anthony Farrindon's Sermons, a line which struck me. He says the old proverb has it, "*Humanum est errare*," to err is human, but, saith he, when we err by thinking too kindly of others we may say, "*Christianum est errare*," it is Christian to err in such a fashion. I would not have you credulous, but I would have you trustful, for suspicion is a cruel evil. Few fall into the blessed error of valuing their fellow Christians at too high a rate.

In reference to the unconverted this is a very important matter. Love "believeth all things" in their case. She does not believe that the unconverted are converted, for, if so, she would not seek their conversion. She believes that they are lost and ruined by the Fall, but she believes that God can save them. Love believes that the precious blood of Christ can redeem the bondslaves of sin and Satan, and break their iron chains; she believes that the power of the Holy Spirit can change a heart of granite into a heart of flesh. Love, therefore, believing this, believes also that God can save this sinner by herself, and she therefore begins to speak to him, expecting that the word she speaks will be God's instrument of salvation.

When she finds herself sitting next to a sinner, she believes that there was a necessity for her to be there, even as Christ must needs go through Samaria. She saith to herself, “Now will I tell to this poor soul what Christ hath done, for I believe that even out of my poor lips eternal life may flow, and in such a babe as I am God may perfect praise to his own glory.” She does not refrain from preaching Christ through fear of failure, but she believes in the great possibilities which lie in the gospel and in the Spirit of God, and so she deals earnestly with the man next her. She believes in her own principles, she believes in the grace of God, she believes in the power of the Spirit of God, she believes in the force of truth, she believes in the existence of conscience, and so she is moved to set about her saving work. She believeth all things.

Brethren, do you want a model of this? Then I beseech you look to your divine Master once again. See him in the morning when the sheep are counted, missing one of them, and so full of faith is he that he can find the lost one, that he leaves the ninety and nine, and cheerfully enters the pathless wilderness. See how he bounds over the mountains! How he descends the ravines! He is seeking his sheep until he finds it, for he is fully assured that he shall find it. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, for his faith is great in the salvation of men, and he goes forth to it believing that sinners shall be saved. I delight in the deep, calm faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. He had no faith in man’s goodness, for “he knew what was in man”; but he had great faith in what could be done in men and what could be wrought for them, and for the joy that was set before him in this he endured the cross, despising the shame. He had faith that grand things would come of his salvation — men would be purified, error would be driven out, false-hood would be slain, and love would reign supreme.

Here is the second grand victory of love, she “believeth all things.” Herein let us exercise ourselves till we are skilled in it.

Love’s third great labor is in “hoping all things.” Love never despairs. She believes in good things yet to come in her fellow-men, even if she cannot believe in any present good in them. Hope all things about your brethren. Suppose a friend is a member of the church, and you cannot see any clear signs of grace in him, hope all things about him. Many true believers are weak in faith, and the operations of grace are dim in them; and some are

placed in positions where the grace they have is much hindered and hampered: let us take these things into consideration. It is hard to tell how little grace may yet suffice for salvation: it is not ours to judge. Hope all things, and if you should be forced to see sad signs in them, which make you fear that they have no grace, yet, remember that some of the brightest believers have had their faults, and grave ones too. Remember yourself, lest you also be tempted. If you cannot hope that these persons are saved at all, hope that they will be, and do all that you can to promote so blessed an end.

Hope all things. If thy brother has been very angry with thee without a cause, hope that thou wilt win him; and set about the task. If thou hast tried and failed, hope to succeed next time, and try again. Hope that though thou hast failed seven times, and he still speaks bitterly, yet in his heart he is really ashamed, or at least that he will be so very soon. Never despair of your fellow Christians.

As to the unconverted, you will never do anything with them unless you hope great things about them. When the good Samaritan found the poor man half dead, if he had not hoped about him he would never have poured in the oil and the wine, but would have left him there to die. Cultivate great hopefulness about sinners. Always hope of them that they will be saved yet: though no good signs are apparent in them. If you have done your best for them, and have been disappointed and defeated, still hope for them. Sometimes you will find cause for hope in the fact that they begin to attend a place of worship. Grasp at that, and say, "Who can tell? God may bless them." Or if they have long been hearers, and no good has come of it, still hope that the minister will one day have a shot at them, and the arrow shall pierce through the joints of the harness. When you last spoke to them there seemed a little tenderness: be thankful for it, and have hope. If there has been a little amendment in their life, be hopeful about them. Even if you can see nothing at all hopeful in them, yet hope that there may be something which you cannot see, and perhaps an effect has been produced which they are endeavoring to conceal. Hope because you are moved to pray for them. Get other people to pray for them, for as long as they have some one to pray for them their case is not given over. If you get others to pray, there will be another string to your bow. If they are very ill, and you cannot get at them, or they are on their dying beds, still

have hope about them, and try to send them a message in some form or other. Pray the Lord to visit and save them; and always keep up your hope about them. Till they are dead let not your hope be dead.

Would you see a model of this? Ah, look at our blessed Lord, and all his hopefulness for US: how, despairing of none, he went after those whom others would have given up. If you ask a proof, remember how he went after you. Will you despair of anybody since Christ did not despair of you? Wonders of grace belong to God, and all those wonders have been displayed in many among us. If you and I had been there when they brought the adulterous woman taken in the very act, I am afraid that we should have said, "This is too bad; put her away, she cannot be borne with." But oh, the hopefulness of the blessed Master when even to her he said, "Woman, where are thine accusers? Neither do I condemn thee. Go, and sin no more." What wonderful patience, and gentleness, and hopefulness our Lord displayed in all his converse with the twelve! It was a noble hopefulness in Christ which led him to trust Peter as he did: after he had denied his Master with oaths, our Lord trusted him to feed his sheep and lambs, and set him in the forefront of apostolic service. He has also had compassion on some of us, putting us into the ministry, and putting us in trust with the gospel, for he knew what love would do for us, and he was certain he could yet make something of us to his own glory.

The last victory of love is in enduring all things, by which I understand a patient perseverance in loving. This is perhaps the hardest work of all, for many people can be affectionate and patient for a time, but the task is to hold on year after year. I have known some men earnestly check their temper under provocation, and bear a great many slights, but at last they have said, "There is an end to everything: I am not going to put up with it any longer. I cannot stand it." Blessed be God, the love that Christ gives us endureth all things. As his love endured to the end, so does the love which the Spirit works in us endure to the end.

In reference first to our fellow Christians, love holds out under all rebuffs. You mean that I shall not love you, my good man, but I shall love you. You give me the rough side of your tongue, and make me see that you are not a very lovable person, but I can love you notwithstanding all. What? Will you do me a further unkindness? I will oppose you by doing you a

greater kindness than before. You said a vile thing about me; I will not hear it, but if it be possible I will say a kind thing of you. I will cover you up with hot coals till I melt you; I will war against you with flames of love till your anger is consumed. I will master you by being kinder to you than you have been unkind to me. What hosts of misrepresentations and unkindnesses there are; but if you go on to be a true Christian you must endure all these. If you have to deal with people who will put up with nothing from you, take care to be doubly patient with them. What credit is there in bearing with those who bear with you? If your brethren are angry without a cause, be sorry for them, but do not let them conquer you by driving you into a bad temper. Stand fast in love; endure not some things, but all things, for Christ's sake; so shall you prove yourself to be a Christian indeed.

As to your dealing with the unconverted, if ever you go into the field after souls, be sure to carry your gun with you, and that gun is love. You gentlemen who go out shooting partridges and other birds at this time of the year, no doubt find it a pleasant pastime; but for real excitement, joy, and pleasure, commend me to soul-winning. What did our Lord say, "I will make you fishers of men." If you go out fishing for souls you will have to endure all things, for it will come to pass that some whom you have been seeking for a long time will grow worse instead of better. Endure this among the all things. Those whom you seek to bless may seem to be altogether unteachable, they may shut their ears and refuse to hear you; never mind, endure all things. They may grow sour and sullen, and revile you in their anger, but be not put about by them, let them struggle till they are wearied, and meanwhile do you quietly wait, saying to yourself, "I must save them." A warder who has to take care of insane persons will frequently be attacked by them, and have to suffer hard blows; but what does he do? Strike the patient and make a fight of it? No, he holds him down and pins him fast; but not in anger, for he pities him too much to be angry with him. Does a nurse with a delirious patient take any notice of his cross words, and grumbling, and outcries? Not she. She says, "I must try to save this man's life," and so with great kindness she "endureth all things." If you were a fireman, and found a person in an upper room, and the house was on fire, would you not struggle with him rather than let him remain in the room and burn. You would say, "I will save you in spite of

yourself.” Perhaps the foolish body would call you names, and say, “Let me alone, why should you intrude into my chamber?” But you would say, “Never mind my intrusion; I will apologize afterwards for my rudeness, but you must be out of the fire first.” I pray God give you this blessed unmannerliness, this sweet casting of all things to the wind, if by any means you may save some.

If you desire to see the mirror and the paragon of persevering endurance, look you there! I wish you could see it. I wish these eyes could see the sight as I have sometimes seen it. Behold the cross! See the patient Sufferer and that ribald multitude: they thrust out the tongue, they sneer, they jest, they blaspheme; and there he hangs, triumphant in his patience, conquering the world, and death and hell by enduring “all things.” O love, thou didst never sit on a throne so imperial as the cross, when there, in the person of the Son of God, thou didst all things endure. Oh that we might copy in some humble measure that perfect pattern which is here set before us. If you would be saviors, if you would bless your generation, let no unkindness daunt you; let no considerations of your own character, or honor, or peace of mind keep you back, but of you may it be said, even as of your Lord, “He saved others, himself he could not save.”

Have not I shown you four grand battles far excelling all the Waterloos, and Trafalgars, and Almas, and Inkermans on record? Heroes are they that fight and win them, and the Lord God of love shall crown them.

**III.** I close by noting THE SOURCES OF LOVE’S ENERGY. The time is gone, as I thought it would be, but it has brought us round in a circle to where we started from. The Holy Ghost alone can teach men how to love, and give them power to do so. Love’s art is learned at no other school but at the feet of Jesus, where the Spirit of love doth rest on those who learn of him. Beloved, the Spirit of God puts love into us, and helps us to maintain it, thus — first, love wins these victories, for it is her nature. The nature of love is self-sacrifice. Love is the reverse of seeking her own. Love is intense; love is burning; therefore she burneth her way to victory. Love! Look at it in the mother. Is it any hardship to her to lose rest and peace and comfort for her child? If it costs her pain, she makes it pleasure by the ardor of her affection. It is the nature of love to court difficulties, and to



rejoice in suffering for the beloved object. If you have fervent love to the souls of men, you will know how true this is.

Next to this, love has four sweet companions. There are with her tenderness that “beareth all things,” faith that “believeth all things,” hope that “hopeth all things,” and patience which “endureth all things,” and he that hath tenderness, and faith, and hope, and patience hath a brave quaternion of graces to guard him, and he need not be afraid. Best of all, love sucks her life from the wounds of Christ. Love can bear, believe, hope, and endure because Christ has borne, believed, and hoped, and endured for her. I have heard of one that had a twist: they say that he saw something that others never saw, and heard a voice that others never heard, and he became such a strange man that others wondered at him. Oh, that I had more and more of that most solemn twist which comes through feeling a pierced hand laid on my shoulder, and hearing in my ear a sorrowful voice, that selfsame voice which cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” I would see that vision and hear that voice, and then — what then? Why, I must love; I must love; I must love. That would be the soul’s strange bias and sweet twist. Love makes us love; love bought us, sought us, and brought us to the Savior’s feet, and it shall henceforth constrain us to deeds which else would be impossible. You have heard of men sometimes in a mad fit doing things that ordinary flesh and blood could never have performed. Oh to be distracted from selfishness by the love of Christ, and maddened into self-oblivion by a supreme passion for the Crucified. I know not how otherwise to put my thoughts into words so that they may hint at my burning meaning. May the Lord of love look into your very eyes with those eyes which once were red with weeping over human sin: may he touch your hands with those hands that were nailed to the cross, and impress the blessed nailmarks upon your feet, and then may he pierce your heart till it pour forth a life for love, and flow out in streams of kind desires, and generous deeds, and holy sacrifices for God and for his people. God grant it, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  1 Corinthians 13.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 797, 264, 439.

# THE PRINCIPAL WHEAT

## SERMON NO. 1626

*“The principal wheat.” — ~~2005~~ Isaiah 28:25.*

THE PROPHET mentions it as a matter of wisdom on the part of the husbandman, that HE KNOWS WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL THING TO CULTIVATE, and makes it his principal care. The text, with the connection, runs thus, — “Does not the husbandman cast in the principal wheat?” He does not go to the granary and take out wheat, and cummin, and barley, and rye, and fling these about right and left, but he estimates the value of each grain, and arranges them in his mind accordingly. He does not think that cummin, and carroway, which he merely grows to give a flavour to his meal, are of half such importance as his bread-corn; and, though rye and barley have their values, yet he does not reckon that even these are equal to what he calls “the principal wheat.” He is a man of discretion, he arranges things; he places the most important crop in the front rank, and spends upon it the most care.

Here let us learn a lesson. Do keep things distinct in your minds — not huddled and muddled by a careless thoughtlessness. Do not live a confused life, without care and discretion, running all things into one; but sort things out, and divide and distinguish between the precious and the vile. See what this is worth, and what the other is worth, and set your matters in rank and order, making some of them principal, and others of them inferior. I suggest to you young people especially that, in starting life, you say to yourselves, “What shall we live for? There is a principal thing for which we ought to live, what shall it be?” Have you turned over that question, or have you gone at it hit or miss? What are you living for? What is your principal aim? Is it going to be that of the old gentleman in Horace who said to his boy, “Get money: get it honestly, if you can; but, by all means, get money.” Will you be a money-spinner? Shall coin be your principal corn? Or will you choose a life of pleasure — “A short life and a merry one,” as so many fools have said to their great sorrow? Is it in dissipation

that your life is to be spent? Are thistles to be your principal crop? Because there is a pleasure in looking at a Scotch thistle, do you intend to grow acres of pleasurable vice? And will you make your bed upon them when you come to die? Search and see what is worthy of being the principal object in life; and, when you have found it out, then beseech the Holy Spirit to help you to choose that one thing, and to give all your powers and faculties to the cultivation of it. The farmer, who finds that wheat ought to be his principal crop, makes it so, and lays himself out with that end in view: learn from this to have a main object, and to give your whole mind to it.

This farmer was wise, because he counted that to be principal which was the most needful. His family could do without cummin, which was but a flavouring. Perhaps the mistress might complain, or the cook might grumble, but that did not signify so much as it would do if the children cried for bread. They certainly must have wheat, for bread is the staff of life. It is bread that strengtheneth man's heart, and therefore the farmer must grow wheat if he does not grow anything else. That which is necessary he regarded as the principal thing. Is not this common sense? If we were wisely to sit down and estimate, should we not say, "To be forgiven my sins, to be right with God, to be holy, to be fit to live eternally in heaven, is the greatest, the most needful thing for me, and therefore I will make it the principal object of my pursuit." A creature cannot be satisfied unless he is answering the end for which he is created; and the end of every intelligent creature is first, to glorify God, and next, to enjoy God. What a bliss it must be to enjoy God himself for ever and ever. Other things may be desirable, but this thing is needful. A competence of income, a measure of esteem among men, a degree of health — all these are the flavouring of life, but to be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation is life itself. Jesus Christ is the bread by which our soul's best life is sustained. Oh, that we were all wise enough to feel that to be one with Christ is the one thing needful; that to be at peace with God is the principal thing; that to be brought into harmony with the Most High is the true music of our being. Other herbs may take their place in due order, but grace is the principal wheat, and we must cultivate it.

This farmer was wise, because he made that to be the principal thing which was the most fit to be so. Of course, barley is useful as food, for

nations have lived on barley bread, and lived healthily too; and rye has been the nutriment of millions: neither have they starved on oats, and other grains. Still, give me a piece of wheaten bread, for it is the best staff for life's journey. This farmer knew that wheat was the most fitting food for man, and so he did not put the inferior grain, which might act as a substitute, into the prominent place; but he gave his wheat the preference. He did not say, "the principal barley," or "the principal rye," much less "the principal cummin," or "the principal fitches," but "the principal wheat."

And what is there, brethren, that is so fit for the heart, the mind, the soul of man, as to know God and his Christ. Other mental foods, such as the fruits of knowledge, and the dainties of science, excellent though they may be — are inferior nutriment and unsuitable to build up the inner manhood. In my God and my Savior, I find my heaven and my all. My soul sits down to a crumb of truth about Jesus, and finds great satisfaction in living upon it. The more we can know God, and enjoy God, and become like to God, and the more Christ is our daily bread, the more do we perceive the fitness of all this to our new-born natures. O beloved, make that to be your principal object which is the fittest pursuit of an immortal mind.

*"Religion is the chief concern  
Of mortals here below;  
May I its great importance learn,  
Its sovereign virtue know!  
"More needful this than glittering wealth,  
Or aught the world bestows;  
Not reputation, food, or health,  
Can give us such repose."*

Moreover, this farmer was wise, because he made that the principal thing which was the most profitable. Under certain circumstances, in our own country, wheat is not the most profitable thing which a man can grow; but, ordinarily, it is the best crop that the earth yields, and therefore the text speaks of "the principal wheat." Our grandfathers used to rely upon the wheat stack to pay their rent. They looked to their corn as the arm of their strength; and though it is not so now, it always was so of old, and perhaps it may yet be so again. Anyhow, the figure holds good with regard to true religion. That is the most profitable thing. I am told that rich men find it very hard to get hold of anything which yields five per cent nowadays; but

this blessed fear of the Lord is an extraordinarily profitable investment, for it does not yield a hundred per cent or a thousand per cent, but a man begins with nothing and all things become his by faith. Being freely discharged of our sins, we are by overflowing grace greatly enriched, so that we number among our possessions heaven itself, Christ himself, God himself. All things are ours. Oh, what a blessed crop to sow! What a harvest comes of it! Godliness is profitable for the life that now is, and for that which is to come. Godliness is a blessing to a man's body, it keeps him from drunkenness and vice; and it is a blessing to his soul, it makes him sweet and pure. It is a blessing to him every way. If I had to die like a dog, I would like to live like a Christian. If there were no hereafter, yet still, for comfort and for joy, give me the life of one who strives to live like Christ. There is a practical everyday truth in the verse —

*“‘Tis religion that can give  
Sweetest pleasures while we live;  
“‘Tis religion must supply  
Solid comfort when we die.”*

Only that religion must not be of the common sort; it must have for its root a hearty faith in Jesus Christ. See ye to it. Our religion must be either everything or nothing, either first or nowhere. Make it “the principal wheat,” and it will richly repay you.

**II.** Secondly, the husbandman is a lesson to us because HE GIVES THIS PRINCIPAL THING THE PRINCIPAL PLACE. I find that the Hebrew is rendered by some eminent scholars, “He puts the wheat into the principal place.” That little handful of cummin for the wife to flavour the cakes with he grows in a corner; and the various herbs he places in their proper borders. The barley he sets in its plot, and the rye in its acre; but if there is a good bit of rich soil — the best he has — he appropriates it to the principal wheat. He gives his choicest fields to that which is to be the main means of his living.

Now, here is a lesson for you and for me. Let us give to true godliness our principal powers and abilities. Let us give to the things of God our best and most intense thought. I pray you, do not take religion at second hand from what I tell you, or from what somebody else tells you; but think it over. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the word of God. The

thoughtful Christian is the growing Christian. Remember, the service of God deserves our first consideration and endeavor. We are poor things at our prime, but we ought to give the Lord nothing short of our best. God would not have us serve him heedlessly, but he would have us use all the brain and intellect and mind that we have in studying and practising his word. “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.” “Meditate upon these things. Give thyself wholly to them.” If your mind is more clear and active at one time than at another, then sow the principal wheat. If you feel more fresh and more inclined to think at one time of the day than at another, let your mind then go towards the best things.

Be sure, also, to yield to this subject your most earnest love. The best field in the little estate of manhood is not the head, but the heart; sow the principal wheat there. Oh, to have true religion in the heart; to love what we know — intensely to love it; to hold it fast as with the grip of life and death — never to let it go! The Lord says, “My son, give me thy heart,” and he will not be contented with anything less than our heart. Oh, when your zeal is most burning, and your love is most fervent, let the warmth and the fervency all go towards the Lord your God, and to the service of him who has redeemed you with his precious blood. Let the principal wheat have the principal part of your nature. Towards God and his Christ also turn your most fervent desires. When you enlarge your desire, desire Christ; when you become ambitious let your ambition be all for God. Let your hunger and your thirst be after righteousness. Let your aspirations and your longings be all towards holiness, and the things that shall make you like to Christ. Give to this principal wheat your principal desires.

Then let the Lord have the attentive respect of your life. Let the principal wheat be sown in every action. If we are truly Christians we must be as much Christians outside the church as in it. We shall try to make our eating and our drinking, and everything we do, tend to the glory of God. Draw no line between the secular and the religious part of your conduct, but let the secular be made religious by a devout desire to glorify God in the one as much as in the other. Let us worship God in the commonest duties of life, even as they do who stand before his throne. So it ought to be. Let us sow the principal wheat in all the fields of our conversation, in business, in the family, among our friends, and with our children. May we each one feel, “For me to live is Christ. I cannot live without Christ, or for

anything but Christ." Let your whole nature yield itself to Jesus, and to none else.

We should give to this principal wheat our most earnest labors. We should spend ourselves for the spread of the gospel. A Christian man ought to lay himself out to serve Jesus. I hate to see a professing man zealous in politics and lukewarm in devotion; all on fire at a parish vestry, and chill as winter when he comes to a prayer-meeting. Some fly like eagles when they are serving the world, but they have a broken wing in the service of God. This should not be. If anything could rouse us up, and make the lion within us roar in his strength, it should be when we confront the foes of Jesus or fight in his cause. Our Lord's service is the principal wheat, let us labor most in connection with it.

This, I think, should also take possession of us so as to lead to our greatest sacrifices. The love of Christ ought to be so strong as to swallow up self, and make sacrifice our daily joy. For Christ's name's sake we should be willing to endure poverty, reproach, slander, exile, death. Nothing should be dear to a Christian in comparison with Christ. Now, I will put it to you whether it is so or no. Is the love of Jesus the principal wheat with us? Are we giving our religion the chief place or not? I am afraid some people treat religion as certain gentlemen treat an off-hand farm; they put a bailiff into it, and only give an eye to it now and then. Their minister is the bailiff, and they expect him to see to it for them. These off-hand farms are losing concerns. Look at these half-and-half brethren. They have religion? Certainly. But they are like the man of whom the child spoke at the Sunday-school. "Is your father a Christian?" said the teacher. "Yes," said the child, "but he has not worked much at it lately." I could point out several of this sort, who are sowing their wheat very sparingly, and choosing the most barren patch to sow it in. They profess to be Christians, but religion is a tenth-rate article on their farm. Some have a large acreage for the world, and a poor little plot for Christ. They are growers of worldly pleasure and self-indulgence, and they sow a little religion by the roadside for appearance sake. This will not do. God will not thus be mocked. If we despise him and his truth we shall be lightly esteemed. O come let us give our principal time, talent, thought, effort to that which is the chief concern of immortal spirits. May we

imitate the husbandman who gives the principal wheat the principal place in his farm.

**III.** Let us learn a third lesson. **THE HUSBANDMAN SELECTS THE PRINCIPAL SEED-CORN WHEN HE IS SOWING HIS WHEAT.** When a farmer is setting aside wheat for sowing, he does not choose the tail corn and the worst of his produce, but if he is a sensible man he likes to sow the best wheat in the world. Many farmers search the country round for a good sample of wheat for sowing, for they do not expect to get a good harvest out of bad seed. The husbandman is taught of God to put into the ground “the principal wheat.” Let me learn that if I am going to sow to the Lord and to be a Christian, I should sow the best kind of Christianity.

I should try to do this, first, by believing the weightiest doctrines. I would believe not this “ism,” nor that, but the unadulterated truth which Jesus taught; for a holy character will only grow by the Spirit of God out of true doctrine. Falsehood breeds sin: truth begets and fosters holiness. You and I therefore ought to select our seed carefully, and cast out all error. If we are wise we shall think most of the most important truths, for I have known people attach the greatest importance to the smallest things. They fight over the fitches, and leave the wheat to the crows. As for me, those who will may dispute over vials and trumpets, I shall mainly preach the doctrine of the precious blood and the glorious truths of substitution and atonement. These doctrines are the principal wheat, and therefore these shall have my choice.

Next to that, we ought to sow the noblest examples. Many men are dwarfed because they choose a bad model to start with. They imitate dear old Mr. So-and-so till they grow wonderfully like him with the best of him left out. A minister happens to be of a gloomy turn of mind, and he preaches the deep experience of the children of God, and in consequence a band of good people think it their duty to be melancholy. Why need they fall into a ditch because their leader has splashed himself? We should never copy any man’s infirmities. To be like Paul there is no need to have weak eyes; to be like Thomas there is no necessity to doubt. If you copy any good man, there is a point at which you ought to stop short. If I must have a human model, I would prefer one of the bravest of the saints of God; but



oh how much better to follow that perfect pattern which you have in Christ Jesus!

We should sow the best wheat by seeing that we have the purest spirit. Alas! How soon do spirits become soiled by self or pride, or despondency or sloth, or some earthly taint. But what a grand thing it is to live the spirit of Christ. May we be humble, lowly, bold, self-sacrificing, pure, chaste, and holy.

And, then, there is one more mode of sowing selected seed. We should endeavor to live in the closest communion with God. A dear brother prayed just now that we might have as much grace as we were capable of receiving, and that God would bring us into such a state that we might not hinder him in anything which he willed to do by us. This is a good prayer. It should be our desire to rise to the highest form of spiritual life. If you sow this principal wheat, get the best sort of it. There is a spirit and a spirit; and there are doctrines and doctrines; the best is the best for you. O young men, if you mean to have piety, go in for it thoroughly. Do not sneak through the world as if you were ashamed of your Lord. If you are Christ's show your colors. Rally to his banner, gather to his trumpet call, and then stand up, stand up for Jesus. If there is any manhood in you, this great cause calls for it all; exhibit it, and may the Spirit of God help you so to do.

**IV.** Fourthly, THE HUSBANDMAN GROWS THE PRINCIPAL WHEAT WITH THE PRINCIPAL CARE. Some critics say that the proper translation is that the husbandman plants his wheat in rows. It is said that the large crops in Palestine in olden time were due to the fact that they planted the wheat. They set it in lines, so that it was not checked or suffocated by its being too thick in one place, neither was there any fear of its being too thin in another. The wheat was planted, and then streams of water were turned by the foot to each particular plant. No wonder, therefore, that the land brought forth abundantly.

We should give our principal care to the principal thing. Our godliness should be carried out with discretion and care. Brethren, are we careful enough as to our religious walk? Have you ever searched to the bottom of your profession? Why do you happen to be members of a certain church?

Your mother was so. Well, there is some good in that reason, but not enough to justify you in the sight of God. I pray you judge your standing. If any Christian minister is afraid to urge you to this duty I stand in doubt of him. I am not at all afraid. I beg you to examine all that I teach you, for I would not like to be responsible for another man's creed. Like the Bereans, search and see whether these things be according to Scripture or not. One of the greatest blessings that could come upon the church would be a searching spirit which would refer everything to the Holy Scriptures. If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them. Do your service to God as carefully as the eastern farmer planted his wheat, when he set it in rows with great orderliness and exactness. You serve a precise God, therefore serve him precisely. He is a jealous God, therefore be jealous of the least taint of error or will-worship.

Take care, also, that you water every part of your religion, as the farmer watered each plant. Pray for grace from on high that you may never be parched and dried up. Perform to your faith, to your hope, to your love, and to all the plants that are in your soul every other service which the husbandman renders to his wheat. Give grace your principal care, for it deserves it.

**V.** With this I close. Do this, because FROM THIS YOU MAY EXPECT YOUR PRINCIPAL CROP. If religion be the principal thing, you may look to religion for your principal reward. The harvest will come to you in various ways. You will make the greatest success in this life if you wholly live to the glory of God. Success or failure must much depend upon the fitness of our object. It is of no use my attempting to sing, for I shall never be able to conduct a choir. I could not succeed in that, but if I preach, I may succeed, for that is my work. Now you, Christian man, if you try to live to the world you will not prosper, for you are not fitted for it. Grace has spoiled you for sin. If you live to God with all your heart you will succeed in it, for God has made you on purpose for it. As he made the fish for the water, and the birds for the air, so he made the believer for holiness, and for the service of God; and you will be out of your element, a fish out of water, or a bird in the stream, if you leave the service of God. The Eastern farmer's prosperity hinges on his wheat, and yours upon your devotion to God. It is to Godliness that you must look for your joy. Is there any bliss like the bliss of knowing that you are in Christ, and are the beloved of the

Lord? It is to your religion that you must look for comfort on a sick and dying bed, and you may be there very soon.

In the world to come what a crop, what a harvest will come of serving the Lord! What will come out of all else? What but mere smoke? A man has made a million of money, and he is dead. What has he got by his wealth? A man's fame rings throughout the earth as a great and successful warrior, and he is dead. What has he as the result of all his honors? To live to the world is like playing with boys in the street for halfpence, or with babes for bits of platter and oyster shells. Life for God is real and substantial, but all else is waste. Let us think so, and gird up our loins to serve the Lord. May the divine Spirit help us to sow "the principal wheat," and to live in joyful expectation of reaping a happy harvest according to the promise, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

# BAPTISM — A BURIAL

## SERMON NO. 1627

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
OCTOBER 30TH, 1881,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,**

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” — ~~and~~ Romans 6:3,4

I SHALL not enter into controversy over this text, although over it some have raised the question of infant baptism or believers' baptism, immersion or sprinkling. If any person can give a consistent and instructive interpretation of the text, otherwise than by assuming believers' immersion to be Christian baptism, I should like to see them do it. I myself am quite incapable of performing such a feat, or even of imagining how it can be done. I am content to take the view that baptism signifies the burial of believers in water in the name of the Lord, and I shall so interpret the text. If any think not so, it may at least interest them to know what we understand to be the meaning of the baptismal rite, and I trust that they may think none the less of the spiritual sense because they differ as to the external sign. After all, the visible emblem is not the most prominent matter in the text. May God the Holy Spirit help us to reach its inner teaching.

I do not understand Paul to say that if improper persons, such as unbelievers, and hypocrites, and deceivers, are baptized they are baptized into our Lord's death. He says “so many of us,” putting himself with the rest of the children of God. He intends such as are entitled to baptism, and come to it with their hearts in a right state. Of them he says, “Know ye

not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" He does not even intend to say that those who were rightly baptized have all of them entered into the fullness of its spiritual meaning; for if they had, there would have been no need of the question, "Know ye not?" It would seem that some had been baptized who did not clearly know the meaning of their own baptism. They had faith, and a glimmer of knowledge sufficient to make them right recipients of baptism, but they were not well instructed in the teaching of baptism; perhaps they saw in it only a washing, but had never discerned the burial. I will go further, and say that I question if any of us yet know the fullness of the meaning of either of the ordinances which Christ has instituted. As yet we are, with regard to spiritual things, like children playing on the beach while the ocean rolls before us. At best we wade up to our ankles like our little ones on the sea shore. A few among us are learning to swim; but then we only swim where the bottom is almost within reach. Who among us has yet come to lose sight of shore and to swim in the Atlantic of divine love, where fathomless truth rolls underneath, and the infinite is all around? Oh, may God daily teach us more and more of what we already know in part, and may the truth which we have as yet but dimly perceived come to us in a brighter and clearer manner, till we see all things in clear sunlight. This can only be as our own character becomes more clear and pure; for we see according to what we are; and as is the eye such is that which it sees. The pure in heart alone can see a pure and holy God. We shall be like Jesus when we shall see him as he is, and certainly we shall never see him as he is till we are like him. In heavenly things we see as much as we have within ourselves. He who has eaten Christ's flesh and blood spiritually is the man who can see this in the sacred Supper, and he who has been baptized into Christ sees Christ in baptism. To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly.

Baptism sets forth the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and our participation therein. Its teaching is twofold. First, think of our representative union with Christ, so that when he died and was buried it was on our behalf, and we were thus buried with him. This will give you the teaching of baptism so far as it sets forth a creed. We declare in baptism that we believe in the death of Jesus, and desire to partake in all the merit of it. But there is a second equally important matter and that is

our realized union with Christ which is set forth in baptism, not so much as a doctrine of our creed as a matter of our experience. There is a manner of dying, of being buried, of rising, and of living in Christ which must be displayed in each one of us if we are indeed members of the body of Christ.

**I.** First, then, I want you to think of OUR REPRESENTATIVE UNION WITH CHRIST as it is set forth in baptism as a truth to be believed. Our Lord Jesus is the substitute for his people, and when he died it was on their behalf and in their stead. The great doctrine of our justification lies in this, that Christ took our sins, stood in our place, and as our surety suffered, and bled, and died, thus presenting on our behalf a sacrifice for sin. We are to regard him, not as a private person, but as our representative. We are buried with him in baptism unto death to show that we accept him as being for us dead and buried.

Baptism as a burial with Christ signifies, first, acceptance of the death and burial of Christ as being for us. Let us do that at this very moment with all our hearts. What other hope have we? When our divine Lord came down from the heights of glory and took upon himself our manhood, he became one with you and with me; and being found in fashion as a man, it pleased the Father to lay sin upon him, even your sins and mine. Do you not accept that truth, and agree that the Lord Jesus should be the bearer of your guilt, and stand for you in the sight of God? “Amen! Amen!” say all of you. He went up to the tree loaded with all this guilt, and there he suffered in our room and stead as we ought to have suffered. It pleased the Father, instead of bruising us, to bruise him. He put him to grief, making his soul an offering for sin. Do we not gladly accept Jesus as our substitute? O beloved, whether you have been baptized in water or not, I put this question to you, “Do you accept the Lord Jesus as your surety and substitute?” For if you do not, you shall bear your own guilt and carry your own sorrow, and stand in your own place beneath the glance of the angry justice of God. Many of us at this moment are saying in our inmost hearts —

*“My soul looks back to see  
The burdens thou didst bear,  
When hanging on the cursed tree,  
And hopes her guilt was there.”*

Now, by being buried with Christ in baptism, we set our seal to the fact that the death of Christ was on our behalf, and that we were in him, and died in him, and, in token of our belief, we consent to the watery grave, and yield ourselves to be buried according to his command. This is a matter of fundamental faith — Christ dead and buried for us; in other words, substitution, suretyship, vicarious sacrifice. His death is the hinge of our confidence: we are not baptized into his example, or his life, but into his death. We hereby confess that all our salvation lies in the death of Jesus, which death we accept as having been incurred on our account.

But this is not all; because if I am to be buried, it should not be so much because I accept the substitutionary death of another for me as because I am dead myself. Baptism is an acknowledgment of our own death in Christ. Why should a living man be buried? Why should he even be buried because another died on his behalf? My burial with Christ means not only that he died for me, but that I died in him, so that my death with him needs a burial with him. Jesus died for us because he is one with us. The Lord Jesus Christ did not take his people's sins by an arbitrary choice of God; but it was most natural and fit and proper that he should take his people's sins, since they are his people, and he is their federal head. It behooved Christ to suffer for this reason — that he was the covenant representative of his people. He is the Head of the body, the Church; and if the members sinned, it was meet that the Head, though the Head had not sinned, should bear the consequence of the acts of the body. As there is a natural relationship between Adam and those that are in Adam, so is there between the second Adam and those that are in him. I accept what the first Adam did as my sin. Some of you may quarrel with it, and with the whole covenant dispensation, if you please; but as God has pleased to set it up, and I feel the effect of it, I see no use in my controverting it. As I accept the sin of father Adam, and feel that I sinned in him, even so with intense delight I accept the death and atoning sacrifice of my second Adam, and rejoice that in him I have died and risen again. I lived, I died, I kept the law, I satisfied justice in my covenant Head. Let me be buried in baptism that I may show to all around that I believe I was one with my Lord in his death and burial for sin.

Look at this, O child of God, and do not be afraid of it. These are Grand truths, but they are sure and comforting. You are getting among Atlantic

billows now, but be not afraid. Realize the sanctifying effect of this truth. Suppose that a man had been condemned to die on account of a great crime; suppose, further, that he has actually died for that crime, and now, by some wonderful work of God, after having died he has been made to live again. He comes among men again as alive from the dead, and what ought to be the state of his mind with regard to his offense? Will he commit that crime again? A crime for which he has died? I say emphatically, God forbid. Rather should he say, "I have tasted the bitterness of this sin, and I am miraculously lifted up out of the death which it brought upon me, and made to live again: now will I hate the thing that slew me, and abhor it with all my soul." He who has received the wages of sin should learn to avoid it for the future. But you reply, "We never did die so; we were never made to suffer the due reward of our sins." Granted. But that which Christ did for you comes to the same thing, and the Lord looks upon it as the same thing. You are so one with Jesus, that you must regard his death as your death, his sufferings as the chastisement of your peace. You have died in the death of Jesus, and now by strange, mysterious grace you are brought up again from the pit of corruption unto newness of life. Can you, will you, go into sin again? You have seen what God thinks of sin: you perceive that he utterly loathes it; for when it was laid on his dear Son, he did not spare him, but put him to grief and smote him to death. Can you, after that, turn back to the accursed thing which God hates? Surely, the effect of the great grief of the Savior upon your spirit must be sanctifying. How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? How shall we that have passed under its curse, and endured its awful penalty, tolerate its power? Shall we go back to this murderous, villainous, virulent, abominable evil? It cannot be. Grace forbids.

This doctrine is not the conclusion of the whole matter. The text describes us as buried with a view to rising. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death," — for what object? — "that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Be buried in Christ! What for? That you may be dead for ever? No, but that now getting where Christ is, you may go where Christ goes. Behold him, then: he goes, first, into the sepulcher, but next out of the sepulcher; for when the third morning came he rose. If you are one with Christ at all, you must be one with him all through; you must be



one with him in his death, and one with him in his burial, then you shall come to be one with him in his resurrection. Am I a dead man now? No, blessed be his name, it is written, "Because I live ye shall live also." True, I am dead in one sense, "For ye are dead"; but yet not dead in another, "For your life is hid with Christ in God"; and how is he absolutely dead who has a hidden life? No; since I am one with Christ I am what Christ is: as he is a living Christ, I am a living spirit. What a glorious thing it is to have arisen from the dead, because Christ has given us life. Our old legal life has been taken from us by the sentence of the law, and the law views us as dead; but now we have received a new life, a life out of death, resurrection-life in Christ Jesus. The life of the Christian is the life of Christ. Ours is not the life of the first creation, but of the new creation from among the dead. Now we live in newness of life, quickened unto holiness, and righteousness, and joy by the Spirit of God. The life of the flesh is a hindrance to us; our energy is in his Spirit. In the highest and best sense our life is spiritual and heavenly. This also is doctrine which is to be held most firmly.

I want you to see the force of this; for I am aiming at practical results this morning. If God has given to you and to me an entirely new life in Christ, how can that new life spend itself after the fashion of the old life? Shall the spiritual live as the carnal? How can you that were the servants of sin, but have been made free by precious blood, go back to your old slavery? When you were in the old Adam life, you lived in sin, and loved it; but now you have been dead and buried, and have come forth into newness of life: can it be that you can go back to the beggarly elements from which the Lord has brought you out? If you live in sin, you will be false to your profession, for you profess to be alive unto God? If you walk in lust, you will tread under foot the blessed doctrines of the Word of God, for these lead to holiness and purity. You would make Christianity to be a by-word and a proverb, if, after all, you who were quickened from your spiritual death should exhibit a conduct no better than the life of ordinary men, and little superior to what your former life used to be. As many of you as have been baptized have said to the world, — We are dead to the world, and we have come forth into a new life. Our fleshly desires are henceforth to be viewed as dead, for now we live after a fresh order of things. The Holy Spirit has wrought in us a new nature, and though we are in the world, we are not of

it, but are new-made men, “created anew in Christ Jesus.” This is the doctrine which we avow to all mankind, that Christ died and rose again, and that his people died and rose again in him. Out of the doctrine grows death unto sin and life unto God, and we wish by every action and every movement of our lives to teach it to all who see us.

So far the doctrine: is it not a precious one indeed? Oh, if you be indeed one with Christ, shall the world find you polluting yourselves? Shall the members of a generous, gracious Head be covetous and grasping? Shall the members of a glorious, pure, and perfect Head be defiled with the lusts of the flesh and the follies of a vain life? If believers are indeed so identified with Christ that they are his fullness, should they not be holiness itself? If we live by virtue of our union with his body, how can we live as other Gentiles do? How is it that so many professors exhibit a mere worldly life, living for business and for pleasure, but not for God, in God, or with God? They sprinkle a little religion on a worldly life, and so hope to Christianize it. But it will not do. I am bound to live as Christ would have lived under my circumstances; in my private chamber or in my public pulpit, I am bound to be what Christ would have been in like case. I am bound to prove to men that union to Christ is no fiction, or fanatical sentiment: but that we are swayed by the same principles and actuated by the same motives.

Baptism is thus an embodied creed, and you may read it in these words: “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

**II.** But , secondly, A REALIZED UNION WITH CHRIST is also set forth in baptism, and this is rather a matter of experience than of doctrine.

**1.** First, there is, as a matter of actual experience in the true believer, death. “Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” It must be contrary to all law to bury those who are yet alive. Until they are dead, men can have no right to be buried. Very well, then, the Christian is dead, — dead, first, to the dominion of sin. Whenever sin called him aforetime he answered, “Here am I, for thou didst call me.” Sin ruled his members, and if sin said, “Do this,” he did it, like the soldiers obedient to their centurion; for sin ruled over all the parts of his nature, and exercised over him a supreme tyranny. Grace has changed

all this. When we are converted we become dead to the dominion of sin. If sin calls us now, we refuse to come, for we are dead. If sin commands us we will not obey, for we are dead to its authority. Sin comes to us now — oh, that it did not, — and it finds in us the old corruption which is crucified, but not yet dead; but it has no dominion over our true life. Blessed be God, sin cannot reign over us, though it may assail us and work us harm. “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under law, but under grace.” We sin, but not with allowance. With what grief we look back upon our transgressions! How earnestly do we endeavor to avoid them! Sin tries to maintain its usurped power over us; but we do not acknowledge it as our sovereign. Evil enters us now as an interloper and a stranger, and works sad havoc, but it does not abide in us upon the throne; it is an alien, and despised, and no more honored and delighted in. We are dead to the reigning power of sin.

The believer, if spiritually buried with Christ, is dead to the desire of any such power. “What!” say you, “do not godly men have sinful desires?” Alas, they do. The old nature that is in them lusteth towards sin; but the true man, the real ego, desires to be purged of every speck or trace of evil. The law in the members would fain urge to sin, but the life in the heart constrains to holiness. I can honestly say, for my own self, that the deepest desire of my soul is to live a perfect life. If I could have my own best desire, I would never sin again; and though, alas, I do consent to sin so that I become responsible when I transgress, yet my innermost self loathes iniquity. Sin is my bondage, not my pleasure; my misery, not my delight; at the thought of it I cry out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?” In our heart of hearts our spirit cleaves steadfastly to that which is good, and true, and heavenly, so that the real man delights in the law of God, and follows hard after goodness. The main current and true bent of our soul’s wish and will is not towards sin, and the apostle taught us no mere fancy when he said, “For he that is dead is freed from sin.”

Moreover, in the next place we are dead as to the pursuits and aims of the sinning and ungodly life. Brethren, are any of you that profess to be God’s servants living for yourselves? Then you are not God’s servants; for he that is really born again lives unto God: the object of his life is the glory of God and the good of his fellow-men. This is the prize that is set before the quickened man, and towards this he runs. “I do not run that way,” says

one. Very well, then you will not come to the desired end. If you are running after the pleasures of the world or the riches of it, you may win the prize you run for, but you cannot win “the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus.” I hope that many of us can honestly say that we are now dead to every object in life, except the glory of God in Christ Jesus. We are in the world, and have to live as other men do, carrying on our ordinary business; but all this is subordinate, and held in as with bit and bridle; our aims are above yon changeful moon. The flight of our soul, like that of an eagle, is above these clouds: though that bird of the sun alights upon the rock, or even descends to the plain, yet its joy is to dwell above, outsoaring the lightning, rising over the black head of the tempest, and looking down upon all earthly things. Henceforth our grace-given life speeds onward and upward; we are not of the world, and the world’s engagements are not those upon which we spend our noblest powers.

Again, we are dead in this sense, that we are dead to the guidance of sin. The lust of the flesh drives a man this way and that way. He steers his course by the question, “What is most pleasant? What will give me most present gratification?” The way of the ungodly is mapped out by the hand of selfish desire: but you that are true Christians have another guide, you are led by the Spirit in a right way. You ask, “What is good and what is acceptable in the sight of the Most High?” Your daily prayer is, “Lord, show me what thou wouldest have me to do?” You are alive to the teachings of the Spirit, who will lead you into all truth; but you are deaf, yea, dead to the dogmas of carnal wisdom, the oppositions of philosophy, the errors of proud human wisdom. Blind guides who fall with their victims into the ditch are shunned by you, for you have chosen the way of the Lord. What a blessed state of heart this is! I trust, my brethren, that we have fully realized it! We know the Shepherd’s voice, and a stranger we will not follow. One is our teacher, and we submit our understandings to his infallible instruction.

Our text must have had a very forcible meaning among the Romans in Paul’s time, for they were sunk in all manner of odious vices. Take an average Roman of that period, and you would have found in him a man accustomed to spend a large part of his time in the amphitheater, hardened by the brutal sight of bloody shows, in which gladiators slew each other to amuse a holiday crowd. Taught in such a school, the Roman was cruel to

the last degree, and withal ferocious in the indulgence of his passions. A depraved man was not regarded as being at all degraded; not only nobles and emperors were monsters of vice, but the public teachers were impure. When those who were regarded as moral were corrupt, you may imagine what the immoral were. "Enjoy yourself; follow after the pleasures of the flesh," was the rule of the age. Christianity was the introduction of a new element. See here a Roman converted by the grace of God! What a change is in him! His neighbors say, "You were not at the amphitheater this morning. How could you miss the sight of the hundred Germans who tore out each other's bowels?" "No," he says, "I was not there; I could not bear to be there. I am totally dead to it. If you were to force me to be there, I must shut my eyes, for I could not look on murder committed in sport!" The Christian did not resort to places of licentiousness; he was as good as dead to such filthiness. The fashions and customs of the age were such that Christians could not consent to them, and so they became dead to society. It was not merely that Christians did not go into open sin, but they spoke of it with horror, and their lives rebuked it. Things which the multitude counted a joy, and talked of exultingly, gave no comfort to the follower of Jesus, for he was dead to such evils. This is our solemn avowal when we come forward to be baptized. We say by acts which are louder than words that we are dead to those things in which sinners take delight, and we wish to be so accounted.

**2.** The next thought in baptism is burial. Death comes first, and burial follows. Now, what is burial, brethren? Burial is, first of all, the seal of death; it is the certificate of decease. "Is such a man dead?" say you. Another answers, "Why, dear sir, he was buried a year ago." There have been instances of persons being buried alive, and I am afraid that the thing happens with sad frequency in baptism, but it is unnatural, and by no means the rule. I fear that many have been buried alive in baptism, and have therefore risen and walked out of the grave just as they were. But if burial is true, it is a certificate of death. If I am able to say in very truth, "I was buried with Christ thirty years ago," I must surely be dead. Certainly the world thought so, for not long after my burial with Jesus I began to preach his name, and by that time the world thought me very far gone, and said, "He stinketh." They began to say all manner of evil against the preacher; but the more I stank in their nostrils the better I liked it, for the

surer I was that I was really dead to the world. It is good for a Christian to be offensive to wicked men. See how our Master stank in the esteem of the godless when they cried, "Away with him, away with him!" Though no corruption could come near his blessed body, yet his perfect character was not savored by that perverse generation. There must, then, be in us death to the world, and some of the effects of death, or our baptism is void. As burial is the certificate of death, so is burial with Christ the seal of our mortification to the world.

But burial is, next, the displaying of death. While the man is indoors the passers-by do not know that he is dead; but when the funeral takes place, and he is carried through the streets, everybody knows that he is dead. This is what baptism ought to be. The believer's death to sin is at first a secret, but by an open confession he bids all men know that he is dead with Christ. Baptism is the funeral rite by which death to sin is openly set forth before all men.

Next, burial is the separateness of death. The dead man no longer remains in the house, but is placed apart as one who ceases to be numbered with the living. A corpse is not welcome company. Even the most beloved object after a while cannot be tolerated when death has done his work upon it. Even Abraham, who had been so long united with his beloved Sarah, is heard to say, "Bury my dead out of my sight." Such is the believer when his death to the world is fully known: he is poor company for worldlings, and they shun him as a damper upon their revelry. The true saint is put into the separated class with Christ, according to his word, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." The saint is put away in the same grave as his Lord; for as he was, so are we also in this world. He is shut up by the world in the one cemetery of the faithful, if I may so call it, where all that are in Christ are dead to the world together, with this epitaph for them all, "And ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

And the grave is the place — I do not know where to get a word — of the settledness of death; for when a man is dead and buried you never expect to see him come home again: so far as this world is concerned, death and burial are irrevocable. They tell me that spirits walk the earth, and we have all read in the newspaper "The Truth about Ghosts," but I have my

doubts on the subject. In spiritual things, however, I am afraid that some are not so buried with Christ but what they walk a great deal among the tombs. I am grieved at heart that it should be so. The man in Christ cannot walk as a ghost, because he is alive somewhere else; he has received a new being, and therefore he cannot mutter and peep among the dead hypocrites around him. See what our chapter saith about our Lord: “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.” If we have been once raised from dead works we shall never go back to them again. I may sin, but sin can never have dominion over me; I may be a transgressor and wander much from my God, but never can I go back to the old death again. When my Lord’s grace got hold of me, and buried me, he wrought in my soul the conviction that henceforth and for ever I was to the world a dead man. I am right glad that I made no compromise, but came right out. I have drawn the sword, and thrown away the scabbard. Tell the world they need not try to fetch us back, for we are spoiled for them as much as if we were dead. All they could have would be our carcasses. Tell the world not to tempt us any longer, for our hearts are changed. Sin may charm the old man who hangs there upon the cross, and he may turn his leering eye that way, but he cannot follow up his glance, for he cannot get down from the cross: the Lord has taken care to use the mallet well, and he has fastened his hands and feet right firmly, so that the crucified flesh must still remain in the place of doom and death. Yet the true, the genuine life within us cannot die, for it is born of God; neither can it abide in the tombs, for its call is to purity and joy and liberty; and to that call it yields itself.

**3.** We have come as far as death and burial; but baptism, according to the text, represents also resurrection: “That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Now, notice that the man who is dead in Christ, and buried in Christ, is also raised in Christ, and this is a special work upon him. All the dead are not raised, but our Lord himself is “the firstfruits of them that slept.” He is the first-begotten from among the dead. Resurrection was a special work upon the body of Christ by which he was raised up, and that work, begun upon the Head, will continue till all the members partake of it, for —

*“Though our inbred sins require  
Our flesh to see the dust;  
Yet as the Lord our Savior rose,  
So all his followers must.”*

As to our soul and spirit, the resurrection has begun upon us. It has not come to our bodies yet, but it will be given to them at the appointed day. For the present a special work has been wrought upon us by which we have been raised up from among the dead. Brethren, if you had been dead and buried, and had been lying one night, say, in Woking Cemetery, and if a divine voice had called you right up from the grave when the silent stars were shining on the open heath — if, I say, you had risen right out from the green mound of turf, what a lonely being you would have been in the vast cemetery amid the stilly night! How you would sit down on the grave and wait for morning! That is very much your condition with regard to the present evil world. You were once like the rest of the sinners around you, dead in sin, and sleeping in the grave of evil custom. The Lord by his power has called you out of your grave, and now you are alive in the midst of death. There can be no fellowship here for you; for what communion have the living with the dead? The man out there in the cemetery just quickened would find none among all the dead around him with whom he could converse, and you can find no companions in this world. There lies a skull, but it sees not from the eyeholes; neither is there speech in its grim mouth. I see a mass of bones lying in yon corner: the living one looks at them, but they cannot hear or speak. Imagine yourself there. All that you would say to the bones would be to ask, “Can these dry bones live?” You would be a foreigner in that home of corruption, and you would haste to get away. That is your condition in the world: God has raised you up from among the dead, from out of the company among whom you had your former conversation. Now, I pray you, do not go and scratch into the earth, to tear up the graves to find a friend there. Who would rend open a coffin and cry, “Come, you must drink with me! You must go to the theater with me”? No, we dread the idea of association with the dead, and I tremble when I see a professor trying to have communion with worldly men. “Come ye out from among them; be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing.” You know what would happen to you if you were thus raised, and were forced to sit close to a dead body newly taken from the grave. You would cry, “I cannot bear it; I cannot endure it”; you would get



to the wind side of the horrid corpse. So with a man that is really alive unto God: deeds of injustice, oppression, or unchastity he cannot endure; for life loaths corruption.

Notice that, as we are raised up by a special work from among the dead, that rising is by divine power. Christ is brought again “from the dead by the glory of the Father.” What means that? Why did it not say, “by the power of the Father”? Ah, beloved, glory is a grander word; for all the attributes of God are displayed in all their solemn pomp in the raising of Christ from the dead. There was the Lord’s faithfulness; for had he not declared that his soul should not rest in hell, neither should His Holy One see corruption? Was not the love of the Father seen there? I am sure it was a delight to the heart of God to bring back life to the body of his dear Son. And so, when you and I are raised out of our death in sin, it is not merely God’s power, it is not merely God’s wisdom that is seen, it is “the glory of the Father.” Oh, to think that every child of God that has been quickened has been quickened by “the glory of the Father. “ It has taken not alone the Holy Spirit, and the work of Jesus, and the work of the Father, but the very “glory of the Father.” If the tiniest spark of spiritual life has to be created by “the glory of the Father,” what will be the glory of that life when it comes into its full perfection, and we shall be like Christ, and see him as he is! O beloved, value highly the new life which God has given you. Think of it as making you richer than if you had a sea of pearls, greater than if you were descended from the loftiest of princes. There is in you that which it required all the attributes of God to create. He could make a world by power alone, but you must be raised from the dead by “the glory of the Father.”

Notice next, that this life is entirely new. We are to “walk in newness of life.” The life of a Christian is an entirely different thing from the life of other men, entirely different from his own life before his conversion, and when people try to counterfeit it, they cannot accomplish the task. A person writes you a letter and wants to make you think he is a believer, but within about half-a-dozen sentences there occurs a line which betrays the imposter. The hypocrite has very neatly copied our expressions, but not quite. There is a freemasonry among us, and the outside world watch us a bit, and by-and-by they pick up certain of our signs; but there is a private sign which they can never imitate, and therefore at a certain point

they break down. A godless man may pray as much as a Christian, read as much of the Bible as a Christian, and even go beyond us in externals; but there is a secret which he knows not and cannot counterfeit. The life divine is so totally new that the unconverted have no copy to work by. In every Christian it is as new as if he were the very first Christian. Even though in every one it is the image and superscription of Christ, yet there is a milled edge or a something about the real silver that these counterfeits cannot get a hold of. It is a new, a novel, a fresh, a divine thing.

And, lastly, this life is an active thing. I have often wished that Paul had not been so fast when I have been reading him. His style travels in seven-leagued boots. He does not write like an ordinary man. I beg to tell him that if he had written this text according to proper order, it should run, "Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should be raised from the dead." But see; Paul has got over ever so much ground while we are talking: he has reached to "walking." The walking includes the living, of which it is the sign, and Paul thinks so fast when the Spirit of God is upon him that he has passed beyond the cause to the effect. No sooner do we get the new life than we become active: we do not sit down and say, "I have received a new life: how grateful I ought to be. I will quietly enjoy myself." Oh dear, no. We have something to do directly we are alive, and we begin walking, and so the Lord keeps us all our lives in his work; he does not allow us to sit down contented with the mere fact that we live, nor does he allow us to spend all our time in examining whether we are alive or no; but he gives us one battle to fight, and then another; he gives us his house to build, his farm to till, his children to nurse, and his sheep to feed. At times we have fierce struggles with our own spirit, and fears lest sin and Satan should prevail, till our life is scarce discerned by itself, but it is always discerned by its acts. The life that is given to those who were dead with Christ is an energetic, forceful life, that is evermore busy for Christ, and would, if it could, move heaven and earth and subdue all things unto him who is its Head.

This life Paul tells us is an unending one. Once get it, and it will never go from you. "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more."

Next, it is a life which is not under the law or under sin. Christ came under the law when he was here, and he had our sin laid on him, and therefore died; but

after he rose again there was no sin laid on him. In his resurrection both the sinner and the Surety are free. What had Christ to do after his rising? To bear any more sin? No, but just to live unto God. That is where you and I are. We have no sin to carry now; it was all laid on Christ. What have we to do? Every time we have the headache, or feel ill, are we to cry out, "This is a punishment for my sin"? Nothing of the kind. Our punishment is all done with, for we have borne the capital sentence, and are dead: our new life must be unto God.

*"All that remains for me  
Is but to love and sing,  
And wait until the angels come  
To bear me to the King."*

I have now to serve him and delight myself in him, and use the power which he gives me of calling others from the dead, saying, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." I am not going back to the grave of spiritual death nor to my grave-clothes of sin; but by divine grace I will still believe in Jesus, and go from strength to strength, not under law, not fearing hell, nor hoping to merit heaven, but as a new creature, loving because loved, living for Christ because Christ lives in me, rejoicing in glorious hope of that which is yet to be revealed by virtue of my oneness in Christ.

Poor sinner, you do not know anything about this death and burial, and you never will till you have power to become sons of God, and that he gives to as many as believe on his name. Believe on his name, and it is all yours. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Romans 6.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 775, 762, 646.

# THE VOICE BEHIND THEE

## SERMON NO. 1672

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 23RD, 1882,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

*“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left”*

— ~~2302~~ *Isaiah 30:21*

ON the Sabbath before last we spoke concerning “the still small voice.” After the thunder and the fire and the earthquake had passed away, for the Lord was not in them, there came a still small voice unto Elijah, which reached the prophet’s heart, and brought him back to his former condition of communion with God. This hopeful morning we shall hear that same “still small voice” actually speaking a warning and teaching word, and we shall see how it operates upon the sinner, reaching both his ear and his heart. God calls to the rebellious, and by his gentle word they are brought to his feet with repentance, turned from their evil wandering, and led in the way of obedience.

The word behind us which is spoken of in the text is mentioned as one among other covenant blessings. No “if” or “but” is joined to it. It is one of those gracious, unconditional promises upon which the salvation of the guilty depends. There are many comforts of the new life which depend upon our own action and behavior, and these come to us with “ifs”; but those which are vital and essential are secured to the chosen of God without “but” or “peradventure.” It shall be so: God declares it shall, and he has power to carry out every jot and tittle of every promise that he makes to his people. I shall ask you at this good hour mainly to admire the free and sovereign grace of God in making such a promise as this to anybody, and especially in making it to a people whom he speaks of as “a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord.” He severely upbraids them, and then in great patience he says to

them, even to them, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you.” God’s grace is marvellous in itself, but its most marvellous point is the singular channel in which it chooses to flow: it runs down into the Dead Sea of sin and makes the waters pure.

**I.** I invite you to notice first of all THE POSITION OF THE WANDERER to whom this special blessing comes. How does God find men when he declares that they shall hear a word behind them? First, he finds them with their backs turned to him. This is clear enough, if you remember that the word is to be heard “behind” them. The sinner has gone away from God, and God calls after him from behind. He has turned his back upon his true Friend, his best Friend, his only capable Friend, but that Friend does not therefore change his temper and resent the insult; nay, he is provoked to a love more pleading and persuasive than ever, and calls to him to come into the right way. After having transgressed wilfully and wickedly, the rebel now distinctly turns his back on God and truth; according to the Lord’s complaint, “they have turned unto me the back, and not the face.” He turns his back on the law, on the gospel, on mercy, on eternal life. He turns his back on the adoption of the great Father, on pardon bought with the blood of Jesus, on regeneration which can alone be wrought by the Holy Spirit: he turns his back upon holiness, happiness, and heaven. He turns away from sunlight, and wanders down into deeper and yet deeper night, striving to get away from God and holy influences. Yet the Lord follows him, and with a voice of touching love and tender compassion he calls to him, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” The word of warning, instruction, and entreaty follows the wanderer, and with ever-increasing pathos beseeches him to turn and live. Again and again the wise, earnest, personal voice assails his ear, as if love resolved that he should not perish if wooing could win him to life. The wanderer seeks not God, but his God seeks him. Man turns from the God of love, but the love of God turns not away from him.

What matchless grace is this, that God should thus call after sinners when they openly renounce his rule, and flee from his mercy. Oh, if the Lord had turned his back on us, where had we been? If he had given us up to our own devices, and left us to ourselves, then our eternal ruin would want but a few more days and months to consummate itself, and we should be driven for ever from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his

power. Have we not said unto God, “Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of thy ways”? If he had replied to us, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire in hell,” it had only been the echo of our own words. When we said to him “Depart,” suppose he had turned round and said, “Depart, depart yourselves.” But instead of that, while we turn ourselves deliberately away from God, he still calls after us; he will not let us go. We have a freedom of will, but it is by that freedom of will that men are damned, since they will not come unto Christ that they might have life, but they will to follow the devices and desires of their own hearts. Free-will, thus held in chains by evil lustings, becomes the most destructive agency in the world; but, blessed be God, he has freedom of will too, and that freedom of sovereign grace will not have its hands bound nor its lips closed, but it will act and speak in omnipotent love. So when the Lord sees us in the wantonness of our wickedness, dead in trespasses and sins, his great love wherewith he loves us seeks us out, and from the lips of that love come tender accents bidding us return to God, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

Observe that these persons had not only turned their backs on God, but they were going further and further away from him. Of course, when you have once turned your back upon the right, the further you travel the more wrong you become. They were not content to be near to God, even with their backs to him, but they hastened away. They are eager and quick to escape from their own mercy. Like the prodigal, they are not satisfied till they get into “a far country”: they cannot rest in the same land with their God: they journey with all speed away from the Lord, and the greater the distance that they can set between themselves and their Father the more are they at ease. In forgetting God they find a horrible peace: the peace of death, a peace which will stupefy them into eternal destruction. Now, it is while they are thus going hot foot away from God, further and further every day, madly rushing along the downward road, never satisfied with the sin to which they have attained, flying from God as if he were their terror and would be their destroyer, it is even then that the word sounds behind them and they are startled into thought. They have a powerful voice pleading with them thus, —

“Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die, O house of Israel? This is the way, walk ye in it. The way you are now pursuing is not the way

to peace and safety; return at once, for this is the way, walk ye in it.”

Here again I admire the overflowing riches of the grace of God, that he should call men to himself when they are altogether taken up with other things, when every thought, and every word, and every act is in rebellion against him. Paul saith, “Doth God care for oxen?” but here is a far greater wonder, “Doth God care for worthless revolvers?” When a chosen man is desperately set on mischief, determined to destroy himself, God is yet more determined to save him. The two determinations meet, and we shall see which of the two will prove itself the stronger one. We soon find that the determination of God overcomes the determination of man. The iron breaks the northern iron and the steel. “Thus saith the Lord; your covenant with death is broken, and your league with hell is disannulled:” for there was a prior covenant, a covenant of grace made by God himself, which stands fast for ever; and there was a prior league which God made with his Son on our behalf, and that league shall overthrow our league with death and hell. Glory be to God that even when the sinner is still rebellious, and shows no signs of repentance, nor is conscious of any wish to turn from the error of his ways, even then, while his heart is black as night, and his spirit is choke-full with rebellion, God calls to him, “Return, O backsliding children.” “They shall hear a voice behind them, saying, This is the way.”

More than this, however, is true. They had turned their backs on God, and were going further from him, though they were warned not to do so, and they were pursuing their course in spite of warning. Read the twentieth verse: “Thine eyes shall see thy teachers”: there they stood, good men, right in the way, entreating their hearers to cease from provoking their God and destroying their own souls. Hear them cry, “Turn ye from your iniquities, for this way leads to death: turn ye, turn ye.” They can see their teachers stretching out their hands with eager importunity, pleading even unto boiling tears, persuading them to turn from the way and the wages of sin. Still they push on, as if eternal destruction were a prize to be sought rather than a doom to be dreaded. Was it not so with many of us in the days of our unregeneracy? Mother and father endeavored to block up the evil road: in them our eyes beheld our teachers. How they taught us: how they prayed with us: how they labored if possible to turn us from the

error of our ways! But we persevered with obstinate resolve. It is hard going to hell over a pleading mother, and equally hard to destroy one's self by pushing aside an earnest father's good advice; but we seemed resolved to do so. Then perhaps followed Sunday-school teachers, full of intense love to us; and how they pleaded! How wisely they set the case before us, and how tenderly they pleaded: our eyes did see our teachers, but still our eyes would not see the right way, nor would our hearts desire it; we were determined that we would by hook or by crook land ourselves in hell. Our soul was given to her idols, and after those idols we resolved to go. We loved the wages of iniquity, the pleasures of the flesh, the pride of life, the conceit of self-salvation: we loved anything better than our God; and though our teachers were before us, ready to help and eager to teach we made small account of them. In after-life it may be our teachers were earnest pastors, who could not preach dull, dead sermons, and would not suffer us to sleep ourselves into perdition. They cried aloud and spared not: they were in anguish about us: they gave themselves no rest until we would turn from our iniquities. We could see our teachers, and we had a loving respect for them too, yet we cast their word behind our back: it was of no use to us: we loved iniquity, and that way we would go, come what might of it. Yet even then, when we were despising God's prophets and paying no regard to all the words of warning, the Lord was still loving us, looking after us, and crying after us, and saying, "This is the way; this is the way: walk ye in it. Come back, come back, come back: you are destroying yourselves: return unto your Father and your God." Why did he not throw the reins on our necks, and say, "Let them alone; they are given unto idols: I have hewed them with the prophets, I have ploughed them with men of God, but all has come to nought; they have stiffened their necks, they have hardened their hearts, they have made their forehead like unto an adamant stone; therefore let them reap the result of their transgressions"? But it was not so, for God had made this word an unconditional promise of his covenant, "They shall hear a voice behind them."

One more mark of the ungodly condition of those whom God would call was this, that they had many ways in which to wander. Sometimes they roamed to the right hand, at other times they wandered to the left, but they never turned face about. Hear ye the way to heaven; it is right about



face then keep straight on to glory. Nay, but we will turn this way, we will turn that way, we will turn any way except to God. Some men have right-hand sins, respectable iniquities which challenge little censure from their fellows; not black, but whitewashed sins. Such men are not thieves, they are not licentious, they are not drunkards, but their sins take a quieter form; they mock God with their self-righteousness, and insult him with their prayers, which are no prayers, but only pretences and fictions, and not the real prayers of God's elect ones. Others have left-hand sins; they plunge into the sins of the flesh; no vice is too black for them. Only propose to have a little pleasure and they will plunge into any vice to gain it: ay, and almost without pleasure, altogether without present profit, they will sin, as if for sin's own sake. When they have burned their finger in the candle they will after that hold their arm in the fire; when they have brought disease into their bodies by sin they will return to the evil which caused it; when they have beggared their purse by their extravagant lusts yet still they will go on playing the profligate; when they have filled themselves with despair till they are as a bucket running with gall and wormwood, and this has been emptied out for them by God's grace, they will fill it up again, for they are infatuated with sin; they find a delight in it and they will not, they cannot give it up. Shall the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may they that have been accustomed to do evil learn to do well. Alas, such a miracle has not happened to them. They choose all shapes of evil, but the good they will not have. I say their right-hand sins, their left-hand sins, sins of their life, sins of their heart, — they will follow all these eagerly, but unless God by his own omnipotent voice shall call them back they will not come to him, to Jesus, to grace, to holiness, and heaven. Tell it, tell it, tell it; sound it forth beneath the sky for ever and ever, that the Lord does call to himself such wanton wanderers. "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, saith the Lord: Turn, O backsliding children; for I am married unto you." Oh, the pity of God, not only for the miserable, but for the wicked; it surpasses thought. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly." Favor to the guilty is the choicest of favor. We come not to preach salvation to the righteous — for where shall we find them? — but we proclaim it to the unrighteous and to the ungodly. "The whole have no need of a physician; but they that are sick"; and Christ has come after the sick, calling, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Oh, if anything will touch the heart it should be this

word of free grace, this fact that God doth bid men return to him. Mercy is full of patience; it bears and forbears, and still it cries, "This is the way, walk ye in it"; oh, who would be so cruelly ungrateful as to close his ear against its pleadings?

Thus I have spoken sufficiently upon the position of the wanderer.

**II.** Now, for a little while, we will dwell upon THE CALL OF MERCY. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee."

Notice, it is a call that is altogether undesired, and comes unsought to the man who has gone astray. He hears the inward call whose voice is "Return:" he looks for a moment, and then puts his foot down to pursue his journey. "Never," he says, "will I alter my course," and he boldly hastens on, though before him lie death and hell. As he is persevering in his ruinous course the same word again bids him "Return." He hears the admonition, but still he pushes on; he must not and will not return from the way of evil. If he could reach a spot where such disturbing voices would never trouble him how gladly would he hasten towards it. Hence so many altogether forsake the place of worship: they prefer the stagnant pool of stupid obstinacy to the sweet river of the water of life. So far from desiring to be warned, if they could voyage to a distant Tarshish, where voices of warning would never reach them more, it would be a delightful journey; and if ship could be taken, they would, like Jonah, pay the fare to the shipmaster, and secure a berth in the next vessel. I have heard of one in the backwoods of America who was unloading his furniture, and while doing so up rode a Methodist minister. "Confound you," said he, "I have moved half-a-dozen times to get away from you Methodist fellows: I am never comfortable where you are. I will put the things on the cart again, and find a spot where I shall be free from you." On they went to another clearing, but when they reached it the first thing that happened, before the man took up his lodging, was the appearance of a Methodist minister. "Where shall I go to get away from you Methodist preachers?" "There is nowhere I know of," said the minister, "that you can go, for I am afraid if you go to hell you will find some of them there, for preachers have been lost. The very best thing you can do is to yield at once, and let me hold a service to-night in your camp." That was sound advice; and so some of you will be pestered and worried as long as you live if you will not come

to Christ. Omnipotence has servants everywhere, and these are all charged to warn you of your peril. I knew one who would not go to a place of worship, and turned every Bible out of his house; but he found a copy of the holy Book in his house, and as he cursed and swore he learned that it was the property of a daughter whom he loved too much to scold, and he was obliged to let the sacred volume rest where she had placed it. A Bible in a house where it is forbidden to be read is a splendid power for good, as he soon discovered. In a house where it is outwardly honored the Bible may have little influence, but if it gets where it must not be allowed, everybody reads it. If you can make God's Word to be forbidden fruit, Eve will feed on it, and Adam will follow her. Thus the grace of God came into the house, and it would never be expelled. Down by Mitcham, when the lavender is growing, if you take a house there you will discern a smell of lavender; you may shut the windows and close the doors, but when any persons enter a whiff of lavender enters with them, you cannot help it; and if you live where the gospel is preached at all you will be sure to hear it, and made to know of it. It is God's intention that you should. It is a voice that comes unasked and undesired, but come it does.

"A word behind thee"; it is the voice of an unseen caller whose existence has been almost forgotten. It is not the teachers that speak in this powerful way. The teachers you have seen with your eyes, and they have done you no good; but someone calls whom you never saw and never will see till he sits on the throne of judgment at the last great day; but still he utters a word which cannot be kept out of your ears. It will come to you mysteriously at all sorts of hours crying, "Return, return, return." It will sound often at dead of night, and make the chambers of conscience ring with its notes. I have known it to wake a man out of his slumbers: I have known it sound in his dreams till he dreamed of hell, and woke up and felt the torment in his own conscience. Though he has done all he could, has been off to the theater, to the gay party, to the entertainment, to deeper sin, yet still even there the word has haunted him. I recollect one who in this very city plunged into all manner of gaiety to try to get rid of this word, yet God met him in a play; words were used in the performance which touched his conscience, and he fled from the playhouse as from a burning building, fell on his knees, and sought and found the Savior. This call of mercy is the word of a hidden One: you cannot see who it is that

speaks, yet you cannot shut your ears to his admonitions nor refuse reverence to his warnings.

This voice pursues and overtakes the sinner. Do you see him running, — with all his might rushing to his own destruction? The word comes, at first, rather feebly — “Return.” He scarcely looks back, but on he flies. Lo, the voice follows. He runs faster from it to show his determination to carry out his own will. The voice still follows him, saying, “Return.” Then he stops a minute, but being desperately enamoured of his transgressions, he again takes to his heels to fly away from God; still the word pursues his footsteps, and in pleading accents cries, — “Return, return, return, return;” till at last he is constrained to sit down and listen to the word which comes from he knows not where. He cannot understand how and why it comes so home to him, but it is a fulfillment of the promise; it is the word behind him saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

That voice when it comes to sinners is generally most opportune, for according to the text they are to hear this voice behind them when they turn to the right hand or to the left. A man may go steadily plodding on in his course of ungodliness and hear no such word of pleading, but how often it has happened that there has been a temptation of a more than usually forceful character, and the traveler was about to turn to the right, and then, at that precise moment, he has heard the word of God behind him giving him warning. His feet had almost gone; his steps had well-nigh slipped, but the word of the Lord upheld him, and he went not into the deadly sin. Or it may be it is what I have described as a left-handed sin: the man was carried on to an action which, if he had actually performed it, would have involved his sure destruction; but just as he was about to turn down Deadman’s Lane there came a voice behind him, “Return, return.” Often it is so, and even if the man does not return and seek the right way, but keeps steadily on as carelessly as ever, still he is slackening his speed, and he dares not take that left-hand turning into gross sin which he would have followed if the word had not checked him. Even where the Spirit of God does not save a man it keeps him from many a sin; and when men rebel against the light and will not yield to it, yet still that light has a restraining influence over them of which they may be unconscious. Those who watch them know that if that bit and bridle had not been supplied by the word they would have gone to an excess of riot which would have been

dangerous to others as well as totally destructive to themselves. Blessed be God for the opportuneness of the word of mercy. Men delay to come, but God does not delay to call.

And you see, to close this second point, that it is absolutely necessary that the potent word should be spoken and should be heard. For the man had seen his teachers, but they had not wrought him any good. How often the Lord seems to put us ministers right up in the corner with our faces to the wall, till we are little in the eyes of our hearers and little in our own eyes. He does so with me, and while I can glorify his name and bless him abundantly for the many that are brought to Christ, yet I never take the slightest congratulation to myself about it, for what am I but the driest and most barren stick that there is in all my Master's garden apart from his watering? If sinners had nothing to save them but us poor preachers, not one of them would be brought up from death and hell. Sinners would laugh at us as simpletons if God were not with us: they do so as it is, and I do not wonder at it, because there is enough in us that deserves to be laughed at. They are ready to despise us, and we cannot be broken-hearted if they do, for we ourselves used in former days to despise the servants of God, and if we do not do so now, it is because the grace of God has made a change in us: we cannot expect better treatment than we ourselves rendered to better men when they pleaded with us. The word behind us is needful, that "still small voice" which no mortal man can speak, but only God himself, that inward monition of the conscience, that touching language of the heart which is as much beyond the power of man as to make a world or breath life into an image of clay. Therefore pray ye mightily to the blessed Spirit that he may breathe on men and save them, and that the word of God may still follow and pursue them till they turn from the way of transgression.

I leave that point. You have seen the position of the rambler, and the grace of God in the call of mercy.

**III.** But what was THE WORD OF THAT CALL? It is stated at full length, "This is the way, walk ye in it." That is the word of the call. It contains within itself, first, specific instruction. "This is the way." There is a kind of preaching which has nothing specific, definite, and positive in it: it is a bit of cloud-land, and you may make what you like out of it — God's

grace or man's merit, faith in Christ or faith in self. You need to be your own instructor, and then like the child looking into the fire you will see whatever your own eye chooses to create. Too much preaching is of a kind so mixed that it reminds me of the showman when his visitors asked, "Which is Wellington and which is Napoleon?" "Whichever you please," said he; "you have paid your money and you may take your choice." So it seems to be with many preachers as to doctrine. You may have what kind of doctrine you like so long as you pay your pew-rent. "Cleverly put," cries one, when he had heard a smart sermon. Is not that enough? I answer, it is not enough: we want the sure testimony of revelation, sealed in the heart by the Holy Ghost. Cleverness is not God's way of blessing men. Conjectures and loose opinions are not worth the breath which is expended in expressing them. The Lord lays down a definite pathway, and he says, "This is the way." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved; this is the way. Repent and be converted, every one of you; this is the way. To leave sin, to quit self, to trust in Christ: this is the way." Something definite is laid down before those who desire to be taught of God, and they are told what is to be done, what is to be received, what is to be given up. "This is the way." Definite instruction is given. This may not suit the Broad School, but it is exactly what the anxious seeker needs.

This definite instruction may also be said to be a special correction. When the voice behind says, "This is the way," it does as good as say that the opposite path is not the way; for there is only one way to heaven, and there never will be two; and when men hear a voice saying, "This is the way," it does in effect remind them that the opposite is not the way. If ye are going the reverse of the right way, turn ye from it, and ye shall live. How much we ought to bless God that the gospel comes in as a corrective, kills the false and introduces us to the true. May falsehood be slain within us, and truth reign there for ever. May we leave all other roads, since the Lord has said of one road only, "This is the way."

It is also a word of sure confirmation. "This is the way." When that is heard many times, — "This is the way," "This is the way," "This is the way;" when, according to our hymn,

*“We hear our Savior say,  
‘Come hither, soul, I am the Way,’”*

if we have already believed it to be the way we are strengthened in that conviction. Hearing the mysterious word declaring again and again, “This is the way,” men grow to believe the truth of God’s word, and out of that by-and-by there is begotten a living faith in a living Savior. Oh, this is a great mercy, to hear the same thing many times, to hear the voice proclaim again and again and again, “This is the way,” “This is the way.” “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ, the righteous.” May the repetitions of the Spirit effectually preserve us from the deadly shadow of doubt, and fix us as a nail in a sure place.

This is followed up by a word of personal direction. “Walk ye in it.” Do not merely hear about it, but “walk ye in it.” Be not content to be critics, thinkers, and considerers, but become doers of the word. “This is the way,” — here is the doctrine: “Walk ye in it,” — there is the practice. Well is it when the Lord by his Spirit speaks to the runaway sinner and tells him what he is to do and to believe; then he makes the way and the walk to be vividly present, — “This is the way, walk ye in it” without delay.

This takes the form of encouraging permission. Some think they may not come to Christ. They actually ask the question, “May I believe in him? Is there salvation for me?” Why, saith the text, “This is the way.” Do not sit looking at it: “walk ye in it.” “But I am so big a sinner.” “Christ is the way; walk ye in it.” There is room enough for big sinners in Jesus. “But I have been so long coming.” Never mind: this is the way, “walk ye in it.” Never mind if you have been seventy years coming if you have come to the way at last, “Walk ye in it.” “But I am afraid my feet are so polluted that I shall stain the way:” “This is the way, walk ye in it.” You are not told to stand on one side and wait till something shall happen to you which shall persuade you to come, but here is the king’s highway, walk ye in it. Walking is the simplest of all exercises. There is no great artistic skill required in order to walk, but walking is all that is wanted. Come to Christ, — come to him anyhow. Oh soul, tumble to him somehow; trust him as best you can: and if you cannot do it without question, trust him because you must trust him, since you have nobody else to trust to. Throw

yourself into Jesus' arms; swoon away on the bosom of Christ. It is the essence of faith, to die into the life of God in Christ Jesus. This is the message which comes behind many a runaway sinner, — "This is the way, walk ye in it."

**IV.** According to our text success is promised to the word. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." Notice, **THE SUCCESS OF THE WORD**, — thine ears shall hear. God not only gives us something to hear, but he gives us ears to hear with. Oh, the mercy of God! he spreads the table, and then he gives the appetite; he furnishes the garments, and he gives us the sense of nakedness, and so leads us to put them on. Everything that is wanted to bear a man from the gates of hell to the gates of heaven free-grace provides. Nothing is left out: the catalogue is complete: he that sends the tidings also opens the ears. "Thine ears shall hear." This is effectual grace. Teachers cannot make men hear. They can appeal to the external ear, and after that they have no more that they can do; but God can make men hear. Without violating the freedom of their wills he can get at their hearts, at their consciences, at their understandings, and he can press the truth home to their souls. When the Lord does it, it is done. When we do it, it is often so done that afterwards it is undone, but verily I know that what God doeth shall be for ever. All that is of nature's spinning will be unravelled one day; but when God spins, it will last throughout eternity.

I take it when we read here, "Thine ears shall hear," it means first, that the message of divine love shall come to the man's mind so as to create uneasiness in it. He is jauntily traversing the road to destruction: he has chosen the path, and he delights in it. It often looks to him to be a flowery way, a pleasant road. So he walks on, and he would be very happy but for that word behind him crying, "Turn ye! turn ye! turn ye!" Just as he was turning down that glade in the wood to the right, where all the flowers of spring are found in profusion, that call troubled him again! He would sooner have seen a serpent hissing in the pathway, or heard a lion roar from the thicket, than have heard that word. The man says, "I never can be quiet: I can see other people going to amusements and pleasures, and they heartily enjoy themselves; but the fact is, the more amusement I have the less I am amused, and I am never more miserable than when everybody else is laughing. Why am I thus?" He thinks he is hardly done by, and is



the special object of God's hatred. Everybody else is jolly, but he is gloomy. They can look on the wine when it is red, when it moveth itself aright, when it giveth its color in the cup; and so could he once look into the rosy depths, but now he sees that serpent at the bottom of it, and he is afraid to touch it lest the draught should turn to venom in his veins. He almost curses the arrangements of heaven which have made him so ill at ease. He wishes he had never heard the parson preach the sermon which bothered him so; he wishes he had never had a godly mother at all, that he might have gone straight away into sin, and have been as merry as a cricket; but now there is that voice again behind him, boring its way into his tingling ears. For a moment he had forgotten it, but there it comes again — "Turn! turn! turn! turn!" He stops his ears; but it bombards his soul with worse than cannon balls; as if the word of God pounded him with shells, he hears the thunders of the cannonade, — "Return! Return! Return!" What can he do? He longs to escape from the divine rebuke. The word has made him quiver and quake. So far so good. We shall see next what will happen to him.

After a while there gets to be a desire in his heart. It is only a faint and spasmodic desire, — nothing very strong or constant — but there it is, and it cannot be quenched. "I wish I could get right somehow: for in my present condition I am in an evil case; I am sailing in the wrong boat; I wish I could land somewhere, and take the return boat and get to my home. I do not feel at all easy; I wish I knew what to do to be saved. I do know it somehow, for I have heard it every Sabbath day, but yet I do not understand it; I cannot get hold of it; I wish I could, for I am anxious to be forgiven, to be renewed in the spirit of my mind, to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus." "Do you know," he says to someone, "that voice I could not bear, that used to wake me up at nights, that kept me out of pleasure? There is a kind of music in it now; I like to hear it: I wish I heard it so that it had an effect upon me, for I am afraid I shall go down to the pit, and be lost under accumulated responsibilities for having neglected the call of divine love. Oh, help me to come to Christ, for I am anxious to reach him, but I feel as if I could not come. I do not feel as I ought. I am told to believe, but I do not know what it means, or I cannot do it.

*“I would but can’t believe,  
Then all would easy be.  
I would but cannot, Lord, relieve:  
My help must come from thee.”*

He is getting on all right, friends. We shall have a better bulletin concerning him directly. He is wonderfully improving: a great deal of the fever of pride has gone out of the man; we shall have him yet in perfect health. He could not rest because he heard too much of the word behind him, and now he cannot rest because he cannot hear enough of it: he desires that it may penetrate his soul and change him from darkness to light.

What shall happen next? As that voice continues to sound, it pulls him up, and leads to resolve. The word of the Lord has put a bit into his mouth and a bridle between his jaws; he does not dare go any further; he sits down to consider. I think I saw him on his knees too, and he is resolved if heaven is to be had he will have it; if mercy is to be found he will find it; he will rake the world over, but he will gain the pearl of great price. I think I heard him say he would not go to sleep till he found Jesus. I am glad he has come to that pass. Friend, you are just like the prodigal when he said, “I will arise and go to my father”; only take care you do not end in resolutions. Let it be said of you as of that same prodigal, “He arose, and came to his father”; for all our resolutions are not worth the making unless they be most earnestly and speedily carried into effect. Observe the effect of the word behind the wanderer. Cannot you see the man who was running so fast? He has pulled up. He sees a line drawn across his path, and he must not go over it. He feels that if he goes further he may never have another call of mercy, and this makes him pause. Did not we sing this morning,

*“Soon that voice will cease its calling”?*

The man is anxious to obey while he may. He is not yet resolved to go back, but he dares not go further.

Watch him, for the voice is calling again, and he is every now and then turning his ear round as if he wanted to hear it. “Return, return, return.” He smites upon his breast and cries, “Would God I could return; I will return, for I cannot perish; I cannot let things go as once I did; I cannot leave everything to take its own way while I take my chance. No, I must

have Christ or else I die, and I must have him soon, or else I shall seal my eternal destiny, and prove a castaway for ever. O God, call again, call again; keep on calling, till I come; for lo, my spirit answers, ‘Draw me, and I will run after thee.’ When thou saidst unto me, ‘Seek ye my face,’ my heart said unto thee, ‘Thy face, Lord, will I seek.’“

What will be the last stage of this inner work? Since the man dares not go any further in this wrong way, what is he to do? He cannot turn to the right or to the left, for God has hedged up his way with thorns. Now, listen to what he will say, “I will return unto my first husband, for it was better with me then than now.” This poor soul looks on him whom he pierced. He did not know he was piercing his Redeemer; but now he sees it all, and while his eyes begin to stream with tears, he turns unto this Christ upon the cross, and finds life while looking at him. See him get up and feel as if he did not know what to do with himself as he cries,

*“Blest cross; blest sepulcher; blest rather be  
The man that here did shed his blood for me.”*

Now he enquires, “Which is my way? Speak, sweet voice; speak, sweet voice; tell me which is my way.” And now the voice moves and speaks in front of him; for shepherds go before their sheep. The man looks and sees the Crucified One with pierced hands and feet leading the way, and he delights to follow him: ay, and he shall follow him until at the last he shall see his face in glory everlasting. Redeemed by blood and rescued by power eternal, and brought home to the great Shepherd’s fold, to go no more out for ever, the sinner shall be filled with gladness. Listen, then, listen, ye that have turned your backs on God! Infinite mercy woos you, boundless compassion entreats you to be saved. Turn ye; turn as you are, all black and filthy and bemired; tarry not to mend or wash, but come to Jesus all unholy and unclean, without a single sound speck upon your leprous frame, utterly lost and ruined. Christ died for such as you. I say again, tarry not to improve yourselves, but come now, while mercy’s voice incites you, while the Holy Ghost not only entreats, but sweetly constrains. Come and welcome, sinners, come. The Lord bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Isaiah 30.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 909, 496, 497.

# ALL JOY IN ALL TRIALS

## A SERMON NO. 1704

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING,  
FEBRUARY 4TH, 1883,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” — ~~SOME~~ James 1:2-4.

JAMES calls the converted among the twelve tribes his brethren. Christianity has a great uniting power: it both discovers and creates relationships among the sons of men. It reminds us of the ties of nature, and binds us with the bonds of grace. Every one that is born of the Spirit of God is brother to every other that is born of the same Spirit. Well may we be called brethren, for we are redeemed by one blood; we are partakers of the same life; we feed upon the same heavenly food; we are united to the same living head; we seek the same ends; we love the same Father: we are heirs of the same promises; and we shall dwell for ever together in the same heaven. Wherefore, let brotherly love continue; let us love one another with a pure heart fervently, and manifest that love, not in word only, but in deed and in truth. Whatever brotherhood may be a sham, let the brotherhood of believers be the most real thing beneath the stars.

Beginning with this word “brethren,” James shows a true brotherly sympathy with believers in their trials, and this is a main part of Christian fellowship. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” If we are not tempted ourselves at this moment, others are: let us remember them in our prayers; for in due time our turn will come, and we shall be put into the crucible. As we would desire to receive sympathy and help in our hour of need, let us render it freely to those who are now

enduring trial. Let us remember those that are in bonds, as bound with them, and those that suffer affliction as being ourselves in the body. Remembering the trials of his brethren, James tries to cheer them, and therefore he says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials." It is a part of our high calling to rise ourselves into confidence; and it is also our duty to see that none of our brethren despond, much less despair. The whole tendency of our holy faith is to elevate and to encourage. Grace breeds no sorrow, except the healthy sorrow which comes with saving repentance and leads to the joy of pardon: it comes not to make men miserable, but to wipe all tears from their eyes. Our dream is not of devils descending a dreary staircase to hell, but of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder, the top of which leads to the shining throne of God. The message of the gospel is one of joy and gladness, and were it universally understood and received this world would be no longer a wilderness, but it would rejoice and blossom as the rose. Let grace reign in all hearts, and this earth will become a temple filled with perpetual song; and even the trials of life will become causes of the highest joy, so beautifully described by James as "all joy," as if every possible delight were crowded into it. Blessed be God, it is our work, not to upbraid, but to cheer all the brotherhood: we walk in a light which glorifies everything upon which it falls, and turns losses into gains. We are able in sober earnest to speak with the afflicted, and bid them be patient under the chastening hand of God; yea, to count it all joy when they fall into divers trials because those trials will work out for them such signal, such lasting good. They may be well content to sow in tears since they are sure to reap in joy.

Without further preface we will come at once to the text; and observe that in speaking about affliction, for that is the subject of the text, the apostle notes, first, the essential point which is assailed by temptation, namely, your faith. Your faith is the target that all the arrows are shot at; the furnace is kindled for the trial of your faith. Notice, secondly, the invaluable blessing which is thus gained, namely, the proving of your faith, discovering whether it be the right faith or no. This proof of our faith is a blessing of which I cannot speak too highly. Then, thirdly, we may not overlook the priceless virtue which is produced by this process of testing, namely, patience; for the proving of your faith produces patience, and this

is the soul's surest enrichment. Lastly, in connection with that patience we shall note the spiritual completeness which is thus promoted: — "That ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Perhaps you have noticed that little variations I have made in the text; but I am now following the Revised Version, which gives an admirable rendering. I will read it. "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proof of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing."

**I.** First, let us think a little upon THE ESSENTIAL POINT WHICH IS ASSAILED by temptation or trial. It is your faith which is tried. It is supposed that you have that faith. You are not the people of God, you are not truly brethren unless you are believers. It is this faith of yours which is peculiarly obnoxious to Satan and to the world which lieth in the wicked one. If you had not faith they would not be enemies of yours; but faith is the mark of the chosen of God, and therefore his foes become the foes of all the faithful, spitting their venom specially upon their faith. God Himself hath put enmity between the serpent and the woman, between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed; and that enmity must show itself. The serpent bites at the heel of the true seed: hence mockings, persecutions, temptations, and trials are sure to beset the pathway to faith. The hand of faith is against all evil, and all evil is against faith. Faith is that blessed grace which is most pleasing to God, and hence it is the most displeasing to the devil. By faith God is greatly glorified, and hence by faith Satan is greatly annoyed. He rages at faith because he sees therein his own defeat and the victory of grace.

Because the trial of your faith brings honor to the Lord, therefore the Lord Himself is sure to try it that out of its trial praise may come to his grace by which faith is sustained. Our chief end is to glorify God, and if our trials enable us more fully to answer the end of our being it is well that they should happen unto us. So early in our discourse we see reason to count it all joy when we fall into manifold trials.

It is by our faith that we are saved, justified, and brought near to God, and therefore it is no marvel that it is attacked. It is by believing in Christ that we are delivered from the reigning power of sin, and receive power to become the sons of God. Faith is as vital to salvation as the heart is vital

to the body: hence the javelins of the enemy are mainly aimed at this essential grace. Faith is the standard bearer, and the object of the enemy is to strike him down that the battle may be gained. If the foundations be removed what can the righteous do? If the cable can be snapped whither will the vessel drift? All the powers of darkness which are opposed to right and truth are sure to fight against our faith, and manifold temptations will march in their legions against our confidence in God.

It is by our faith that we live; we began to live by it, and continue to live by it, for “the just shall live by faith.” Once let faith go and our life is gone; and hence it is that the powers which war against us make their main assault upon this royal castle, this key of the whole position. Faith is your jewel, your joy, your glory; and the thieves who haunt the pilgrim way are all in league to tear it from you. Hold fast, therefore, this your choice treasure.

It is by faith, too, that Christians perform exploits. If men of old wrought daring and heroic deeds it was by faith. Faith is the fighting principle and the conquering principle: therefore it is Satan’s policy to slay it even as Pharaoh sought to kill the male children when Israel dwelt in Egypt. Rob a Christian of his faith and he will be like Samson when his locks were cut away: the Philistines will be upon him and the Lord will have departed from him. Marvel not if the full force of the current shall beat upon your faith, for it is the foundation of your spiritual house. Oh that your faith may abide steadfast and unmovable in all present trials, that so it may be found true in the hour of death and in the day of judgment. Woe unto that man whose faith fails him in this land of peace, for what will he do in the swelling of Jordan?

Now, think of how faith is tried. According to the text we are said to fall into “manifold temptations” or into “divers temptations” — that is to say, we may expect very many and very different troubles. In any case these trials will be most real. The twelve tribes to whom this epistle was written were a specially tried people, for in the first place they were, as Jews, greatly persecuted by all other nations, and when they became Christians they were cruelly persecuted by their own people. A Gentile convert was somewhat less in peril than a Jewish Christian, for the latter was crushed between the upper and nether millstones of Paganism and Judaism. The

Israelitish Christian was usually so persecuted by his own kith and kin that he had to flee from them, and whither could he go, for all other people abhorred the Jews? We are not in such a plight, but God's people even to this day will find that trial is no sham word. The rod in God's house is no toy to play with. The furnace, believe me, is no mere place of extra warmth to which you may soon accustom yourself: it is often heated seven times hotter, like the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar and God's children are made to know that the fire burns and devours. Our temptations are no inventions of nervousness nor hobgoblins of dreamy fear. Ye have heard of the patience of Job — his was real patience, for his afflictions were real. Could each tried believer among us tell his own story I do not doubt we would convince all who heard us that the troubles and temptations which we have endured are no fictions of romance, but must be ranked among the stern realities of actual life.

Ay, and note too, that the trials of Christians are such as would in themselves lead us into sin, for I take it that our translators would not have placed the word "temptation" in the text, and the Revisionists would not have retained it, if they had not felt that there was a colouring of temptation in its meaning, and that "trial" was hardly the word. The natural tendency of trouble is not to sanctify, but to induce sin. A man is very apt to become unbelieving under affliction: that is a sin. He is apt to murmur against God under it: that is a sin. He is apt to put forth his hand to some ill way of escaping from his difficulty: and that would be sin. Hence we are taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation; because trial has in itself a measure of temptation"; and if it were not neutralized by abundant grace it would bear us towards sin. I suppose that every test must have in it a measure of temptation. The Lord cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man; but this is to be understood of his end and design. He entices no man to do evil; but yet He tries the sincerity and faithfulness of men by placing them where sin comes in their way, and does its best or its worst to ensnare them: His design being that the uprightness of His servants may thus be proved, both to themselves and others. We are not taken out of this world of temptation, but we are kept in it for our good. Because our nature is depraved it makes occasions for sin, both out of our joys and our trials, but by grace we overcome the tendency of nature, and so derive benefit from tribulation. Do I not speak



to many here who at times feel strong impulses towards evil, especially in the darksome hour when the spirit of evil walks abroad? Have you not been made to tremble for yourselves in season of fierce trial, for your feet were almost gone, your steps had well-nigh slipped. Is there any virtue that has not been weather-beaten? Is there any love that has not at times been so tried that it threatened to curdle into hate? Is there any good thing this side heaven which has marched all the way in silver slippers? Did ever a flower of grace blossom in this wretched clime without being tried with frost or blight? Our way is up the river; we have to stem the current, and struggle against a flood which would readily bear us to destruction. Thus, not only trials, but black temptations assail the Christian's faith.

As to what shape they take, we may say this much: the trial or temptation of each man is distinct from that of every other. When God did tempt Abraham he was bidden to take his son, his only son, and offer him upon a mountain for a sacrifice. Nobody here was ever tried in that way: nobody ever will be. We may have the trial of losing our child, but certainly not the trial of having a command to offer him in sacrifice. That was a trial peculiar to Abraham: necessary and useful to him, though never proposed to us. In the case of the young man in the gospels, our Lord Jesus tried him with, "If thou wouldest be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." Some have dreamed that it must therefore be the duty of everybody to part with their possessions: but this is idle. It would not be the duty of any man to offer up his only son; and it is not the duty of every man to part with all his goods. These were tests to particular persons; and others equally special and searching have been applied in other cases. We are not to try ourselves, nor to desire other men's trials; it will be well if we endure those which the Lord appoints for us, for they will be wisely chosen. That which would most severely test me would perhaps be no trial to you; and that which tries you might be no temptation to me. This is one reason why we often judge one another so severely, because feeling ourselves to be strong in that particular point we argue that the fallen one must have been strong in that point too, and therefore must have willfully and earnestly have determined to do wrong. This may be a cruel supposition. We hastily conclude that the temptation must have been as feeble in his case as it would have been in our own; which is a great mistake, for a temptation which to you or to

me would be no temptation at all, may be to another individual, of a peculiar constitution and under singular circumstances, a most fierce and terrible blast from the adversary, before which he falls mournfully, but not with malice aforethought. Divers trials, says the apostle, and he knew what he said.

And, dear friends, sometimes these divers trials derive great force from their seemingly surrounding us, and cutting off escape: James says, — "Ye fall into divers temptations": like men who fall into a pit, and do not know how to get out; or like soldiers who fall into an ambuscade; or travellers in the good old times when two or three footpaths surrounded them and made them feel that they had fallen into bad hands. The tempted see not which way to turn; they appear to be hemmed in; they are as a bird that is taken in the fowler's snare. This it is that makes calamity of our manifold temptations, that they hedge up our way, and unless faith finds the clue we wander in a thorny maze.

At times temptation comes suddenly upon us, and so we fall into it. When we were at rest, and were quiet, suddenly the evil came, like a lion leaping from the thicket. When Job's children were eating and drinking in their elder brother's house, then suddenly a wind came from the wilderness, and the patriarch was bereaved: the cattle were ploughing, the sheep were grazing, the camels were at their service, and in a moment, by fire from heaven, and by robber bands, the whole of these possessions vanished. One messenger had not told his story before another followed at his heels; Job had no breathing time, the blows fell thick and fast. The trial of our faith is most severe when divers trials happen to us when we look not for them. It is not strange in the light of these things that James should say, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials"?

Those were the days of tumults, imprisonment, crucifixion, sword, and fire. Then the amphitheatre devoured Christians by thousands. The general cry was "The Christians to the lions!" Do you wonder if sometimes the bravest were made to say, Is our faith really true? This faith which is abhorred of all mankind, can it be divine? Has it come from God? Why, then, does He not interpose and deliver His people? Shall we apostatise? Shall we deny Christ and live, or shall we go on with our confession through innumerable torments even to a bloody death? Will fidelity answer

after all? Is there a crown of glory? is there an eternity of bliss? Is there in very deed a resurrection of the dead? These questions came into men's minds then, and were fairly faced: the faith of martyrs was not taken up at second hand, or borrowed from their parents; they believed for themselves in downright earnest. Men and women in those days believed in such a way that they never flinched nor started aside from fear of death; indeed, they pressed forward to confess their faith in Jesus in such crowds that at last the heathen cried, "There must be something in it: it must be a religion of God, or how could these men so gladly bear their troubles?" This was the faith of God's elect, the work of the Holy Ghost.

You see, then, the main point of attack is our faith, and happy is the man whose shield can catch and quench all the fiery darts of the enemy.

**II.** That we may make the text more clear we shall next notice THE INVALUABLE BLESSING WHICH IS GAINED BY THE TRIAL OF OUR FAITH. The blessing gained is this, that our faith is tried and proved. Two Sabbaths ago I addressed you upon the man whose bad foundations led to the overthrow of his house; and I know that many said after the sermon: — "God grant that we may not be like him: may we have a firm foundation for our soul to rest on." Then you went home, and you sat down and said, "Have I this sure foundation?" You began to question, argue, reason, and so on, and your design was a good one. But I do not reckon that much came of it; our own looking within seldom yields solid comfort. Actual trial is far more satisfactory; but you must not try yourself. The effectual proof is by trials of God's sending. The way of trying whether you are a good soldier is to go down to the battle: the way to try whether a ship is well built is, not merely to order the surveyor to examine her, but to send her to sea: a storm will be the best test of her staunchness. They have built a new lighthouse upon the Eddystone: how do we know that it will stand? We judge by certain laws and principles, and feel tolerably safe about the structure; but, after all, we shall know best if after-years when a thousand tempests have beaten upon the lighthouse in vain. We need trials as a test as much as we need divine truth as our food. Admire the ancient types placed in the ark of the covenant of old: two things were laid close together, — the pot of manna and the rod. See how heavenly food and heavenly rule go together: how our sustenance and our chastening are equally provided for! A Christian cannot live

without the manna nor without the rod. The two must go together. I mean this, that it is as great a mercy to have your salvation proved to you under trial as it is to have it sustained in you by the consolations of the Spirit of God. Sanctified tribulations work the proof of our faith, and this is more precious than that of gold which perisheth, though it be tried by fire.

Now, when we are able to bear it without starting aside, the trial proves our sincerity. Coming out of a trouble the Christian says to himself, "Yes, I held fast mine integrity, and did not let it go. Blessed be God, I was not afraid of threatening; I was not crushed by losses; I was kept true to God under pressure. Now, I am sure that my religion is not a mere profession, but a real consecration to God. It has endured the fire, being kept by the power of God."

Next, it proves the truthfulness of our doctrinal belief. Oh, yes, you may say, "I have heard Mr. Spurgeon expound the doctrines, and I have believed them." This is poor work; but if you have been sick, and found a comfort in those doctrines, then you are assured of their truth. If you have been on the borders of the grave, and the gospel has given you joy and gladness, then you know how true it is. Experimental knowledge is the best and surest. If you have seen others pass through death itself triumphantly you have said, "This is proof to me: my faith is no guess-work: I have seen for myself." Is not this assurance cheaply purchased at any price? May we not count it all joy when the Lord puts us in the way of getting it? It seems to me that doubt is worse than trial. I had sooner suffer any affliction than be left to question the gospel or my own interest in it. Certainly it is a jewel worth purchasing even with our heart's blood.

Next, your own faith in God is proved when you can cling to Him under temptation. Not only your sincerity, but the divinity of your faith is proved; for a faith that is never tried, how can you depend upon it? But if in the darkest hour you have still said, "I cast my burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain me," and you find He does sustain you, then is your faith that of God's elect. If in temptation you cry to God in prayer that you may keep your garment unspotted, and He helps you to do so, then also are you sure that yours is the faith which the Spirit begets in the soul. After a great fight of affliction, when I come forth a conqueror, I know that I do believe in God, and I know that this faith makes me a partaker of

covenant blessings; from this I may fairly argue that my faith is of the right kind.

I find it especially sweet to learn the great strength of the Lord in my own weakness. We find out under trial where we are most weak, and just then in answer to prayer strength is given answerable to the need. The Lord suits the help to the hindrance, and puts the plaster on the wound. In the very hour when it is needed the needed grace is given. Does this not tend to breed assurance of faith?

It is a splendid thing to be able to prove even to Satan the purity of your motives. That was the great gain of Job. There was no question about his outward conduct, but the question was about his motive. "Ah," says the devil, "he serves God for what he gets out of Him. Hast Thou not set a hedge about him and all that he has? His is cupboard love: he cares nothing for God Himself, he only cares for the reward of his virtue." Well, he is tried, and everything is taken away, and when he cries, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," when he blesses the taking as well as the giving God, then the devil himself could not have the prudence to accuse him again. As to Job's own conscience, it would be quite settled and confirmed as to his pure love to God. My brethren, I reckon that the endurance of every imaginable suffering and trial would be a small price to pay for a settled assurance, which would for ever prevent the possibility of doubt. Never mind the waves if they wash you upon this rock. Therefore, when you are tempted, "Count it all joy" that you are tried, because you will thus receive a proof of your love, a proof of your faith, a proof of your being the true-born children of God.

James says, "Count it." A man requires to be trained to be a good accountant; it is an art which needs to be learned. What muddles some of us would make if we had to settle accounts and manage disbursements and incomings without the aid of a clerk! How we should get entangled with balances and deficits! We could much easier spend money than count it. But when a man once knows the science of book-keeping, and gets into the way of it, he readily arrives at the true position of affairs. He has learned to count, and no error escapes his eye. James gives us a ready reckoner, and teaches us in our troubles how to count. He sets before us a different kind of measure from that which carnal reason would use: the shekel of the

sanctuary was very different from the shekel in common commerce, and so is the counting of faith far other than that of human judgment. He bids us take our pen and sit down quickly and write at his correct dictation. You are going to write down, “Manifold temptations;” that would be so much on the wrong side: but instead thereof he bids you set down the proving of your faith, and this one asset transforms the transaction into a substantial gain. Trials are like a fire; they burn up nothing in us but the dross, and they make the gold all the purer. Put down the testing process as a clear gain, and, instead of being sorry about it, count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials, for this bestows upon you a proof of your faith. So far there is sufficient ground for counting all trials joy. Now, let us go a little further.

**III.** Let us think of THE PRICELESS VIRTUE WHICH IS PRODUCED BY TRIAL, namely, patience; for the proof of your “faith worketh patience.” Patience! We all have a large stock of it — until we need it, and then we have none. The man who truly possesses patience is the man that has been tried. What kind of patience does he get by the grace of God? First, he obtains a patience that accepts the trials as from God without a murmur. Calm resignation does not come all at once; often long years of physical pain, or mental depression, or disappointment in business, or multiplied bereavements, are needed to bring the soul into full submission to the will of the Lord. After much crying the child is weaned; after much chastening the son is made obedient to his Father’s will. By degrees we learn to end our quarrel with God, and to desire that there may not be two wills between God and ourselves, but that God’s will may be our will. Oh, brother, if your troubles work you to that, you are a gainer, I am sure, and you may count them all joy.

The next kind of patience is when experience enables a man to bear ill-treatment, slander, and injury without resentment. He feels it keenly, but he bears it meekly. Like his Master, he opens not his mouth to reply, and refuses to return railing for railing. Contrariwise he gives blessing in return for cursing; like the sandal-wood tree which perfumes the axe which cuts it. Blessed is that holy charity which hopeth all things, endureth all things, and is not easily provoked. Ah, friend, if the grace of God by trial shall work in you the quiet patience which never grows angry, and never ceases

to love, you may have lost a trifle of comfort, but you have gained a solid weight of character.

The patience which God works in us by tribulation also takes another form, namely, that of acting without undue haste. Before wisdom has balanced our zeal we are eager to serve God all in a hurry, with a rush and a spurt, as if everything must be done within the hour or nothing would ever be accomplished. We set about holy service with somewhat more of preparedness of heart after we have been drilled in the school of trial. We go steadily and resolutely about work for Jesus, knowing what poor creatures we are, and what a glorious Master we serve. The Lord our God is in no hurry because He is strong and wise. In proportion as we grow like the Lord Jesus we shall cast aside disturbance of mind and fury of spirit. His was a grand life-work, but He never seemed to be confused, excited, worried, or hurried, as certain of His people are. He did not strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets. He knew His hour was not yet come, and there were so many days in which He could work, and therefore He went steadily on till He had finished the work which His Father had given Him to do. That kind of patience is a jewel more to be desired than the gem which glitters on the imperial brow. Sometimes we blunder into a deal of mischief, making more haste than speed; and we are sure to do so when we forget to pray, and fail to commit our matters into the Divine hands. We may run with such vehemence that we may stumble, or lose our breath: there may be in our random efforts as much undoing as doing, for want of possessing our souls in patience.

That is a grand kind of patience, too, when we can wait without unbelief. Two little words are good for every Christian to learn and to practise — pray and stay. Waiting on the Lord implies both praying and staying. What if the world is not converted this year! What if the Lord Jesus does not come to-morrow! What if still our tribulations are lengthened out! What if the conflict is continued! He that has been tried and by grace has obtained the true profit of his trials, both quietly waits and joyfully hopes for the salvation of God. Patience, brother! Is this high virtue scarce with thee? The Holy Spirit shall bestow it upon thee through suffering.

This patience also takes the shape of believing without wavering, in the very teeth of strange providences and singular statements, and perhaps

inward misgivings. The established Christian says, "I believe my God, and therefore if the vision tarry I will wait for it. My time is not yet come. I am to have my worst things first and my best things afterwards, and so I sit me down at Jesus' feet and tarry his leisure."

Brothers and sisters, if, in a word, we learn endurance we have taken a high degree. You look at the weather-beaten sailor, the man who is at home on the sea: he has a bronzed face and mahogany-coloured flesh, he looks as tough as heart of oak, and as hardy as if he were made of iron. How different from us poor landmen. How did the man become so inured to hardship, so able to breast the storm, so that he does not care whether the wind blows south-west or north-west? He can go out to sea in any kind of weather; he has his sea legs on: how did he come to this strength? By doing business in great waters. He could not have become a hardy seaman by tarrying on shore. Now, trial works in the saints that spiritual hardihood which cannot be learned in ease. You may go to school for ever, but you cannot learn endurance there: you may colour your cheek with paint, but you cannot give it that ingrained brown which comes of stormy seas and howling winds. Strong faith and brave patience come of trouble, and a few men in the church who have thus been prepared are worth anything in times of tempest. To reach that condition of firm endurance and sacred hardihood is worth all the expense of all the heaped-up troubles that ever come upon us from above or from beneath. When trial worketh patience we are incalculably enriched. The Lord give us more of this choice grace. As Peter's fish had the money in its mouth, so have sanctified trials spiritual riches for those who endure them graciously.

**IV.** Lastly, all this works something better still, and this is our fourth head: THE SPIRITUAL COMPLETENESS PROMOTED. "That ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Brethren, the most valuable thing a man can get in this world is that which has most to do with his truest self. A man gets a good house; well, that is something: but suppose he is in bad health, what is the good of his fine mansion? A man is well clothed and well fed: that is something: but suppose he shivers with ague, and has no appetite through indigestion. That spoils it all. If a man is in robust health this is a far more valuable boon. Health is far more to be prized than wealth, or honor, or learning: we all allow that, but then suppose that a man's innermost self is diseased while his body is healthy, so that he is disgraced



by vice or fevered with passion, he is in a poor plight, notwithstanding that he has such a robust frame? The very best thing is that which will make the man himself a better man; make him right, and true, and pure, and holy. When the man himself is better, he has made an unquestionable gain. So, if our afflictions tend, by trying our faith, to breed patience, and that patience tends to make us into perfect men in Christ Jesus, then we may be glad of trials. Afflictions by God's grace make us all-around men, developing every spiritual faculty, and therefore they are our friends, our helpers, and should be welcomed with "all joy."

Afflictions find out our weak points, and this makes us attend to them. Being tried, we discover our failures, and then going to God about those failures we are helped to be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Moreover, our trials, when blessed of God to make us patient, ripen us. I do not know how to explain what I mean by ripening, but there is a sort of mellowness about believers who have endured a great deal of affliction that you never meet in other people. It cannot be mistaken or imitated. A certain measure of sunlight is wanted to bring out the real flavour of fruits, and when a fruit has felt its measure of burning sun it develops a lusciousness which we all delight in. So is it in men and women: a certain amount of trouble appears to be needful to create a certain sugar of graciousness in them, so that they may contain the rich, ripe juice of a gracious character. You must have known such men and such women, and have said to yourselves, "I wish I could be like them, so calm, so quiet, so self-contained, so happy, and when not happy, yet so content not to be happy; so mature in judgment, so spiritual in conversation, so truly ripe." This only comes to those in whom the proof of their faith works experience, and then experience brings forth the fruits of the Spirit. Dear brothers and sisters, there is a certain all-roundness of spiritual manhood which never comes to us except by manifold temptations. Let me attempt to show you what I mean. Sanctified trials produce a chastened spirit. Some of us by nature are rough and untender; but after awhile friends notice that the roughness is departing, and they are quite glad to be more gently handled. Ah, that sick chamber did the polishing; under God's grace, that depression of spirit, that loss, that cross, that bereavement, — these softened the natural ruggedness, and made the man meek and lowly, like his Lord. Sanctified trouble has a great tendency to breed sympathy,

and sympathy is to the church as oil to machinery. A man that has never suffered feels very awkward when he tries to sympathize with a tried child of God. He kindly does his best, but he does not know how to go to work at it; but those repeated blows from the rod make us feel for others who are smarting, and by degrees we are recognized as being the Lord's anointed comforters, made meet by temptation to succor those who are tempted.

Have you never noticed how tried men, too, when their trouble is thoroughly sanctified, become cautious and humble? They cannot speak quite so fast as they used to do: they do not talk of being absolutely perfect, though they are the very men who are Scripturally perfect; they say little about their doings, and much about the tender mercy of the Lord. They recollect the whipping they had behind the door from their Father's hands, and they speak gently to other erring ones. Affliction is the stone which our Lord Jesus throws at the brow of our giant pride, and patience is the sword which cuts off its head.

Those, too, are the kind of people who are most grateful. I have known what it is to praise God for the power to move one leg in bed. It may not seem much to you, but it was a great blessing to me. They that are heavily afflicted come to bless God for everything. I am sure that woman who took a piece of bread and a cup of water for her breakfast, and said, "What, all this, and Christ too!" must have been a tried woman, or she would not have exhibited so much gratitude. And that old Puritan minister was surely a tried man, for when his family had only a herring and a few potatoes for dinner, he said, "Lord, we bless Thee that Thou hast ransacked sea and land to find food for us this day." If he had not been a tried man, he might have turned up his nose at the meal, as many do at much more sumptuous fare. Troubled men get to be grateful men, and that is no small thing.

As a rule, where God's grace works, these come to be hopeful men. Where others think the storm will destroy the vessel, they can remember storms equally fierce which did not destroy it, and so they are so calm that their courage keeps others from despair.

These men, too, become unworldly men. They have had too much trouble to think that they can ever build their nest in this black forest. There are

too many thorns in their nest for them to reckon that this can be their home. These birds of paradise take to their wings, and are ready to fly away to the land of unfading flowers.


And these much-tempted ones are frequently the most spiritual men, and out of this spirituality comes usefulness. Mr. Greatheart, who led the band of pilgrims up to the celestial city, was a man of many trials, or he would not have been fit to lead so many to their heavenly rest; and you, dear brother, if ever you are to be a leader and a helper, as you would wish to be, in the church of God, it must be by such means as this that you must be prepared for it. Do you not wish to have every virtue developed? Do you not wish to become a perfect man in Christ Jesus? If so, welcome with all joy divers trials and temptations; fly to God with them; bless Him for having sent them: ask Him to help you to bear them with patience, and then let that patience have its perfect work, and so by the Spirit of God you shall become “perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.” May the Comforter bless this word to your hearts, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

# EARNEST EXPOSTULATION

## SERMON NO. 1714

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 1ST, 1883,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” —  Romans 2:4.

The apostle is intensely personal in his address. This verse is not spoken to us all in the mass, but to some one in particular. The apostle fixes his eyes upon a single person, and speaks to him as “Thee” and “Thou.” “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” It should ever be the intent of the preacher to convey his message to each hearer in his own separate individuality. It is always a very happy sign when a man begins to think of himself as an individual, and when the exhortations and invitations of the gospel are seen by him to be directed to himself personally. I will give nothing for that indirect, essay-like preaching which is as the sheet lightning of summer, dazzling for the moment, and flaming over a broad expanse, but altogether harmless, since no bolt is launched from it, and its ineffectual fires leave no trace behind. I will give nothing for that kind of hearing which consists in the word being heard by everybody in general, and by no one in particular. It is when the preacher can “Thee” and “Thou” his hearers that he is likely to do them good. When each man is made to say, “This is for me,” then the power of God is present in the word. One personal, intentional touch of the hem of Christ’s garment conveys more blessing than all the pressure of the crowd that thronged about the Master. The laying of his healing hand upon the individual who was suffering had more virtue in it than all those heavenly addresses which fell from his lips upon minds that did not receive the truth for themselves. I do pray that we may come to personal

dealings with the Lord each one for himself, and that the Spirit of God may convince each man and each woman, according as the case may stand before the living God. O my hearer, thou art now to be lovingly spoken with: I speak not to You as unto many, but unto thee, as one by thyself.

Observe that the apostle singled out an individual who had condemned others for transgressions, in which he himself indulged. This man owned so much spiritual light that he knew right from wrong, and he diligently used his knowledge to judge others, condemning them for their transgressions. As for himself, he preferred the shade, where no fierce light might beat on his own conscience and disturb his unholy peace. His judgment was spared the pain of dealing with his home offenses by being set to work upon the faults of others. He had a candle, but he did not place it on the table to light his own room; he held it out at the front door to inspect therewith his neighbours who passed by. Ho! my good friend, my sermon is for thee. Paul looks this man in the face and says, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whoever thou art, that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things:" and then he pointedly says to him: "Thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" Well did the apostle aim that piercing arrow; it hits the center of the target and strikes a folly common to mankind. The poet of the night-watches wrote, —

*All men think all men mortal but themselves.*

As truly might I say, "All men think all men guilty but themselves." The punishment which is due to sin the guilty reckon to be surely impending upon others, but they scarce believe that it can ever fall upon themselves. A personal doom for themselves is an idea which they will not harbour: if the dread thought should light upon them they shake it off as men shake snow-flakes from their cloaks. The thought of personal guilt, judgment, and condemnation is inconvenient; it breeds too much trouble within, and so they refuse it lodging. Vain men go maundering on their way, whispering of peace and safety; doting as if God had passed an act of amnesty and oblivion for them, and had made for them an exception to all the rules of justice, and all the manner of his courts. Do men indeed believe that they alone shall go unpunished? No man will subscribe to that notion

when it is written down in black and white, and yet the mass of men live as if this were true; I mean the mass of men who have sufficient light to condemn sin in others. They start back from the fact of their own personal guiltiness and condemnation, and go on in their ungodliness as if there were no great white throne for them, no last assize, no judge, no word of condemnation, and no hell of wrath. Alas, poor madmen, thus to dream! O Spirit of Truth save them from this fatal infatuation.

Sin is always on the downward grade, so that when a man proceeds a certain length he inevitably goes beyond it. The person addressed by the apostle first thought to escape judgment, and then he came to think lightly of the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering of God. He thinks he shall escape in the future, and because of that he despises the present goodness and longsuffering of the Most High. Of course he does. If he does not believe in the terrors of the world to come for himself, he naturally reckons it to be a small thing to have been spared their immediate experience. Barren tree as he is, he does not believe that he will ever be cut down, and therefore he feels no gratitude to the dresser of the vineyard for pleading, "Let it alone yet another year, till I dig about it, and dung it." I wish, as God shall help me, to drive hard at the consciences of men upon this matter. I would be to you, my careless friend, what Jonah was to Nineveh: I would warn you, and bestir you to repentance. Oh that the Holy Ghost would make this sermon effectual for the arousing of every unsaved soul that shall hear or read it!

**I.** First, let me speak this morning to thee, O unregenerate, impenitent man, concerning THE GOODNESS OF GOD WHICH THOU HAST EXPERIENCED. Thou hast known the goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering of God. According to the text, "riches" of these have been spent upon unconverted, ungodly men, and upon thee as one of them. Let me speak with thee first, O man, and remind thee how favored thou hast been of God by being made a partaker of "the riches of his goodness." In many cases this is true of temporal things. Men may be without the fear of God, and yet, for all that, God may be pleased to prosper their endeavours in business. They succeed almost beyond their expectation — I mean some of them; probably the description applies to thee. They rise from the lowest position, and accumulate about them the comforts and luxuries of life. Though they have no religion, they have wit, and prudence,

and thrift, and so they compete with others, and God permits them to be winners in the race for wealth. Moreover, he allows them to enjoy good health, vigour of mind, and strength of constitution: they are happy in the wife of their youth, and their children are about them. Theirs is an envied lot. Death seems for awhile forbidden to knock at their door, even though he has been ravaging the neighbourhood; even sickness does not molest their household. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Abraham had to prepare a Machpelah, and David mourned over his sons; but these have had to make scant provision for family sepulcher; a hedge has in very deed been set about them and all that they have. I know that it is thus with many who do not love God, and have never yielded to the entreaties of his grace. They love not the hand which enriches them, they praise not the Lord who daily loadeth them with benefits. How is it that men can receive such kindness, and yield no return? O sirs, you are to-day blessed with all that need requires; but I pray you remember that you might have been in the depths of poverty. An illness would have lost you your situation; or a slight turn in trade would have left you bankrupt. You are well to-day; but you might have been tossing to and fro upon a bed of sickness; you might have been in the hospital, about to lose a limb. Shall not God be praised for health and freedom from pain? You might have been shut up in yonder asylum, in the agonies of madness. A thousand ills have been kept from you; you have been exceedingly favored by the goodness of the Most High. Is it not so? And truly it is a wonderful thing that God should give his bread to those that lift up their heel against him, that he should cause his light to shine upon those who never perceive his goodness therein, that he should multiply his mercies upon ungodly men who only multiply their rebellions against him, and turn the gifts of his love into instruments of transgression.

Furthermore, this goodness of God had not only come to you in a temporal form, O impenitent man, but it has also visited you in a spiritual manner. Myriads of our fellow men have never had an opportunity of knowing Christ. The missionary's foot has never trodden the cities wherein they dwell, and so they die in the dark. Multitudes are going downward, downward; but they do not know the upward road; their minds have never been enlightened by the teachings of God's word, and hence they sin with less grievousness of fault. You are placed in the very

focus of Christian light, and yet you follow evil! Will you not think of this? Time was when a man would have to work for years to earn enough money to buy a Bible. There were times when he could not have earned one even with that toil; now the word of God lies upon your table, you have a copy of it in almost every room of your house; is not this a boon from God? This is the land of the open Bible, and the land of the preached word of God; in this you prove the riches of God's goodness. Do you despise this wealth of mercy? Possibly you have enjoyed the further privilege of sitting under a ministry which has been particularly plain and earnest; you have not had sermons preached before you, they have been preached at you: the minister has seized upon you and tugged at your conscience, as though he would force you to the Savior. With cries and entreaties you have been invited to your heavenly Father, and yet you have not come. Is this a small thing?

What is more, you have been favored with a tender conscience. When you do wrong you know it, and smart for it. What mean those wakeful nights after you have yielded to a temptation? What means that miserable feeling of shame? that fever of unrest? You find it hard to stifle the inward monitor, and difficult to resist the Spirit of God. Your road to perdition is made peculiarly hard; do you mean to follow it at all costs, and go over hedge and ditch to hell?

You have not only been aroused by conscience, but the good Spirit has striven with you, and have been almost persuaded to be a Christian. Such has been the blessed work of the Spirit upon your heart that you have at times been melted down, and ready to be moulded by grace. A strange softness has come over you, and if you had not gathered up all your evil strength, and if the devil had not helped you to resist, you had by this time dropped into the Savior's arms. Oh, the riches of the goodness of God to have thus wooed you, and pressed his love upon you! You have scarcely had a stripe, or a frown, or an ill word from God; his ways have been all kindness, and gentleness, and longsuffering from the first day of your memory even until now. "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness?" O man, answer this, I implore thee.

The apostle then dwells upon the riches of "forbearance." Forbearance comes in when men having offended, God withholds the punishment that



is due to them; when men, having been invited to mercy, have refused it, and yet God continues to stretch out his hands, and invite them to come to him. Patient endurance of offenses and insults has been manifested by God to many of you, who now hear these words of warning. The Lord knows to whom I speak and may he make you, also, know that I am speaking to you, even to you. Some men have gone back to the very sin of which for awhile they repented; they have suffered for their folly, but have turned again to it with suicidal determination. They are desperately set on their own ruin and nothing can save them. The burnt child has run to the fire again; the singed moth has plunged again into the flame of the candle; who can pity such self-inflicted miseries? They are given over to perdition, for they will not be warned. They have returned to the haunt of vice, though they seemed to have been snatched from the deep ditch of its filthiness. They have wantonly and wilfully returned to their cups, though the poison of former draughts is yet burning in their veins. Yet, despite this folly, God shows forbearance towards them. They have grievously provoked him when they have done despite to his word, and have even turned to laughter the solemnities of his worship, against their own consciences, and to their own confusion: yet when his hand has been lifted up he has withdrawn it in mercy. See how God has always tempered his providence with kindness to them. He laid them low so that they were sore sick, but at the voice of their moaning he restored them. They trembled on the brink of death, yet he permitted them to recover strength; and now, despite their vows of amendment, here they are, callous and careless, unmindful of the mercy which gave them a reprieve.

Did you ever think what is included in the riches of forbearance. There are quick tempered individuals who only need to be a little provoked, and hard words and blows come quick and furious: but, oh, the forbearance of God when he is provoked to his face by ungodly men! By men, I mean, who hear his word, and yet refuse it! They slight his love, and yet he perseveres in it. Justice lays its hand on the sword, but mercy holds it back in its scabbard. Well might each spared one say, —

*“O unexhausted Grace  
O Love unspeakable!  
I am not gone to my own place;  
I am not yet in hell!  
Earth doth not open yet,  
My soul to swallow up:  
And, hanging o’er the burning pit,  
I still am forced to hope.”*

Our apostle adds to goodness and forbearance the riches of “longsuffering.” We draw a distinction between forbearance and longsuffering. Forbearance has to do with the magnitude of sin; longsuffering with the multiplicity of it: forbearance has to do with present provocation; longsuffering relates to that provocation repeated, and continued for a length of time. Oh, how long doth God suffer the ill manners of men! Forty years long was he grieved with that generation whose carcasses fell in the wilderness. Has it come to forty years yet with you, dear hearer? Possibly it may have passed even that time, and a half-century of provocation may have gone into eternity to bear witness against you. What if I should even have to say that sixty and seventy years have continued to heap up the loads of their transgressions, until the Lord saith, “I am pressed down under your sins; as a cart that is full of sheaves I am pressed down under you.” Yet for all that, here you are on praying ground and pleading terms with God; here you are where yet the Savior reigns upon the throne of grace; here you are where mercy is to be had for the asking, where free grace and dying love ring out their charming bells of invitation to joy and peace! Oh, the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering. Three-fold is the claim: will you not regard it? Can you continue to despise it?

I should like to set all this in a striking light if I could, and therefore I would remind you of who and what that God is who has exhibited this goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering to men. Remember how great he is. When men insult a great prince the offence is thought to be highly heinous. If anyone should openly insult our own beloved Queen, and continue to do so, all the nation would be clamorous to have the impertinence ended speedily. We cannot bear that a beloved ruler should be publicly insulted. And what think you of the sin which provokes God? which to his face defies him? and in his very courts resists him? Shall this

always be forborne with? Is there not a limit to longsuffering? Goodness also adds another item to the provocation; for we naturally say, “Why should one so good be treated so cruelly?” If God were a tyrant, if he were unrighteous or unkind, it were not so much amiss that men stood out against him; but when his very name is love, and when he manifests the bowels of a Father towards his wandering children it is shameful that he should be so wantonly provoked. Those words of Jesus were extremely touching when he pointed to his miracles, and asked, “For which of these things do you stone me?” When I think of God I may well say — for which of his deeds do you provoke him? Every morning he draws the curtain and glads the earth with light, and gives you eyes to see it; he sends his rain upon the ground to bring forth bread for man, and he gives you life to eat thereof — is this a ground for revolting from him? Every single minute of our life is cheered with the tender kindness of God, and every spot is gladdened with his love. I wonder that the Lord does not sweep away the moral nuisance of a guilty race from off the face of earth. Man’s sin must have been terribly offensive to God from day to day, and yet still he shows kindness, love, forbearance. This adds an excessive venom to man’s disobedience. How can he grieve such goodness? How can divine goodness fail to resent such base ingratitude?

Think also of God’s knowledge; for he knows all the transgressions of men. “What the eye does not see the heart does not rue,” is a truthful proverb; but every transgression is committed in the very presence of God, so that penitent David cried, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” Transgression is committed in the sight of God, from whose eyes nothing is hidden. Remember also, that the Lord never can forget; before his eyes all things stand out in clear light, not only the things of to-day, but all the transgressions of a life. Yet for all this he doth forbear. With evil reeking before his face, he is slow to anger, and waiteth that he may be gracious.

All this while, remember, the Lord is great in power. Some are patient because they are powerless: they bear and forbear because they cannot well help themselves; but it is not so with God. Had he but willed it, you had been swept into hell; only a word from him and the impenitent had fallen in the wilderness, and their spirits would have passed into the realms of endless woe. In a moment the Lord could have eased him of his

adversary; he could have stopped that flippant tongue, and closed that lustful eye in an instant. That wicked heart would have failed to beat if God had withdrawn his power, and that rebellious breath would have ceased also. Had it not been for longsuffering you unbelievers would long since have known what it is to fall into the hands of an angry God. Will you continue to grieve the God who so patiently bears with you?

Be it never forgotten that sin is to God much more intolerable than it is to us. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Things which we call little sins are great and grievous evils to him: they do, as it were, touch the apple of his eye. "Oh, do not," he says, "do not this abominable thing that I hate!" His Spirit is grieved and vexed with every idle word and every sensual thought; and hence it is a wonder of wonders that a God so sensitive of sin, a God so able to avenge himself of his adversaries, a God who knows the abundance of human evil, and marks it all, should nevertheless exhibit riches of goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; yet this is what you, my ungodly hearer, have been experiencing many a long year. Here let us pause; and oh that each one who is still unsaved would sing most sincerely the words of Watts: —

*"Lord, we have long abused thy love,  
Too long indulged our sin,  
Our aching hearts e'en bleed to see  
What rebels we have been.  
"No more, ye lusts, shall ye command,  
No more will we obey;  
Stretch out, O God, thy conqu'ring hand,  
And drive thy foes away."*

**II.** Come with me, friend, and let me speak to thee of THE SIN OF WHICH THOU ART SUSPECTED. Hear me, unconverted sinner: the sin of which thou art suspected is this, — "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?" The Lord's goodness ought to be admired and to be adored, and dost thou despise it? His goodness ought to be wondered at and told as a marvel in the ears of others, and dost thou despise it? That I may rake thy conscience a little, lend me thine ear.

Some despise God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, because they never even gave a thought to it. God has given you life to keep you in being, and he has indulged you with his kindness, but it has not yet

occurred to you that this patience is at all remarkable or worthy of the smallest thanks. You have been a drunkard, have you? a swearer? a Sabbath-breaker? a lover of sinful pleasure? Perhaps not quite so; but still you have forgotten God altogether, and yet he has abounded in goodness to you: is not this a great wrong? The Lord saith, Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but these my creatures do not know, my favored ones do not consider. Why, you have no such forbearance with others as God has had with you. You would not keep a dog if it never followed at your heel, but snarled at you: you would not even keep a potter's vessel if it held no water, and was of no service to you; you would break it in pieces, and throw it on the dunghill. As for yourself, you are fearfully and wonderfully made, both as to your body and as to your soul, and yet you have been of no service to your Maker, nor even thought of being of service to him. Still, he has spared you all these years, and it has never occurred to you that there has been any wonderful forbearance in it. Assuredly, O man, thou despisest the longsuffering of thy God.

Others have, perhaps, thought of it, but have never seriously meditated thereon. When we offend a man, if we are right-minded, we not only note the fact with regret, but we sit down and weigh the matter, and seek to rectify it; for we would not be unjust to any person, and if we felt that we had been acting unfairly it would press upon our minds until we could make amends. But are there not some of you who have never given half an hour's consideration to your relation to your God? He has spared you all this while, and yet it has never occurred to you to enter into your chamber and sit down and consider your conduct towards him. It would seem to be too much trouble even to think of your Creator. His longsuffering leads you to repentance, but you have not repented; in fact, you have not thought it worth your while to consider the question at all: you have thought it far more important to enquire, "What shall I eat and what shall I drink?" Bread and broadcloth have shut out the thought of God. Ah me, you will stand at his judgment bar before long — and then? Perhaps ere this week is finished you may have to answer, not to me, but unto him that sits upon the throne; therefore I do implore you now, for the first

time give this matter thought. Despise no longer the goodness and longsuffering of God.

This longsuffering is despised, further, by those who have imagined that God does not take any great account of what they do. So long as they do not go into gross and open sin, and offend the laws of their country, they do not believe that it is of any consequence whether they love God or not, whether they do righteousness or not, whether they are sober and temperate, or drunken and wanton; whether they are clean in heart by God's Spirit, or defiled in soul and life. Thou thinkest that God is altogether such an one as thyself, and that he will wink at thy transgression and cover up thy sin; but thou shalt not find it so. That base thought proves that thou despisest his longsuffering.

Some even get to think that the warnings of love are so much wind, and that the threatenings of God will never be fulfilled. They have gone on for many years without being punished, and instead of drawing the conclusion that the longer the blow is in falling the heavier it will be when it does come, they imagine that because it is long delayed the judgment will never come at all; and so they sport and trifle between the jaws of death and hell. They hear warnings as if they were all moonshine, and fancy that this holy Book, with its threatenings, is but a bugbear to keep fools quiet. If thou thinkest so, sir, then indeed thou hast despised the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God. Do you imagine that this forbearance will last for ever? Do you dream that at least it will continue with you for many years? I know your secret thoughts: you see other men die suddenly, but your secret thought is that you will have long space and ample time: you hear of one struck down with paralysis, and another carried off by apoplexy, but you flatter yourselves that you will have plenty of leisure to think about these things. Oh, how can you be so secure? How can you thus tempt the Lord? False prophets in these evil days play into men's hands and hold out the hope that you may go into the next world wrong, and yet be set right in the end. This is a vile flattery of your wicked hearts; but yet remember that even according to their maundering centuries may elapse before this fancied restoration may occur. A sensible man would not like to run the risk of even a year of agony. Half-an-hour of acute pain is dreaded by most people. Can it be that the very men who start back from the dentist's door, afraid of the

pinch which extricates an aching tooth, will run the risk of years of misery? Take the future of the impenitent even on this footing, it is a thing to be dreaded, and by every means avoided. I say, these flattering prophets themselves, if rightly understood, give you little enough of hope; but what will come to you if the old doctrine proves to be true and you go away into everlasting fire in hell, as the Scripture puts it? Will you live an hour in jeopardy of such a doom? Will you so despise the longsuffering and forbearance of the Lord?

I will not enlarge and use many words, for I am myself weary of words: I want to persuade you even with tears. My whole soul would attract you to your God, your Father. I would come to close quarters with you, and say, — Do you not think that, even though you fall into no doctrinal error, and indulge no hazy hope as to either restitution or annihilation, yet still it is a dreadful despising of God's mercy when you keep on playing with God, and saying to his grace, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee"? The more gentle God is the more you procrastinate, and the more in tenderness he speaks of pardon the more you transgress. Is this generous? Is it right? Is it wise? Can it be a fit and proper thing to do? Oh, my dear hearer, why will you act thus shamefully? Some of you delight to come and hear me preach, and drink in all I have to say, and you will even commend me for being earnest with your souls; and yet, after all, you will not decide for God, for Christ, for heaven. You are between good and evil, neither cold nor hot. I would ye were either cold or hot; I could even wish that ye either thought this word of mine to be false, or else that, believing it to be true, you at once acted upon it. How can you incur the double guilt of offending God and of knowing that it is an evil thing to do so? You reject Christ, and yet admit that he ought to be received by you! You speak well of a gospel which you will not accept for yourselves! You believe great things of a Savior whom you will not have to be your Savior! Jesus himself says, "If I tell you the truth, why do you not believe me?"

"Despisest thou the longsuffering of God?" Dare you do it? I tremble as I think of a man despising God's goodness. Is not this practical blasphemy? Darest thou do it? Oh, if thou hast done it hitherto, do it no more. Ere yon sun goes down again, say within thy heart, "I will be a despiser of God's goodness no longer; I will arise and go unto my Father, and I will say unto

him, — Father, I have sinned. I will not rest until in the precious blood he has washed my sins away.”

**III.** In closing this sermon I desire to remind thee, O ungodly man, of THE KNOWLEDGE OF WHICH THOU ART FORGETFUL. Read my text, — “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” Now there are many here who know as a matter of doctrine that the goodness of God leads them to repentance, and yet they do not know it as a practical truth affecting their lives: indeed, they so act that it is not true to them at all. Yet, if they do not know this they are wilfully ignorant; not willing to retain in their minds a fact so disagreeable to them. None are so blind as those who will not see: but he who does not see, and yet hath eyes, has a criminality about his blindness which is not found in that of those who have no sight. Dear hearer, whether you know this truth or not, I would remind you that God’s patience with you is meant to lead you to repentance. “How?” say you. Why, first by giving you an opportunity to repent. These years, which are now coming to a considerable number with you, have been given you in order that you might turn to God. By the time you were twenty-one you had sinned quite enough; perhaps you had even then begun to mislead other youths, and to instruct in evil those under your influence. Why did not God take you away at once? It might have been for the benefit of the world if he had done so; but yet you were spared till you were thirty. Did not each year of your lengthened life prove that the Lord was saying “I will spare him, for perhaps he will yet amend and think upon his God. I will give him more light, and increase his comforts; I will give him better teaching, better preaching; peradventure he will repent.” Yet you have not done so. Have you lived to be forty, and are you where you were when you were twenty? Are you still out of Christ? Then you are worse than you were; for you have sinned more deeply and you have provoked the Lord more terribly. You have now had space enough. What more do you need? When the child has offended, you say, “Child, unless you beg pardon at once, I must punish you”: would you give a boy so many minutes to repent in as God has given you years? I think not. If a servant is continually robbing you; if he is careless, slothful, disobedient, you say to him, “I have passed over your faults several times, but one of these days I shall discharge you.



I cannot always put up with this slovenliness, this blundering, this idleness: one of these times you will have to go." Have you not so spoken to your female servant, and thought it kind on your part to give her another chance? The lord has said the same to you; yet here you are, a living but impenitent man; spared, but spared only to multiply your transgressions. This know, that his forbearance gives you an opportunity to repent; do not turn it into an occasion for hardening your heart.

But next, the Lord in this is pleased to give a suggestion to you to repent. It seems to me that every morning when a man wakes up still impenitent, and finds himself out of hell, the sunlight seems to say, "I shine on thee yet another day, as that in this day thou mayest repent." When your bed receives you at night I think it seems to say, "I will give you another night's rest, that you may live to turn from your sins and trust in Jesus." Every mouthful of bread that comes to the table says, "I have to support your body that still you may have space for repentance." Every time you open the Bible the pages say, "We speak with you that you may repent." Every time you hear a sermon, if it be such a sermon as God would have us preach, it pleads with you to turn unto the Lord and live. Surely the time past of your life may suffice you to have wrought the will of the Gentiles. "The times of your ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth men everywhere to repent." Do not life and death, and heaven and hell, call upon you so to do? Thus you have in God's goodness space for repentance, and a suggestion to repent.

But something more is here; for I want you to notice that the text does not say, "The goodness of God calleth thee to repentance," but "leadeth thee." This is a much stronger word. God calls to repentance by the gospel; God leads to repentance by his goodness. It is as though he plucked at your sleeve and said, "Come this way." His goodness lays its gentle hand on you, drawing you with cords of love and bands of a man. God's forbearance cries, "Why wilt thou hate me? What wrong have I done thee? I have spared thee; I have spared thy wife and children to thee; I have raised thee up from the bed of sickness; I have loaded thy board; I have filled thy wardrobe; I have done thee a thousand good turns; wherefore dost thou disobey me? Turn unto thy God and Father, and live in Christ Jesus."

If, on the other hand, you have not received rich temporal favors, yet the Lord still leads you to repentance by a rougher hand; as when the prodigal fain would have filled his belly with husks, but could not, and the pangs of hunger came upon him; those pains were a powerful message from the Father to lead him to the home where there was bread enough and to spare. “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” Oh, that thou wouldest yield to its sweet leading, and follow as a child follows the guidance of a nurse. Let thy crosses lead thee to the cross; let thy joys lead thee to find joy in Christ.

Do you not think that all this should encourage you to repent, since God himself leads you that way? If God leads you to repentance he does not mean to cast you away. If he bids you repent, then he is willing to accept your repentance, and to be reconciled to you. If he bids you change your mind, it is because his own mind is love. Repentance implies a radical change in your view of things, and in your estimate of matters; it is a change in your purposes, a change in your thoughts and in your conduct. If the Lord leads you that way he will help you in it. follow his gracious leading till his divine Spirit shall lead you with still greater power and still greater efficacy, till at last you find that he has wrought in you both repentance and faith, and you are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. If “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance,” then be sure of this, that the goodness of God will receive thee when thou dost repent, and thou shalt live in his sight as his well-beloved and forgiven child.

I close now, but I am sorry so to do, for I have not pleaded one-half as I could have wished. Yet what more can I say? I will put it to yourselves. If you were in God’s stead, could you bear to be treated as you have treated him? If you were all goodness and tenderness, and had borne with a creature now for thirty or forty years, how would you bear to see that creature still stand out, and even draw an inference from your gentleness to encourage him in his rebellion? Would you not say, “Well, if my longsuffering makes him think little of sin, I will change my hand. If tenderness cannot win him, I must leave him; if even my love does not affect him, I will let him along. He is given unto his evil ways — I will cease from him, and see what his end will be”? O Lord, say not so, say not so unto anyone in this house, but of thy great mercy make this day to be

as the beginning of life to many. Oh that hearts may be touched with pity for their slighted Savior, that they may seek his face! Here is the way of salvation: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” You know how the Master bade us put it. “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” First, we are to preach faith, whereby we lay hold on Christ; then baptism, whereby we confess that faith, and own that we are dead and buried with Christ that we may live with him in newness of life. Those are the two points he bids us set before you, and I do set them before you. Weary, but not quite wearied out, O impenitent man, I plead with thee! Though thou hast so often been pleaded with in vain, once more I speak with thee in Christ’s stead, and say — Repent of thy sin, look to thy Savior, and confess thy faith in his own appointed way. I verily believe that if I had been pleading with some of you to save the life of a dog I should have prevailed with you a great while ago. And will you not care about the saving of your own souls? Oh, strange infatuation — that men will not consent to be themselves saved; but foolishly, madly, hold out against the mercy of God which leads them to repentance. God bless you, beloved, and may none of you despise his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering.

# BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM

## SERMON NO. 1729

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, JUNE 14TH, 1883,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” — ~~ROM~~ Luke 24:47.*

he servants of God were not left to originate a gospel for themselves, as certain modern teachers appear to do, nor were they even left to map out their mode of procedure in the spreading of the glad tidings. They were told by their great Master what to preach, and where to preach it, and how to preach it, and even where to begin to preach it. There is ample room for the exercise of our thought in obeying Christ's commands; but the worldly wise in these days call no one a thoughtful person who is content to be a docile follower of Jesus. They call themselves “thoughtful and cultured” simply because they set up their own thoughts in opposition to the thoughts of God. It were well if they would remember the old proverb — “Let another praise thee, and not thine own lips.” As a rule those who call themselves “intellectual” are by no means persons of great intellect. Great minds seldom proclaim their own greatness. These boasters are not satisfied to be “followers of God, as dear children,” but must strike out a path for themselves; this reveals their folly rather than their culture. We shall find use for every faculty which we possess, even if we are endowed with ten talents, in doing just as we are bidden by our Lord. Implicit obedience is not thoughtless: on the contrary, it is necessary to its completeness that heart and mind should be active in it.

**I.** Ye that would faithfully serve Christ note carefully how he taught his disciples **WHAT THEY WERE TO PREACH.** We find different descriptions of the subject of our preaching, but on this occasion it is comprised in two things — repentance and remission of sins. I am glad to find in this verse

that old- fashioned virtue called repentance. It used to be preached, but it has gone out of fashion now. Indeed, we are told that we always misunderstood the meaning of the word “repentance”; and that it simply means a “change of mind,” and nothing more. I wish that those who are so wise in their Greek knew a little more of that language, for they would not be so ready with their infallible statements. True, the word does signify a change of mind, but in its Scriptural connection it indicates a change of mind of an unusual character. It is not such a fitful thing as men mean when they speak of changing their minds, as some people do fifty times a day; but it is a change of mind of a deeper kind. Gospel repentance is a change of mind of the most radical sort — such a change as never was wrought in any man except by the Spirit of God. We mean to teach repentance, the old-fashioned repentance, too; and I do not know a better description of it than the child’s verse: —

*“Repentance is to leave  
The things we loved before,  
And show that we in earnest grieve  
By doing so no more.”*

Let every man understand that he will never have remission of sin while he is in love with sin; and that if he abides in sin he cannot obtain the pardon of sin. There must be a hatred of sin, a loathing of it, and a turning from it, or it is not blotted out. We are to preach repentance as a duty. “The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” He that has sinned is bound to repent of having sinned: it is the least that he can do. How can any man ask God for mercy while he abides in his sin?

We are to preach the acceptableness of repentance. In itself considered there is nothing in repentance deserving of the favor of God; but, the Lord Jesus Christ having come, we read, “He that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy.” God accepts repentance for the sake of his dear Son. He smiles upon the penitent sinner, and puts away his iniquities. this we are to make known on all sides.

We are also to preach the motives of repentance — that men may not repent from mere fear of hell, but they must repent of sin itself. Every

thief is sorry when he has to go to prison: every murderer is sorry when the noose is about his neck: the sinner must repent, not because of the punishment of sin, but because his sin is sin against a pardoning God, sin against a bleeding Savior, sin against a holy law, sin against a tender gospel. The true penitent repents of sin against God, and he would do so even if there were no punishment. When he is forgiven, he repents of sin more than ever; for he sees more clearly than ever the wickedness of offending so gracious a God.

We are to preach repentance in its perpetuity. Repentance is not a grace which is only to be exercised by us for a week or so at the beginning of our Christian career: it is to attend us all the way to heaven. Faith and repentance are to be inseparable companions throughout our pilgrimage to glory. Repenting of our sin, and trusting in the great Sinbearer, is to be the tenor of our lives; and we are to preach to men that it must be so.

We are to tell them of the source of repentance, namely, that the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins. Repentance is a plant that never grows on nature's dunghill: the nature must be changed, and repentance must be implanted by the Holy Spirit, or it will never flourish in our hearts. We preach repentance as a fruit of the Spirit, or else we greatly err.

Our second theme is to be remission of sins. What a blessed subject is this! To preach the full pardon of sin — that it is blotted out once for all; the free pardon of sin — that God forgives voluntarily of his own grace; free forgiveness for the very chief of sinners for all their sins, however black they may be; is not this a grand subject? We are to preach a final and irreversible remission; not a pardon which is given and taken back again, so that a man may have his sins forgiven and yet be punished for them. I loathe such a gospel as that, and could not preach it. It would come with an ill grace from these lips. But the pardon of God once given stands for ever. If he has cast our sin into the depths of the sea it will never be washed up again. If he has removed our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west, how can they return to condemn us? Once washed in the blood of the Lamb we are clean. The deed is done: the one offering has put away for ever all the guilt of believers.

Now this is what we are to preach — free, full, irreversible pardon for all that repent of sin, and lay hold on Christ by faith. O servants of the Lord, be not ashamed to declare it, for this is your message!

**II.** Next to this, we are told WHERE IT IS TO BE PREACHED. The text says that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations. Here, then, we have the divine warrant for missions. They are no speculations, or enthusiastic dreams; they are matters of divine command. I daresay you have heard of what the Duke of Wellington said to a missionary in India who was questioning whether it was of any use to preach the gospel to the Hindus. “What are your marching orders?” said this man of discipline and obedience. “What are your marching orders?” that is the deciding question. Now the marching orders are, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” What a wonder it is that the church did not see this long before. After her first days she seems to have fallen asleep, and it is scarcely a hundred years ago since in the providence and grace of God the church began to wake to her high enterprise. We are to preach the gospel everywhere: missions are to be universal. All nations need the preaching of the word. The gospel is a remedy for every human ill among all the races that live upon the face of the earth. Some out of all nations shall receive it; for there shall be gathered before the eternal throne men out of every kindred, and nation, and tongue. No nation will utterly refuse it: there will be found a remnant according to the election of grace even among the most perverse of the tribes of men.

We ought to preach it to every creature, for it is written that it behoved to be so. Read the forty-sixth verse: “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: . . . and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations.” Brethren, there was a divine necessity that Christ should die, and an equally imperative must that he should arise again from the dead; but there is an equally absolute necessity that Jesus should be preached to every creature under heaven. It behooves to be so. Who, then, will linger? Let us each one, according to his ability and opportunity, tell to all around us the story of the forgiveness of sin through the Mediator’s sacrifice to as many as confess their sin and forsake it. We are bidden to preach repentance of sin and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, let us not be slow to do so.

### **III.** But this is not all . We are actually told HOW TO PREACH IT.

Repentance and remission are to be preached in Christ's name. What does this mean? Ought we not to learn from this that we are to tell the gospel to others, because Christ orders us to do so? In Christ's name we must do it. Silence is sin when salvation is the theme. If these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out against them. My brethren, you must proclaim the gospel according to your ability: it is not a thing which you may do or may not do at your own discretion; but you must do it if you have any respect for your Savior's name. If you dare pray in that name, if you dare hope in that name, if you hear the music of joy in that name, then in the name of Jesus Christ preach the gospel in every land.

But it means more than that. Not only preach it under his orders, but preach it on his authority. The true servant of Christ has his Master to back him up. The Lord Jesus will seal by threatening or by grace the word of his faithful messengers. If we threaten the ungodly, the threatening shall be fulfilled. If we announce God's promise to the penitent, that promise shall be surely kept. The Lord Jesus will not let the words of his own ambassadors fall to the ground. "Lo, I am with you always," says he, "even to the end of the world. Go ye therefore and teach all nations." You have Christ with you: teach the nations by his authority.

But does it not mean, also, that the repentance and the remission which are so bound together come to men by virtue of his name? Oh, sinner, there would be no acceptance of your repentance if it were not for that dear name! Oh, guilty conscience, there would be no ease for you through the remission of sin if it were not that the blessed name of Jesus is sweet to the Lord God of hosts! We dare preach pardon to you in his name. The blood has been shed and sprinkled on the burning throne: the Christ has gone in within the veil, and stands there "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Salvation in his name there is assuredly, and this is our glory; but "there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved." That name has a fullness of saving efficacy, and if you will but rest in it, you shall find salvation, and find it now. Thus you see we are not bidden to go forth and say — We preach you the gospel in the name of our own reason; or we preach you the gospel in the name of the church to which we belong, or by the authority of a synod, or



a bishop, or a creed, or a whole church. No, we declare the truth in the name of Christ. Christ has set his honor to pawn for the truth of the gospel. He will lose his glory if sinners that believe and repent are not saved. Dishonor will come to the Son of God if any man repenting of sin is not accepted before God. For his name's sake he will not cast away one that comes to him. O chief of sinners! he will receive you if you will come. He cannot reject you; that were to be false to his own promise, untrue to his own nature.

Be sure then that you preach in Christ's name. If you preach in your own name it is poor work. A man says to me, "I cannot tell a dead sinner to live. I cannot tell a blind sinner to see. I cannot invite an insensible sinner; it is absurd; for the sinner is altogether without strength." No, dear sir, I do not suppose you can do so while you speak according to carnal reason. Does the good man say that God has not sent him to bid the dead arise? Then let him not do it. Pray let him not try to do what God never sent him to do. Let him go home and go to bed; he will probably do as much good asleep as awake. But as for me, I am sent to preach in Jesus' name, "Believe and live," and therefore I am not slow to do so. I am sent on purpose to say, Ye dry bones, live, and I dare do no otherwise. No faithful minister who knows what faith means looks to the sinner for power to believe, or looks to himself for power; but he looks to the Master that sent him for power; and in the name of Christ he says to the withered hand, "Be stretched out," and he says to the dead, "Come forth!" and he does not speak in vain. Oh, yes, it is in Christ's name that we fulfill our office! We are miracle-workers: he endows us with his power if in faith we tell out his gospel. All of you who try to speak the gospel may do it without fear of failure; for the power lies in the gospel and in the Spirit who goes with it, not in the preacher or in the sinner. Blessed be the name of God, we have this treasure in earthen vessels but the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us. So he tells us, then, what to preach, and where to preach it, and how to preach it.

**IV.** Now, I shall ask your attention to the principal topic of the present discourse, and that is, that he told his disciples **WHERE TO BEGIN**.

I have heard of a Puritan who had in his sermon forty-five main divisions, and about ten subdivisions under every head. He might be said largely to divide the word of truth, even if he did not rightly divide it. Now, I have

nine subheads to-night, and yet I hope I shall not detain you beyond the usual time. I cannot make fewer of them and give the full meaning of this sentence — "Beginning at Jerusalem." The apostles were not to pick and choose where they should start, but they were to begin at Jerusalem. Why?

First, because it was written in the Scriptures that they were to begin at Jerusalem: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooves, that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." It was so written: I will give you two or three proofs. Read in the second chapter of Isaiah, at the third verse: "Out of Zion shall come forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Isaiah's word would have fallen to the ground if the preaching had not begun at Jerusalem; but now, to the very letter, this prediction of the evangelical prophet is kept. In Joel, that famous Joel who prophesied the descent of the Spirit and the speaking of the servants and the handmaidens, we read in the second chapter, at the thirty-second verse, "In mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance;" and again in the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of the same prophet — "The Lord shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem." As if the Lord were as a strong lion in the midst of Jerusalem, and as if the sounding forth of the gospel was like the roaring of his voice, that the nations might hear and tremble. How could those promises have been kept if the gospel had begun to be preached in the deserts of Arabia, or if the first church of Christ had been set up at Damascus? Note another passage. Obadiah in his twenty-first verse says, "Saviors shall come up on mount Zion." Who were these saviors but those who instrumentally became so by proclaiming the Savior Jesus Christ. And Zechariah, who is full of visions, but not visionary, says in his fourteenth chapter at the eighth verse, "Living waters shall flow out of Jerusalem," and then he describes the course of those waters till they flowed even unto the Dead Sea, and made its waters sweet. Because the Bible said so, therefore they must begin at Jerusalem, and I call your attention to this, for our Lord Jesus was particular that every jot and tittle of the Old Testament should be fulfilled. Do you not think that this reads us a lesson that we should be very reverent towards every sentence of both the Old and the New Testaments; and if there be anything taught by our Lord ought not his people to

consider well, and act according to the divine ordinance? I am afraid that many take their religion from their parents, or from the church that is nearest to them, without weighing it. "I counsel thee to keep the King's commandment." Oh, that we may be more faithful servants of the Lord; for if we are faithful we shall be careful upon what men call small points, such as the doctrine of baptism, the manner of the Lord's Supper, or this small point of where the gospel should be first preached. It must begin at Jerusalem and nowhere else; for the Scripture cannot be broken. See ye to it, then, that ye walk according to the word of God, and that ye test everything by it. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." So much on that first head.

Secondly, I suppose that our Lord bade his disciples begin to preach the gospel at Jerusalem, because it was at Jerusalem that the facts which make up the gospel had occurred. It was there that Jesus Christ died, that he was buried, that he rose again, and that he ascended into heaven. All these things happened at Jerusalem, or not far from it. Therefore the witness-bearing of the apostles must be upon the spot where if they lie they can be confuted, and where persons can come forward and say, "It was not so; you are deceivers." If our Lord had said, "Do not say anything in Jerusalem. Go away to Rome and begin preaching there," it would not have looked quite so straightforward as it now does when he says, "Preach this before the scribes and the priests. They know that it is so. They have bribed the soldiers to say otherwise, but they know that I have risen." The disciples were to preach the gospel in the streets of Jerusalem. There were people in that city who were once lame, and who leaped like a hart when Jesus healed them. There were men and women there who ate of the fish and that bread that Jesus multiplied. There were people in Jerusalem who had seen their children and their friends healed of dreadful diseases. Jesus bids his disciples beard the lion in his den, and declare the gospel on the spot where, if it had been untrue, it would have been contradicted with violence. Our Lord seemed to say, "Point to the very place where my death took place. Tell them that they crucified me; and see if they dare deny it. Bring it home to their consciences that they rejected the Christ of God." Hence it was that, coming to the very people who had seen these things, the preaching of Peter had unusual force about it: in addition to the

power of the Holy Spirit there was also this — that he was telling them of a crime which they had newly committed, and could not deny: and when they saw their error they turned to God with penitent hearts. I like this thought — that they were to begin at Jerusalem, because there the events of the gospel occurred. This is a direction for you, dear friend: if you have been newly converted, do not be ashamed to tell those who know you. A religion which will not stand the test of the fireside is not worth much! “Oh,” says one. “I have never told my husband. I get out on a Thursday night, but he does not know where I am going, and I steal in here. I have never even told my children that I am a believer. I do not like to let it be known. I am afraid that all my family would oppose me.” Oh, yes; you are going to heaven, round by the back lanes. Going to sneak into glory as a rat crawls into a room through a hole in the floor! Do not attempt it. Never be ashamed of Christ. Come straight out and say to your friends, “You know what I was; but now I have become a disciple of Jesus Christ.” Begin at Jerusalem: it was your Lord’s command. He had nothing to be ashamed of. There was no falsehood in what he bade his disciples preach, and therefore he did as good as say, “Hang up my gospel to the light. It is nothing but truth, therefore display it before mine enemies’ eyes.” If yours is a true, genuine, thorough conversion, I do not say that you are to go up and down the street crying out that you are converted; but on due occasions you must not hide your convictions. Conceal not what the Lord has done for you, but hold up your candle in your own house.

The third reason why the Lord Jesus told them to begin at Jerusalem may have been that he knew that there would come a time when some of his disciples would despise the Jews, and therefore he said — When you preach my gospel, begin with them. This is a standing commandment, and everywhere we ought to preach the gospel to the Jew as well as to the Gentile; Paul even says, “to the Jew first.” Some seem to think that there ought to be no mission to the Jews — that there is no hope of converting them, that they are of no use when they are converted, and so on. I have even heard some who call themselves Christians speak slightly of the Jewish people. What! and your Lord and Master a Jew! There is no race on earth so exalted as they are. They are the seed of Abraham, God’s friend. We have nobles and dukes in England, but how far could they trace their pedigree? Why, up to a nobody. But the poorest Jew on earth is

descended linearly from Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham. Instead of treating them with anything like disrespect, the Savior says, "Begin at Jerusalem." Just as we say, "Ladies first," so it is "the Jew first." They take precedence among races, and are to be first waited on at the gospel feast. Jesus would have us entertain a deep regard to that nation which God chose of old, and out of which Christ also came, for he is of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh. He puts those first who knew him first. Let us never sneer at a Jew again; for our Lord teaches us the rule of his house when he says, "Begin at Jerusalem." Let the seed of Israel first have the gospel presented to them, and if they reject it we shall be clear of their blood. But we shall not be faithful to our orders unless we have taken note of Jews as well as Gentiles.

The fourth reason for beginning at Jerusalem is a practical lesson for you. Begin where you are tempted not to begin. Naturally these disciples would have said one to another when they met, "We cannot do much here in Jerusalem. The first night that we met together the doors were shut for fear of the Jews. It is of no use for us to go out into the street; these people are all in such an excited frame of mind that they will not receive us; we had better go up to Damascus, or take a long journey and then commence preaching; and when this excitement is cooled down, and they have forgotten about the crucifixion, we will come and introduce Christ gradually, and say as little as we can about putting him to death." That would have been the rule of policy — that rule which often governs men who ought to be led by faith. But our Lord had said, "Beginning at Jerusalem," and so Peter must stand up in the midst of that motley throng, and he must tell them, "This Jesus whom ye have with wicked hands crucified and slain is now risen from the dead." Instead of tearing Peter to pieces they come crowding up, crying, "We believe in Jesus: let us be baptized into his sacred name." The same day there were added to the church three thousand souls, and a day or two afterwards five thousand were converted by the same kind of preaching. We ought always to try to do good where we think that it will not succeed. If we have a very strong aversion as a token that we are not called to it, we may regard it as a sign that we ought at least to try it. The devil knows you, dear friend, better than you know yourself. You see, he has been longer in the world than you have, and he knows a great deal more about human nature than you

do; and so he comes to you, and he reckons you up pretty accurately, and says, "This brother would be very useful in a certain sphere of labour, and I must keep him from it." So he tells the brother that he is not called to it, and that it is not the sort of thing for him, and so on; and then he says to himself, "I have turned aside one foe from harming my cause." Yonder is a good sister. Oh, how much she might do for Christ, but Satan guides her into a work in which she will never shine; while the holy work which she could do right well is dreaded by her. I heard a beautiful story last Wednesday, when I was sitting to see inquirers, and I cannot help mentioning it here, for it may be a suggestion to some Christian who is present. A brother, who will be received into the church, was converted in the following way. He came up to London, and worked in a certain parish in the West-end. He was at work on a sewer, and a lady from one of the best houses in the West-end came to the men that were making the sewer and said, "You men, come into my servants' hall and eat your dinners. I will give you either tea or coffee with your meal, and then you will not have to go into the public-house." Some of them went in, but others did not. So the next day the lady came out, and said, "Now, I know that you think my place too fine for you. You do not like to come; so I have come out to fetch you in. While this sewer is being done I should like you to eat your dinners in my house." She got them all in; and when they had done their dinners and drank their tea or coffee she began to talk to them about Jesus Christ. The work was a month or so about, and it was every day the same. Our friend does not know the lady's name, but he knows the name of Jesus through her teaching. Friends, we lose hosts of opportunities; I am sure we do. Many ways of doing good have never occurred to our minds, but they ought to occur to us; and when they do occur we should use them. Let us crucify the flesh about this. Let us overcome natural timidity. Let us in some way or other begin at Jerusalem, which is just where we thought that we never could begin.

Now fifthly. We are getting on, you see. "Beginning at Jerusalem," must surely mean begin at home. Jerusalem was the capital city of their own country. You know the old proverb, "The cobbler's wife goes barefoot." I am afraid that this proverb is verified by some Christians. They do a deal of good five miles off home, but none at home. I knew a man who used to go out with preachers every night in the week, and try to preach himself,

poor soul that he was; but his children were so neglected that they were the most wicked children in the street, and they grew up in all manner of vice. The father was prancing about and looking after other people, and did not care for his own family. Now, if you are going to serve Christ to the very ends of the earth, take care that you begin at home. Dear parents, need I urge you to look to your own children? It is a great joy to me to know that the members of the church for the most part do this. When a dear sister came to me on Wednesday night with three of her children, making four that had come within the last six weeks, I felt grateful to God that parents were looking after their offspring. But if any of you are in the Sabbath-school, and never have a Sabbath-school at home; if any of you talk to strangers in the aisles, but are neglecting your own sons and daughters — oh, let it not be so! The power of a father's prayers with his arms about his boy's neck I know full well. The power of a mother's prayers with her children all kneeling round her is far greater with the young than any public ministry will be. Look well to your children: begin at Jerusalem.

Begin with your servants. Do not let a servant live in your house in ignorance of the gospel. Do not have family prayer merely as a matter of form, but let it be a reality. Do not have one person working for you to whom you have never spoken about his or her soul.

Begin with your brothers. Oh, the influence of sisters over brothers! I have a friend — a dear friend, too — who has long been a man of God, but in his young days he was a very loose fellow, and often he was all the night away from home. His sister used to write letters to him, and frequently while half tipsy he has read them under the street lamp. One letter which he read cut him to the quick. His sister's grief about him was too much for him, and he was compelled to seek and find the Savior. Well has the sister been rewarded for all her love to him. Oh, dear friends, begin at Jerusalem! Begin with your brothers and sisters.

Begin with your neighbours. Oh, this London of ours! It is a horrible place for Christian people to live in! Round about this neighbourhood scarcely can a decent person remain by reason of the vice that abounds, and the language that is heard on every side. Many of you are as much vexed to-day as Lot was when he was in Sodom. Well, bear your witness. Do not be dumb dogs, but speak up for your Lord and Master whenever you are.

Look at our dear brother Lazenby, who entered a workshop where none feared the Lord, and has been the means of bringing all in the shop to God. Another shop has felt his influence, and the first recruit has come to join the church: I should not wonder if the whole of the workmen in the second shop should come, too. The Lord grant it. It is marvelous how the gospel spreads when men are in earnest, and their lives are right. God make you so to live that you show piety at home.

Then, sixthly, begin where much has been already done. Begin at Jerusalem. It is hard work, dear friends, to preach to certain people: they have been preached to so long, like the people at Jerusalem. They know all about the gospel, it is hard to tell them anything fresh, and yet they have felt nothing, but remain wedded to their sins. The Jerusalem people had been taught for centuries in vain; and yet Christ's disciples were to speak to them first. We must not pass the gospel-hardened; we must labour for the conversion of those who have enjoyed privileges but have neglected them, those who have had impressions and have crushed them out, those who seem now as if they had sealed their own death-warrants and would never be saved. Do not hesitate to go to them. The Lord has done much already: it may be that he has laid the fire, and you are to strike the match and set it all alight. Many people have a love to the gospel, a love to the house of God, a love to God's people, and yet they have no saving faith. What a pity! Do not hesitate to address them. I think I hear you say, "I would rather go and preach to the outcasts." So would I; but you and I are not allowed to pick our work. Virgin soil yields the best harvest; and if a man might choose a congregation that is likely to be fruitful, he might well select those that have never heard the word before. But we have not our choice. The Savior's disciples were to begin where the prophets had prophesied, and had been put to death; where sinners had rejected God's voice times out of mind. Therefore do not pass by your fellow-seatholders. Perhaps you say, "Sir, I have spoken to them a great many times, but I cannot make anything of them." No, you cannot; but God can. Try again. Suppose that for twenty years you were to sit in this Tabernacle side by side with an unconverted person, and you were to speak to that person twice every Sunday and twice in the week, and all the twenty years it should be in vain; yet if the individual was brought to Christ at last would not his conversion repay you? Is your time so very



precious? Is your ability so very great? Oh, my dear friend, if you were an archangel it would be worth while for you to work a thousand years to bring one soul to Christ! A soul is such a precious jewel that you would be abundantly rewarded if a century of service only brought you one conversion. Wherefore, in working for Christ, do not hesitate to go to those who have refused the gospel hitherto, for you may yet prevail.

Seventhly, begin where the gospel day is short. If you ask me where I get that thought, it is from the fact that within a very short time Jerusalem was to be destroyed. The Romans were to come there to slay men, women, and children, and break down the walls and leave not one stone upon another. And Christ's disciples knew this; wherefore their Lord said, "Begin at Jerusalem." Now, then, if you have any choice as to the person you shall speak to, select an old man. He is near his journey's end, and if he is unsaved there is but a little bit of candle left by the light of which he may come to Christ. Choose the old man, and do not let him remain ignorant of the gospel. Fish him up at once, for with him it is now or never, since he is on the borders of the grave. Or when any of you notice a girl upon whose cheek you see that hectic flush which marks consumption — if you notice during service the deep "churchyard" cough — say to yourself, "I will not let you go without speaking to you, for you may soon be dead." How many a time have I seen a consumptive at Mentone apparently getting better; but I have noticed him rise from dinner with his handkerchief to his mouth and soon they have whispered, "He died of hemorrhage" — suddenly taken off. When you meet with a pining case, do not wait to be introduced, but introduce yourself; and tenderly, gently, quietly, lovingly say a word about coming to Christ at once. We ought speedily to look up those whose day of grace is short. Perhaps, also, there is a stranger near you who is going far away to a distant land, and may never hear the gospel again; therefore, if you have an opportunity, take care that you avail yourself of it, and reason with him for Jesus at once. Begin at Jerusalem: begin where the day of grace is short.

Eighthly, begin, dear friend, where you may expect opposition. That is a singular thing to advise, but I recommend it because the Savior advised it. It was as certain as that twice two are four that if they preached Christ in Jerusalem, there would be a noise, for there were persons living there who hated the very name of Jesus, for they had conspired to put him to death.

If they began at Jerusalem they would arouse a ferocious opposition. But nothing is much better for the gospel than opposition. A man comes into the Tabernacle to-night, and as he goes away he says, "Yes, I was pleased and satisfied." In that man's case I have failed. But another man keeps biting his tongue, for he cannot endure the preaching. He is very angry; something in the doctrine does not suit him, and he cries, "As long as I live I will never come here again." That man is hopeful. He begins to think. The hook has taken hold of him. Give us time, and we will have that fish. It is no ill omen when a man gets angry with the gospel. It is bad enough, but it is infinitely better than that horrible lethargy into which men fall when they do not think. Some are not good enough even to oppose the gospel of Jesus Christ. Be hopeful of the man who will not let you speak to him, he is one that you must approach again; and if, when he does let you speak to him, he seems as if he would spit on you, be grateful for it. He feels your words. You are touching him on a sore place. You will have him yet. When he swears that he does not believe a word of what you say, do not believe a word of what he says; for often the man who openly objects secretly believes. Just as boys whistle when they go through a churchyard in order to keep their courage up, so many a blasphemer is profane in order to silence his conscience. When he feels the hook, like the fish, the man will drag away from it. Give him line. Let him go. The hook will hold, and in due time you will have him. Do not despair. Do not think it a horrible thing that he should oppose you; you should rather be grateful for it, and go to God and cry that he will give you that soul for your hire. Begin courageously where you may expect opposition.

And, lastly, to come to the meaning which Mr John Bunyan has put upon the text in his famous book called "The Jerusalem Sinner Saved," I have no doubt that the Savior bade them begin at Jerusalem, because the biggest sinners lived there. There they lived who had crucified him. The loving Jesus bids them preach repentance and remission to them. There he lived who had pierced the Savior's side, and they that had plaited the crown of thorns, and put it on his head. There dwell those who had mocked him and spat upon him; therefore the loving Jesus, who so freely forgives, says, "Go and preach the gospel first to them." The greatest sinners are the objects of the greatest mercy. Preach first to them. Are there any such here? My dear friend, we must preach the gospel first to you because you

want it most. You are dying; your wounds are bleeding; the heavenly surgeon bids us staunch your wounds first. Others who are not so badly hurt may wait awhile, but you must be first served lest you die of your injuries. Should not this encourage you great sinners to come to Jesus, when he bids us preach to you first?

We are to preach to you first because, when you have received him, you will praise him most. If you are saved you will encourage others to come, and you will cheer up those who have come already. We shall be glad to get fresh blood poured into the veins of the church by the conversion of big sinners who love much because they have had much forgiven.

Therefore, we are to come to you first. Will you not come to Christ at once? Oh, that you would believe in him! Oh that you would believe in him to-night! To you is the word of this salvation sent. You old sinners — you that have added sin to sin, and done all you can do with both hands wickedly — you that have cursed his name — you that have robbed others — you that have told lies — you that have blackened yourselves with every crime, come and welcome to Jesus. Come to Christ and live at once. Mercy's door is set wide open on purpose that the vilest of the vile may come; and they are called to come first. Just as you are, come along with you. Tarry not to cleanse or mend, but now "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." This night if you believe in Jesus you shall go out of these doors rejoicing that the Lord has put away your sin. To believe is to trust — simply to trust in Christ. It seems a very simple thing, but that is why it is so hard. If it were a hard thing you would more readily attend to it; but being so easy you cannot believe that it is effectual. But it is so; faith does save. Christ wants nothing of you but that you accept what he freely presents to you. Put out an empty hand, a black hand, a trembling hand; accept what Jesus gives, and salvation is yours.

Thus have I tried to expound "Beginning at Jerusalem," O that my Lord would begin with you. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —**

 **MATTHEW 28.**


**HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 486, 537.**

# IN HIM: LIKE HIM

## SERMON NO. 1732

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 17TH, 1883,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk,  
even as he walked.” —  1 John 2:6.*

He that saith he abideth in him: “ — that is exactly what every Christian does say. He cannot be a Christian unless this be true of him, and be cannot fully enjoy his religion unless he assuredly knows that he is in Christ, and can boldly say as much. We must be in Christ, and abidingly in Christ, or else We are not saved in the Lord. It is our union with the Christ that makes us Christians: by union with him as our life we truly live, — live in the favor of God. — We are in Christ, dear brethren, as the manslayer was in the city of refuge: I hope that we can say we abide in him as our sanctuary and shelter. We have fled for refuge to him who is the hope set before us in the gospel; even as David and his men sheltered themselves in the eaves of En-gedi, so we hide ourselves in Christ. We each one sing, and our heart goes with the words —

*“Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee.”*

We have entered into Christ as into the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, as guest; into a banquet-hall, as returning travellers into their home. And now we abide — in Christ in this sense, that we are joined to him : as the stone is, in the wall, as the wave is in the sea, as the branch is in the vine, so are we in Christ. As the branch receives all its sap from the stem, so all the sap of spiritual life flows from Christ into us. If we were separated from him, we should be as branches cut off from the vine, only fit to be gathered up for the fire, and to be burned. So that we abide in Christ as our shelter, our home, and our life. Today we remain in Christ, and hope for ever to remain in him, as our Head. Ours is no transient union; while he lives as our Head we shall remain his members. We are

nothing apart from him. As a finger is nothing without the head, as the whole body is nothing without the head, so should we be nothing without our Lord Jesus Christ. But we are in him vitally, and therefore we dare ask the question, “Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?”

Beloved, since we, then, are the people who say that we abide in him, it is upon us that the obligation of the text falls: we ought ourselves also so to walk even as he walked. A Bible ought has great weight with a conscientious man. Ought it to be so? Then it shall be so, God helping me. If we say we must do. If we talk, we must walk, or it will, be mere talk. If we make the profession of abiding in Christ, we must prove it by our practice of walking with Christ. If we say that we are in Christ and abide in him, we must take care that our life and character are conformed to Christ, or else we shall be making an empty boast. This is true of every man who says he is in Christ, for the text is put in the most general and absolute manner: be the man old or young, rich or poor, learned or simple, pastor or hearer, it is incumbent upon him to live like Christ if he professes to live in Christ.

The first thing about a Christian is initiation, initiation into Christ: the next thing is imitation, the imitation of Christ. We cannot be Christians unless we are in Christ; and we are not truly in Christ unless in him we live and move and have our being, and the life of Christ is lived over again by us according to our measure. “Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.” It is the nature of children to imitate their parents. Be ye imitators; of Christ as good soldiers, who cannot have a better model for their soldierly life than their Captain and Lord. Ought we not to be very grateful to Christ that he deigns to be our example? If he were not perfectly able to meet all our other wants, if he were an expiation and nothing else, we should glory in him as our atoning sacrifice, for we always put that to the front, and magnify the virtue of his precious blood beyond everything: but at the same time we need an example, and it is delightful to find it where we find our pardon and justification. They that are saved from the death of sin need to be guided in the life of holiness, and it is infinitely condescending on the part of Christ that he becomes an example to such poor creatures as we are. It is said to have been the distinguishing mark of Caesar as a soldier that he never said to his followers “Go!” but he always said “Come!” Of

Alexander, also, it was noted that in weary marches he was sure to be on foot with his warriors, and in fierce attack's he always was in the van. The most persuasive sermon is the example which leads the way. This certainly is one trait in the Good Shepherd's character, "when he putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them." If Jesus bids us do anything, he first does it himself. He would have us wash one another's feet; and this is the argument — "Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well; for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." Shall we not do as he does whom we profess to follow? He has left his footprints that we may set our feet in them. Will we not joyfully fix our feet upon this royal road?

That is our theme at this time. We do many of us say that we are in Christ: let us hear how obliged we are by this to walk even as he walked. Oh, Holy Spirit, let us feel the weight of the sacred obligation!

But I stop a minute. I know that there are some here who cannot say that they are in Christ. Then, if you are not in Christ, you are out of Christ; and out of Christ your position is dangerous, terrible, ruinous. If we saw a man hanging over a deep pit, if we saw a man exposed to a sea of fire, and likely to perish in it, all our tenderest emotions would begin to flow, and we should pray in an agony of spirit, "Oh, God, save this man from danger!" My brethren, there are some among us tonight who are in the utmost danger; in a most emphatic sense they are lost already, for they are without God, and without Christ, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. Oh, my hearers, how shall I speak of you without tears? Poor souls, abiding under the wrath of God! Poor souls! The mercy is that you are not past hope. There is an arm that can reach you: there is a voice that calls you — calls you even now; hear it: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and besides me there is none else." Can you not even now give one look to him who died for you? Will you not turn the eye of faith that way, and trust him who was nailed to the tree on your behalf? God grant that you may, and then I may include you also in the blessed instruction of the text. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

**I.** I shall first of all ask you to CONSIDER HOW THIS OBLIGATION IS PROVED. Let us spend a few minutes over the question, Why ought we to walk as Jesus did?

When we read the word “ought,” if we are honest men, we begin to look about us and to make enquiries as to the reason and the measure of this obligation. An “ought” is a compulsion to a true heart. There is a “needs be” to every godly man that he should do what he ought.

What, then, is the ground upon which this “ought” is fixed?

First, it is the design of God that those who are in Christ should walk as Christ walked. It is a part of the original covenant purpose; for “whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” That is the drift of the plan of grace, the aim of the covenant. Grace looks towards holiness, that there should be a people called forth to whom Christ should be the elder brother, the firstborn among many brethren. You certainly have not had the purpose of God fulfilled in you, dear friend, unless you have been conformed to the image of his dear Son. “He hath chosen us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” This is the aim of election; this is the object of redemption; this is the fruit of calling; this is the concomitant of justification; this is the evidence of adoption; this is the earnest of glory; that we should be holy, even as Christ is holy, and in this respect should wear the lineaments of the Son of God. He hath given his own Son to die for us, that we may die to sin; he has given him to live that we may live like him. In every one of us the Father desires to see Christ, that so Christ may be glorified in every one of us. Do you not feel this to be an imperative necessity to be laid upon you? Would you have the Lord miss his purpose? You are chosen of God to this end, that you should be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” and what is this but that you should walk even as he walked? Observe, again, another point of this necessity: it is necessary to the mystical Christ that we should walk as he walked, for we are joined unto the Lord Jesus in one body. Now, Christ cannot be made a monster that would be a blasphemous notion. And yet if any man had eyes, ears, hands, or other members that were not conformable to the head, he would be a strange being. The mouth of a lion, the eye of an ox, the feathers of a

bird — these things would have no consistency with the head of a man. We read of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, that it had a head of fine gold, but legs of iron, and feet part of iron and part of clay. Surely, Christ's spiritual body is not compounded of such discordant elements. No, no. He must be all of a piece. The mystical body must be the most beautiful and precious production of God; for the church is Christ's body, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all." And shall that mysterious fulness be something defiled, deformed, full of sin, subject to Satan? God forbid! "As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy," and as your HEAD is holy, so be ye, as members of his body, holy too. Ought it not to be so? Does anybody raise a question? Does not every member of Christ, by the very fact that he is joined to him by living union, feel at once that he must walk even as Christ walked?

And this, beloved, again, must all be the fruit of the one Spirit that is in Christ and in us. The Father anointed Christ of old with the same anointing, which rests on us in our measure. The Holy Spirit descended upon him, and rested upon him, and we have an unction from the same Holy One. The Spirit of God has anointed all the chosen of God who are regenerated, and he dwelleth with them and in them. Now, the Spirit of God in every case works to the same result. It cannot be supposed that the Spirit of God in any case produces unholiness: the thought were blasphemy. The fruit of the Spirit is everything that is delightful, right, and good towards God, and generous towards man. The Spirit of God, wherever He works, works according to the mind of God; and God is hymned as "Holy, holy, holy," by those pure spirits who know him best. He is altogether without spot or trace of sin, and so shall we be when the Spirit's work is done. If, then, the Spirit of God dwell in you (and if it do not, you are not in Christ), it must work in you conformity to Christ that you should walk even as he walked.

Perhaps further argument is not needed; but I would have true Christians remember that this is one article of the agreement which we make with Christ when we become his disciples. It is taken for granted that when we enter the service of Jesus we by that act and deed undertake by his help to follow his example. "Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." You know, if any man love Christ,



he must follow him: — "If ye love me, keep my commandments." When we took Christ's cross to be our salvation we took it also to be our heavenly burden. When we yielded ourselves up to Christ to be saved by him, we in spirit renounced every sin. We felt that we had come out from under the yoke of Satan, and that we made no reserve for the lusts of the flesh that we might obey them, but bowed our necks to the yoke of the Lord Jesus. We put ourselves into Christ's hands unreservedly, and we said, "Lord, sanctify me, and then use me. Take my body and all its members; take my mind and all its faculties; take my spirit and all the new powers which thou hast bestowed upon me with it; and let all these be thine. Reign in me; rule me absolutely, sovereignly, always and alone. I do not ask to be my own, for I am not my own, I am bought with a price." After we have learned the grand truth that, "if one died for all, then all died," we infer that "Christ died for all, that we that live might not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto him that died for us, and rose again." Are we not, then, to be true to this blessed compact? "I do remember my faults this day," says one. Ay, but remember also the vows that still engage you. Do not desire to escape from the sacred bond. 'This day remember the Lord to whom you dedicated yourself in the days of your youth, perhaps long, years ago, and again entreat him to take full possession of the purchased possession, and hold it against all comers, for ever. So it ought to be. He that says, "I am in him" ought also so to walk even as he walked. Obey the sacrifice of Jesus, yield yourselves as living sacrifices; by your hope of being saved by him put your whole being into his hands to love and serve him all your days.

For, once more, inasmuch as we are in Christ, we are now bound to live to Christ's glory, and this is a great means of glorifying Christ. What can we do to glorify Christ if we do not walk even as he walked? If I came and preached to you, and if I had the tongues of men and of angels, yet if I did not seek to do as my Master did, what avails all that I can say? It is but "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." You know what men say to unholy preachers: they bid them be silent or be consistent. Unholy ministers are a derision, and a scoff, and a by-word. And so it is with unholy Christians, too. You may teach your children at home, or teach them in the Sunday-school class; but if they see your lives to be Christless, prayerless, godless, they will not learn any good from you.

They will rather learn from what you do amiss, than from what you say that is right. Do you blame them that it is so? Are not actions far more forcible than words? Suppose you church-members are unjust in your trade; suppose that in your common conversation you are loose; suppose that in your acts you are licentious or untrue; what does the world say of your Christianity? Why, it becomes to them a thing of contempt. They sniff at it. It is so much dung and sweepings of the street to them, and so it ought to be. In the early ages some of the worst opponents of Christianity used to wing their shafts with the inconsistencies of Christian professors, and they were wise in their generation. One of them said, “Where is that catholic holiness of which we have often heard so much?” and another said, “We heard of these people that they love their Christ, and love other men so that they would even die for love of their brethren; but many of them do not love as well as the heathen whom they despise.” I dare say there was a good deal of slander and scandal in what they said; but I am also afraid that, if it were said today, there would be a vast deal of sorrowful truth in it. Christian love is by no means so plentiful as it might be, nor holy living, either. Is not this the thing that weakens the preaching, of the gospel — the want of living the gospel? If all the professed Christians who live in London really walked as Christ walked, would not the salt have more effect upon the corrupt mass than the stuff which is now called salt seems to have? We preach here in the pulpit; but what can we do, unless you preach yonder at home? It is you preaching in your shops, in your kitchens, in your nurseries, in your parlours, in the streets, which will tell on the masses. This is the preaching — the best preaching in the world, for it is seen as well as heard. I heard one say he liked to see men preach with their feet; and this is it, “they ought also so to walk even as Christ walked.” No testimony excels that which is borne in ordinary life. Christ ought to be glorified by us, and therefore we ought to be like him, for if we are not, we cannot glorify him, but must dishonor him.

Now, that is my first point. Consider how this obligation is proved, and when you have weighed the argument pray the Holy Ghost to make you yield to its gentle pressure.

**II.** Now, secondly, CONSIDER WHEREIN THIS WALKING WITH CHRIST AS HE WALKED CONSISTS. Here is a wide subject. I have a sea before me with as much sailing, room as Noah in the ark. I can only just point out the

direction in which you should sail if you would make a prosperous voyage.

First, brothers to put it all together in one word, the first thing that every Christian has to see to is holiness. I will not try at any great length to explain what that word means, but it always sounds to me as if it explained itself. You know what wholeness is — a thing, without a crack, or flaw, or break; complete, entire, uninjured, whole. Well, that is the main meaning of holy. The character of God is perfectly holy; in it nothing is lacking; nothing is redundant. When a thing, is complete it is whole, and this applied to moral and spiritual things gives you the inner meaning of “holy.” When a man is healthy, perfectly healthy, in spirit, soul, and body, then he is perfectly holy; for sin is a moral disorder, and righteousness is the right state of every faculty. The man whose spiritual health is altogether right is right towards God, right towards himself, right towards men, right towards time, right towards eternity. He is right towards the first table of the law, and right towards the second table. He is an all-round man; he is a whole man, a holy man. Truth is within him; truth is spoken by him; truth is acted by him. Righteousness is in him; he thinks the right thing, and chooses that which is according to the law of uprightness. There is justice in him; he abhors that which is evil. There is goodness in him; he follows after that which will benefit his fellow-men. I cannot spare time to tell you all that the word “holy” means; but if you wish to see holiness, look at Christ. In him you see a perfect character, an all-round character. He is the perfect one; be ye like him in all holiness.

We must go a little into detail; so I say, next, one main point in which we ought to walk according to the walk of our great Exemplar is obedience. Our Lord Jesus Christ took upon himself the form of a servant; and what service it was that he rendered! “He was a son; yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered.” And what obedience that dear Son of God rendered to the Father! He did not come to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him. He yielded himself up to come under law to God, and to do the Fathers will. Now in this respect we ought also to walk even as he walked. We have not come into the world to do what we like, to possess what we choose, or to say, “That is my notion, and therefore so shall it be.” Sin promised freedom, and brought us bondage; grace now binds us, and ensures us liberty. Obedience is the law of every spiritual

nature. It is the Lord's will that in his house his word should be the supreme law, for so only can our fallen natures be restored to their original glory. Set the wandering stars in their spheres, and rule them by the majestic sway of the sun, and then they will keep their happy estate, but not else. Understanding, heart, life, lip, everything, is now to enter into the service of God, even the Father, and it is to be ours to say, "Lord, show me what thou wouldest have me to do." Surely, beyond any other quality, we see in the career of the Son of God the perfection of self-abnegation. No man was ever so truly free as Jesus, and yet no man was so fully subservient to the heavenly will. Never saw these seas a pilot so able to steer according to his own judgment, and never one so carefully to follow the channel as marked down in the chart. His was the unique originality of absolute obedience. Dear friends, you see how it ought to be with you also. It is ours to walk in cheerful subservience to the mind of the Father, even as Jesus did. Does this strike you as an easy thing? It is child's work, certainly; but assuredly it is not child's play.

Such a life would necessarily be one of great activity, for the life of Jesus was intensely energetic. The life of Christ was as full as it could hold. After he had been developed and disciplined by thirty years of seclusion, he showed himself among men as one moved to vehemence with love: "he was clad with zeal as with a cloak." From the day of his baptism till his death he went about doing good. It is wonderful what was packed into about three years: each action had a world of meaning within its own self, and there were thousands of such acts; each sermon was a complete revelation, and every day heard him pour forth such sermons. His biography is made up of the essence of life. Some one remarks that it is wonderful that he did not begin his active life when he was younger. We reply, that it is beautiful that he did not, because he was not called to it, and he was best obeying the Father by living in obscurity. Those thirty years at Nazareth were thirty wonderful years of obedience — obedience; tested by obscurity, patience, restraint, and perhaps dulness. Who among us would find such obedience easy? Would we not far rather rush into notice and make to ourselves a name? Some of us, perhaps, never learned the obedience of being quiet — but it is a wonderful one. Oh, for more of it! Do we know the obedience of being hidden when our light seems needed? — the obedience of going into the desert for forty years, like

Moses, with nothing, to do but wait upon God till God shall put us in commission? There is a wonderful service in waiting till the order comes for us actively to be at it. Samuel said, "To obey is better than sacrifice;" it is in fact better than anything which we can possibly present to God. But when our Lord was at length loosed from his obscurity, with what force he sped along his life-way. How he spent himself! It was a candle burning not only at both ends, but altogether. He not only had zeal burning at his heart, but, like a sheet of flame, it covered him from head to foot There is never an idle hour in the life of Christ. It is wonderful how he sustained the toil. Perhaps he measured out his zeal and his open industry by the fact that he was only to be for a short time here below. It might not be possible to others that they should do as much as he did in so short a space, because they are intended to live longer here, and must not destroy future usefulness by present indiscretion: but still, activity was the rule of our Master's existence. At it, always at it, altogether at it, spending and being spent for his Father; such was his mode of walking, among, men. Oh, friends, if we, indeed, are in him, we ought also so to walk even. as he walked! Wake up, you lazy ones!

Next, we ought to walk as Christ did in the matter of self-denial. Of course, in this work of self-denial we are not called to imitate Christ in offering up ourselves as a propitiatory sacrifice. That would be a vain intrusion into things which are his peculiar domain. The self-denials which we practise should be such as he prescribes us. There is a will-worship which is practised in the Church of Rome of self-denials which are absurd, and must, I think, be hateful in the sight of God rather than pleasing to him. Saint Bernard was a man whom I admire to the last degree, and I count him to be one of the Lord's choice ones; yet in the early part of his life there is no doubt that he lessened his powers of usefulness to a large extent by the emaciation which he endured, and the way in which he brought himself to death's door. At times he was incapable of activity by reason of the weakness which he had incurred through fasting, and colds and exposure, There is no need to inflict useless torture upon the body. When did the Savior thus behave himself? Point me to a single mortification of a needless kind. Enough self-denials come naturally in every Christian man's way to make him try whether he can deny himself in very deed for the Lord's sake. You are thus tested when you are put in

positions where you might get gain by an unrighteous act, or win fame by withholding a truth, or earn love and honor by pandering to the passions of those about you. May you have grace enough to say, “No; it cannot be. I love not myself, but my Lord. I seek not myself, but Christ. I desire to propagate nothing but his truth, and not my own ideas”: then will you have exhibited the self-denial of Jesus. These self-denials will sometimes be hard to flesh and blood. And then in the Church of God to be able to give all your substance, to devote all your time, to lay out all your ability — this is to walk as Jesus walked. When weary and worn, still to be busy; to deny, yourself things which may be allowable, but which if allowable to you would be dangerous to others — this also is like the Lord. Such self-denial as may be helpful to the weak you ought to practise. Think what Christ would do in such a case, and do it; and, whenever you can glorify him by denying yourself, do it. So walk as he did who made himself of no reputation, but took upon himself the form of a servant. and who, though he was rich, brought himself down to poverty for our sakes, that we might be rich unto God. Think of that.

Another point in which we ought to imitate Christ most certainly is that of lowliness. I wish that all Christians did this. When I see some Christian women dressed out — well, like women of the world, though not with half a worldling’s taste, and when I see men so big that they cannot speak to poor people, as if they were made of something better than ordinary flesh and blood; when I notice a haughty, high, hectoring disposition anywhere, it grates upon my feelings, and makes me wonder whether these blunderers hope to go to the heaven of the lowly. The Lord Jesus would never have been half as big as some of his followers are. What great folk some of his disciples are, as compared with him! He was lowly, meek, gentle, a man who so loved the souls of others that he forgot himself. You never detect in the Lord Jesus Christ any tendency towards pride or self-exaltation. Quite the reverse: he is ever compassionate and condescending to men of low estate.

And then note again another point, and that is his great tenderness, and gentleness, and readiness to forgive. His dying words ought to ring in the ear of all who find it hard to pass by affronts, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Did he not set us an example of bearing and forbearing? “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again.” For every curse

he gave a blessing,, You cannot be Christians if this spirit of love is foreign to you. “Oh,” say you, “we endorse the confession.” I do not care. You must love your enemies, or you will die with the Creed in your throats. “Oh,” say you, “we are regular in our pews, hearing the gospel.” I do not care; you must forgive them that trespass against you, or you will go from your pews to perdition “Oh, but we have been baptized, and we come to the communion.” I do not care even about that; for unless you are made meek and lowly in heart you will not find rest unto your souls. Pride goeth not before salvation, but before destruction; and a haughty spirit is no prophecy of elevation, but the herald of a fall. Take care, take care, you that say that you are in Christ; you ought also to walk in all the lowliness and in all the tenderness of Christ, or else at the end you will be discovered to be none of his. Hard, cruel, unrelenting, iron-hearted professors will no more go to heaven than the hogs they fatten.

There is one little big word which tells us more than all this about how Christ walked, and that is the word “love.” Jesus was incarnate love. “God is love,” but God is a spirit, therefore if you wish to see love embodied, look at Christ. He loves the little children, and suffers them to come to him. He loves the widow, and he is tender to her, and raises her dead son. He loves the sinners, and they draw near to him. He loves all sinful and tempted and tried ones, and therefore he comes to seek and to save. He loves the Father first, and then for the Father’s sake he loves the myriads of men. Do you love nobody? Do you live within yourself? Are you immured within your own ribs? Is self all your world? Then you will go to hell. There is no help for it; for the place of unloving spirits is the bottomless pit. Only he that loves can live in heaven, for heaven is love: and you cannot go to glory unless you have learned to love, and to find it your very life to do good to those about you.

Let me add to all this, that he who says that Christ is in him ought also to live as Christ lived in secret. And how was this?

His life was spent in abounding devotion. Ah, me! I fear I shall condemn some here when I remind them of the hymn we just now sang —

*“Cold mountains and the midnight air  
Witnessed the fervor of his prayer.”*

If the perfect Christ could not live without prayer, how can such poor imperfect ones as we are live without it? He had no sin within him, and yet he had need to pray. He was pure and holy, and yet he must needs wait upon God all day long, and often speak with his Father; and then when the night came, and others went to their beds, he withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed. If the Lord Jesus be in you, you must walk as he walked in that matter.

And, then, think of his delight in God. How wonderful was Christ's delight in his God! I can never think of his life as an unhappy one. He was, it is true, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"; but still there was a deep spring of wondrous happiness in the midst of his heart, which made him always blessed; for he said to his Father, "I delight to do thy will, O my God! Yea, thy law is within heart." He delighted in God. Many a sweet night he spent in those prayer-times of his in fellowship with the Father. Why, it was that which prepared him for the agony of his bloody sweat, and for the "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Those love-visits, those near and dear communings which his holy heart had with the Father were his secret meat and drink. And you and I also must delight in God. This charming duty is far too much neglected. Strange that this honey should so seldom be in men's mouths! Listen to this text, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Many a man says, "I should like to have the desires of my heart" Brother, here is the royal road thereto, the King's ascent to his treasury — "Delight thyself also in the Lord." But, listen. it is very likely you would not obtain the desire that is now in your heart if you did that; for he that delights himself in God rises above the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and comes to desire that which God desires, and therefore it is that he wins the desire of his heart. But, oh, the pleasure, the joy, the bliss of delighting in God! How many times have I sung to myself that last dear stanza of the psalm, wherein the inspired poet sings —

*"For yet I know I shall him praise,  
Who graciously to me,  
The health is of my countenance,  
Yea, mine own God is he."*

Oh, what a pleasure! "Mine own God is he." Rich men glory in wealth, famous men in valour, great men in honor, and I in "mine own God." There



is nothing about God but what is delightful to a saint. The infinite God is infinitely delightful to his people. Once get really to know God and to be like him, and even his sternest attributes — his power, his justice, his indignation against sin — will come to be delightful to you. Those men who are cavilling at what God does, questioning over what God has revealed, do not know him, for to know him is to adore him. Oh, brethren, let us find our pleasure, our treasure, our heaven, our all, in the Lord our God, even as our Lord Jesus did. In this thing let us walk even as he walked.

I have not quite done. Dear friends, we ought to walk in holy contentment. Jesus was perfectly content with his lot. When the foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, and he had not where to lay his head, yet he never murmured, but found rest in pursuing his life-work. The cravings of covetousness and pinings of ambition never touched our Lord. Friends, if you do, indeed, say that you abide in him, I pray you be of the same contented spirit. “I have learned,” said the apostle, as if it were a thing which had to be taught, “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

In a word, Christ lived above this world; let us walk as he walked. Christ lived for God, and for God alone; let us live after his fashion. And Christ persevered in such living; he never turned aside from it at all; but as he lived so he died, still serving his God, obedient to his Father’s will, even unto death. May our lives be a mosaic of perfect obedience, and our deaths the completion of the fair design. From our Bethlehem to our Gethsemane may our walk run parallel with the pathway of the Well-beloved! Oh, Holy Spirit, work us to this sacred pattern!

**III.** I close now by saying, in the last place, consider, dear friends, **WHAT IS NEEDFUL TO ALL THIS.**

First, it is needful to have a nature like that of Christ. You cannot give out sweet waters so long as the fountains are impure. “Ye must be born again.” There is no walking with Jesus in newness of life unless we have a new heart and a right spirit. See to it, dear friends, that your nature is renewed — that the Holy Ghost has wrought in you a resurrection from among the dead; for, if not, your walk and conversation will savor of death and

corruption. A new creature is essential to likeness to Christ: it is not possible that the carnal mind should wear the image of Jesus.

That being done, the next thing that is necessary is a constant anointing of the Holy Spirit. Can any Christian here do without the Holy Spirit? Then I am afraid that he is no Christian. But, as for us, we feel every day that we must cry for a fresh visitation of the Spirit, a renewed sense of indwelling, a fresh anointing from the Holy One of Israel, or else we cannot walk as Christ walked.

And then, again, there must be in us a strong resolve that we will walk as Christ walked; for our Lord himself did not lead in that holy life without stern resolution. He set his face like a flint that he would do the right; and he did the right. Do not, I pray you, be led astray by thoughtlessly following your fellow-men: it is a poor, sheepish business, that running in crowds. Dare to be singular dare to stand alone. Stand to it firmly that you will follow Christ. A Christian man in a discussion attempted to defend the truth, but his opponent grew angry, and cried out vehemently again and again, "Hear me! Hear me!" At last the good man answered, "No, I shall not hear you, nor shall you hear me; but let us both sit down and hear the word of the Lord." And that is the thing to do, brethren, to be hearing Christ and following him; not I to learn of you, nor you of me, but both of Christ: so shall we end all controversy in a blessed agreement at his feet. God help us to get there.

And so, once again, I add that if we want to walk as Christ walked, we must have much communion with him. We cannot possibly get to be like Christ except by being with him. I wish that we could rise to be so much like the Savior that we should resemble a certain ancient saint who died a martyr's death, to whom the world said, "What are you?" He said, "I am a Christian." They asked, , What trade do you follow?" And he said, "I am a Christian." They inquired, "What language do you speak?" And he said, "I am a Christian." "But what treasures have you?" said they; and he replied, "I am a Christian." They asked him what friends he had, and he said, "I am a Christian;" for all he was, and all he had, and all he wished to be, and all he hoped to be, were all wrapped up in Christ. If you live with Christ you will be absorbed by him, and he will embrace the whole of your existence: and, in consequence, your walk will be like his.

Take care that you do not in all things copy any but Christ; for if I set my watch by the watch of one of my friends, and he sets his watch by that of another friend, we may all be wrong together. If we shall, each one, take his time from the sun, we shall all be right. There is nothing like going to the fountain-head. Take your lessons in holiness, not from a poor erring disciple, but from the infallible Master. God help you to do go.

A person has written to me this morning to say that he has painted my portrait, but that he cannot finish it until he sees me. I should think not. Certainly you cannot paint a portrait of Christ in your own life unless you see him — see him clearly, see him continually. You may have it general notion of what Christ is like, and you may put a good deal of colour into your copy; but I am sure you will fail unless you see the grand original. You must get to commune with Jesus. You know what we did when we went to school. Our schoolmasters were not quite so wise then as schoolmasters are now. They wrote at the top of the page a certain line for us to follow, and a poor following it was. When I wrote my first line I copied the writing-master's model, but when I wrote the next line I copied my copy of the top line; so that when I reached the bottom of the page I produced a copy of my copy of my copy of my copy of the top line. Thus my handwriting fed upon itself, and was nothing bettered but rather grew worse. So one man copies Christ, perhaps; a friend who hears him preach copies him, and his wife at home copies the hearer, and somebody copies her; and so it goes on all down the line, till we all miss that glorious hand-writing which Jesus has come to teach us. Keep your eye on Christ, dear brother. Never mind me: never mind your friend: never mind the old doctor that you have been hearing so long. Look to Jesus, and to him alone. We have had our sects and our divisions all through that coping of the lines of the boys, instead of looking to the top-line that the Master wrote. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked" May the Spirit of God cause us to do it! Amen and Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE**  
**READ BEFORE SERMON. —  1 JOHN 2.**

**HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK." — 425, 262, 646.**

# THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE DO NOT LEAD TO SIN

SERMON NO. 1735

DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, AUGUST 19TH, 1883,  
AT EXETER-HALL.

“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.” —

✠ Romans 6:14, 15.

LAST Sabbath morning I tried to show that the substance and essence of the true gospel is the doctrine of God's grace — that, in fact, if you take away the grace of God from the gospel you have extracted from it its very life-blood, and there is nothing left worth preaching, worth believing, or worth contending for. Grace is the soul of the gospel: without it the gospel is dead. Grace is the music of the gospel: without it the gospel is silent as to all comfort. I endeavored also to set forth the doctrine of grace in brief terms, teaching that God deals with sinful men upon the footing of pure mercy: finding them guilty and condemned, he gives free pardons, altogether irrespective of past character, or of any good works which may be foreseen. Moved only by pity he devises a plan for their rescue from sin and its consequences — a plan in which grace is the leading feature. Out of free favor he has provided, in the death of his dear Son, an atonement by means of which his mercy can be justly bestowed. He accepts all those who place their trust in this atonement, selecting faith as the way of salvation, that it may be all of grace. In this he acts, from a motive found within himself, and not because of any reason found in the sinner's conduct, past, present, or future. I tried to show that this grace of God flows towards the sinner from of old, and begins its operations upon him when there is nothing good in him: it works in him that which is good and acceptable, and continues so to work in him till the deed of grace is complete, and the believer is received up into the glory for which he is made meet. Grace commences to save, and it perseveres till all is done.

From first to last, from the “A” to the “Z” of the heavenly alphabet, everything in salvation is of grace, and grace alone; all is of free favor, nothing of merit. “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,” “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

No sooner is this doctrine set forth in a clear light than men begin to cavil at it. It is the target for all carnal logic to shoot at. Unrenewed minds never did like it, and they never will; it is so humbling to human pride, making so light of the nobility of human nature. That men are to be saved by divine charity, that they must as condemned criminals receive pardon by the exercise of the royal prerogative, or else perish in their sins, is a teaching which they cannot endure. God alone is exalted in the sovereignty of his mercy; and the sinner can do no better than meekly touch the silver scepter, and accept undeserved favor just because God wills to give it: — this is not pleasant to the great minds of our philosophers, and the broad phylacteries of our moralists, and therefore they turn aside, and fight against the empire of grace. Straightway the unrenewed man seeks out artillery with which to fight against the gospel of the grace of God, and one of the biggest guns he has ever brought to the front is the declaration that the doctrine of the grace of God must lead to licentiousness. If great sinners are freely saved, then men will more readily become great sinners; and if when God’s grace regenerates a man it abides with him, then men will infer that they may live as they like, and yet be saved. This is the constantly-repeated objection which I have heard till it wearies me with its vain and false noise. I am almost ashamed to have to refute so rotten an argument. They dare to assert that men will take license to be guilty because God is gracious, and they do not hesitate to say that if men are not to be saved by their works they will come to the conclusion that their conduct is a matter of indifference, and that they may as well sin that grace may abound.

This morning I want to talk a little about this notion; for in part it is a great mistake, and in part it is a great lie. In part it is a mistake because it arises from misconception, and in part it is a lie because men know better, or might know better if they pleased.

I begin by admitting that the charge does appear somewhat probable. It does seem very likely that if we are to go up and down the country, and say, "The very chief of sinners may be forgiven through believing in Jesus Christ, for God is displaying mercy to the very vilest of the vile," then sin will seem to be a cheap thing. If we are everywhere to cry, "Come, ye sinners, come and welcome, and receive free and immediate pardon through the sovereign grace of God," it does seem probable that some may basely reply, "Let us sin without stint, for we can easily obtain forgiveness." But that which looks to be probable is not, therefore, certain: on the contrary, the improbable and the unexpected full often come to pass. In questions of moral influence nothing is more deceptive than theory. The ways of the human mind are not to be laid down with a pencil and compasses; man is a singular being. Even that which is logical is not always inevitable, for men's minds are not governed by the rules of the schools. I believe that the inference which would lead men to sin because grace reigns is not logical, but the very reverse; and I venture to assert that, as a matter of fact, ungodly men do not, as a rule plead the grace of God as an excuse for their sin. As a rule they are too indifferent to care about reasons at all; and if they do offer an excuse it is usually more flimsy and superficial. There may be a few men of perverse minds who have used this argument, but there is no accounting for the freaks of the fallen understanding. I shrewdly suspect that in any cases in which such reasoning has been put forward it was a mere pretense, and by no means a plea which satisfied the sinner's own conscience. If men do thus excuse themselves, it is generally in some veiled manner, for the most of them would be utterly ashamed to state the argument in plain terms. I question whether the devil himself would be found reasoning thus — "God is merciful, therefore let us be more sinful." It is so diabolical an inference, that I do not like to charge my fellow-men with it, though our moralist opposers do not hesitate thus to degrade them. Surely, no intelligent being can really persuade itself that the goodness of God is a reason for offending him more than ever. Moral insanity produces strange reasonings, but it is my solemn conviction that very rarely do men practically consider the grace of God to be a motive for sin. That which seems so probable at the first blush, is not so when we come to consider it.

I have admitted that a few human beings have turned the grace of God into lasciviousness; but I trust no one will ever argue against any doctrine on account of the perverse use made of it by the baser sort. Cannot every truth be perverted? Is there a single doctrine of Scripture which graceless hands have not twisted into mischief? Is there not an almost infinite ingenuity in wicked men for making evil out of good? If we are to condemn a truth because of the misbehaviour of individuals who profess to believe it, we should be found condemning our Lord himself for what Judas did, and our holy faith would die at the hands of apostates and hypocrites. Let us act like rational men. We do not find fault with ropes because poor insane creatures have hanged themselves therewith; nor do we ask that the wares of Sheffield may be destroyed because edged tools are the murderer's instruments.

It may appear probable that the doctrine of free grace will be made into a license for sin, but a better acquaintance with the curious working of the human mind corrects the notion. Fallen as human nature is, it is still human, and therefore does not take kindly to certain forms of evil — such, for instance, as inhuman ingratitude. It is hardly human to multiply injuries upon those who return us continued benefits. The case reminds me of the story of half-a-dozen boys who had severe fathers, accustomed to flog them within an inch of their lives. Another boy was with them who was tenderly beloved by his parents, and known to do so. These young gentlemen met together to hold a council of war about robbing an orchard. They were all of them anxious to get about it except the favored youth, who did not enjoy the proposal. One of them cried out, "*You* need not be afraid: if our fathers catch us at this work, we shall be half-killed, but your father won't lay a hand upon *you*." The little boy answered, "And do you think because my father is kind to me, that therefore I will do wrong and grieve him? I will do nothing of the sort to my dear father. He is so good to me that I cannot vex him." It would appear that the argument of the many boys was not overpoweringly convincing to their companion: the opposite conclusion was quite as logical, and evidently carried weight with it. If God is good to the undeserving, some men will go into sin, but there are others of a nobler order whom the goodness of God leadeth to repentance. They scorn the beast-like argument — that the more loving God is, the

more rebellious we may be; and they feel that against a God of goodness it is an evil thing to rebel.

By-the-way I cannot help observing that I have known persons object to the evil influence of the doctrines of grace who were by no means qualified by their own morality to be judges of the subject. Morals must be in a poor way when immoral persons become their guardians. The doctrine of justification by faith is frequently objected to as injurious to morals. A newspaper some time ago quoted a verse from one of our popular hymns

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*“Weary, working, plodding one,  
Why toil you so?  
Cease your doing; all was done  
Long, long ago.*

*“Till to Jesus’ work you cling  
By a simple faith,  
‘Doing’ is a deadly thing,  
‘Doing’ ends in death.”*

This is styled mischievous teaching. When I read the article I felt a deep interest in this corrector of Luther and Paul, and I wondered how much he had drunk in order to elevate his mind to such a pitch of theological knowledge. I have found men pleading against the doctrines of grace on the ground that they did not promote morality, to whom I could have justly replied, “What has morality to do with you, or you with it?” These sticklers for good works are not often the doers of them. Let legalists look to their own hands and tongues, and leave the gospel of grace and its advocates to answer for themselves.

Looking back in history, I see upon its pages a refutation of the oft-repeated calumny. Who dares to suggest that the men who believed in the grace of God have been sinners above other sinners? With all their faults, those who throw stones at them will be few if they first prove themselves to be their superiors in character. When have they been the patrons of vice, or the defenders of injustice? Pitch upon the point in English history when this doctrine was very strong in the land; who were the men that held these doctrines most firmly? Men like Owen, Charnock, Manton, Howe, and I hesitate not to add Oliver Cromwell. What kind of men were these? Did they pander to the licentiousness of a court? Did they invent a



Book of Sports for Sabbath diversion? Did they haunt ale-houses and places of revelry? Every historian will tell you, the greatest fault of these men in the eyes of their enemies was that they were too precise for the generation in which they lived, so that they called them Puritans, and condemned them as holding a gloomy theology. Sirs, if there was iniquity in the land in that day, it was to be found with the theological party which preached up salvation by works. The gentlemen with their womanish locks and essenced hair, whose speech savored of profanity, were the advocates of salvation by works, and all bedabbled with lust they pleaded for human merit; but the men who believed in grace alone were of another style. They were not in the chambers of rioting and wantonness; where were they? They might be found on their knees crying to God for help in temptation; and in persecuting times they might be found in prison, cheerfully suffering the loss of all things for the truth's sake. The Puritans were the godliest men on the face of the earth. Are men so inconsistent as to nickname them for their purity, and yet say that their doctrines lead to sin?

Nor is this a solitary instance — this instance of Puritanism; all history confirms the rule: and when it is said that these doctrines will create sin, I appeal to facts, and leave the oracle to answer as it may. If we are ever to see a pure and godly England we must have a gospelized England: if we are to put down drunkenness and the social evil it must be by the proclamation of the grace of God. Men must be forgiven by grace, renewed by grace, transformed by grace, sanctified by grace, preserved by grace; and when that comes to pass the golden age will dawn; but while they are merely taught their duty, and left to do it of themselves in their own strength, it is labor in vain. You may flog a dead horse a long while before it will stir: you need to put life into it, for else all your flogging will fail. To teach men to walk who have no feet is poor work, and such is instruction in morals before grace gives a heart to love holiness. The gospel alone supplies men with motive and strength, and therefore it is to the gospel that we must look as the real reformer of men.

I shall fight this morning with the objection before us as I shall find strength. The doctrine of grace, the whole plan of salvation by grace, is most promotive of holiness. Wherever it comes it helps us to say, "God

forbid,” to the question, “Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?” This I would set out in the clear sunlight.

I wish to call your attention to some six or seven points.

**I.** First, you will see that the gospel of the grace of God promotes real holiness in men by remembering that THE SALVATION WHICH IT BRINGS IS SALVATION FROM THE POWER OF SIN. When we preach salvation to the vilest of men, some suppose we mean by that a mere deliverance from hell and an entrance into heaven. It includes all that, and results in that, but that is not what we mean. What we mean by salvation is this — deliverance from the love of sin, rescue from the habit of sin, setting free from the desire to sin. Now listen. If it be so, that that boon of deliverance from sin is the gift of divine grace, in what way will that gift, or the free distribution of it, produce sin? I fail to see any such danger. On the contrary, I say to the man who proclaims a gracious promise of victory over sin, “Make all speed: go up and down throughout the world, and tell the vilest of mankind that God is willing by his grace to set them free from the love of sin and to make new creatures of them.” Suppose the salvation we preach be this: — you that have lived ungodly and wicked lives may enjoy your sins, and yet escape the penalty — that would be mischievous indeed; but if it be this, — you that live the most ungodly and wicked lives may yet by believing in the Lord Jesus be enabled to change those lives, so that you shall live unto God instead of serving sin and Satan, — what harm can come to the most prudish morals? Why, I say spread such a gospel, and let it circulate through every part of our vast empire, and let all men hear it, whether they rule in the House of Lords or suffer in the house of bondage. Tell them everywhere that God freely and of infinite grace is willing to renew men, and make them new creatures in Christ Jesus. Can any evil consequences come of the freest proclamation of this news? The worse men are, the more gladly would we see them embracing this truth, for these are they who most need it. I say to every one of you, whoever you may be, whatever your past condition, God can renew you according to the power of his grace; so that you who are to him like dead, dry bones, can be made to live by his Spirit. That renewal will be seen in holy thoughts, and pure words, and righteous acts to the glory of God. In great love he is prepared to work all these things in all who believe. Why should any men be angry at such a statement? What possible harm can come of it?

I defy the most cunning adversary to object, upon the ground of morals, to God's giving men new hearts and right spirits even as he pleases.

**II.** Secondly, let it not be forgotten as a matter of fact that THE PRINCIPLE OF LOVE HAS BEEN FOUND TO POSSESS VERY GREAT POWER OVER MEN.

In the infancy of history nations dream that crime can be put down by severity, and they rely upon fierce punishments; but experience corrects the error. Our forefathers dreaded forgery, which is a troublesome fraud, and interferes with the confidence which should exist between man and man. To put it down they made forgery a capital offense. Alas for the murders committed by that law! Yet the constant use of the gallows was never sufficient to stamp out the crime. Many offenses have been created and multiplied by the penalty which was meant to suppress them. Some offenses have almost ceased when the penalty against them has been lightened.

It is a notable fact as to men, that if they are forbidden to do a thing they straightway pine to do it, though they had never thought of doing it before. Law commands obedience, but does not promote it; it often creates disobedience, and an over-weighted penalty has been known to provoke an offense. Law fails, but love wins.

*Love in any case makes sin infamous.* If one should rob another it would be sufficiently bad; but suppose a man robbed his friend, who had helped him often when he was in need, everyone would say that his crime was most disgraceful. Love brands sin on the forehead with a red-hot iron. If a man should kill an enemy, the offense would be grievous; but if he slew his father, to whom he owes his life, or his mother, on whose breasts he was nursed in infancy, then all would cry out against the monster. In the light of love sin is seen to be exceeding sinful.

Nor is this all. *Love has a great constraining power towards the highest form of virtue.* Deeds to which a man could not be compelled on the ground of law, men have cheerfully done because of love. Would our brave seamen man the life-boat to obey an Act of Parliament? No, they would indignantly revolt against being forced to risk their lives; but they will do it freely to save their fellow-men. Remember that text of the apostle, "Scarcely for a righteous (or merely just) man will one die: yet peradventure," says he, "for a good (benevolent) man some would even

dare to die.” Goodness wins the heart, and one is ready to die for the kind and generous. Look how men have thrown away their lives for great leaders. That was an immortal saying of the wounded French soldier. When searching for the bullet the surgeon cut deeply, and the patient cried out, “A little lower and you will touch the Emperor,” meaning that the Emperor’s name was written on his heart. In several notable instances men have thrown themselves into the jaws of death to save a leader whom they loved. Duty holds the fort, but love casts its body in the way of the deadly bullet. Who would think of sacrificing his life on the ground of law? Love alone counts not life so dear as the service of the beloved. Love to Jesus creates a heroism of which law knows nothing. All the history of the church of Christ, when it has been true to its Lord, is a proof of this.

*Kindness also, working by the law of love, has often changed the most unworthy*, and therein proved that it is not a factor of evil. We have often heard the story of the soldier who had been degraded to the ranks, and flogged and imprisoned, and yet for all that he would get drunk and misbehave himself. The commanding officer said one day, “I have tried almost everything with this man, and can do nothing with him. I will try one thing more.” When he was brought in, the officer addressed him, and said, “You seem incorrigible: we have tried everything with you; there seems to be no hope of a change in your wicked conduct. I am determined to try if another plan will have any effect. Though you deserve flogging and long imprisonment, I shall freely forgive you.” The man was greatly moved by the unexpected and undeserved pardon, and became a good soldier. The story wears truth on its brow: we all see that it would probably end so.

That anecdote is such good argument that I will give you another. A drunkard woke up one morning from his drunken sleep, with his clothes on him just as he had rolled down the night before. He saw his only child, his daughter Millie, getting his breakfast. Coming to his senses he said to her, “Millie, why do you stay with me?” She answered, “Because you are my father, and because I love you.” He looked at himself, and saw what a sottish, ragged, good-for-nothing creature he was, and he answered her, “Millie, do you really love me?” The child cried, “Yes, father, I do, and I will never leave you, because when mother died she said, ‘Millie, stick to your father, and always pray for him, and one of these days he will give

up drink, and be a good father to you'; so I will never leave you." Is it wonderful when I add that, as the story has it, Millie's father cast away his drink, and became a Christian man? It would have been more remarkable if he had not. Millie was trying free grace, was she not? According to our moralists she should have said, "Father, you are a horrible wretch! I have stuck to you long enough: I must now leave you, or else I shall be encouraging other fathers to get drunk." Under such proper dealing I fear Millie's father would have continued a drunkard till he drank himself into perdition. But the power of love made a better man of him. Do not these instances prove that undeserved love has a great influence for good?

Hear another story: In the old persecuting times there lived in Cheapside one who feared God and attended the secret meetings of the saints; and near him there dwelt a poor cobbler, whose wants were often relieved by the merchant; but the poor man was a cross-grained being, and, most ungratefully, from hope of reward, laid an information against his kind friend on the score of religion. This accusation would have brought the merchant to death by burning if he had not found a means of escape. Returning to his house, the injured man did not change his generous behavior to the malignant cobbler, but, on the contrary, was more liberal than ever. The cobbler was, however, in an ill mood, and avoided the good man with all his might, running away at his approach. One day he was obliged to meet him face to face, and the Christian man asked him gently, "Why do you shun me? I am not your enemy. I know all that you did to injure me, but I never had an angry thought against you. I have helped you, and I am willing to do so as long as I live, only let us be friends." Do you marvel that they clasped hands? Would you wonder if ere long the poor man was found at the Lollards' meeting? All such anecdotes rest upon the assured fact that grace has a strange subduing power, and leads men to goodness, drawing them with cords of love, and bands of a man. The Lord knows that bad as men are the key of their hearts hangs on the nail of love. He knows that his almighty goodness, though often baffled, will triumph in the end. I believe my point is proved. To myself it is so. However, we must pass on.

**III.** There is no fear that the doctrine of the grace of God will lead men to sin, because ITS OPERATIONS ARE CONNECTED WITH A SPECIAL

REVELATION OF THE EVIL OF SIN. Iniquity is made to be exceeding bitter before it is forgiven or when it is forgiven. When God begins to deal with a man with a view of blotting out his sins and making him his child, he usually causes him to see his evil ways in all their heinousness; he makes him look on sin with fixed eyes, till he cries with David, "My sin is ever before me." In my own case, when under conviction of sin, no cheering object met my mental eye, my soul saw only darkness and a horrible tempest. It seemed as though a horrible spot were painted on my eyeballs. Guilt, like a grim chamberlain, drew the curtains of my bed, so that I rested not, but in my slumbers anticipated the wrath to come. I felt that I had offended God, and that this was the most awful thing a human being could do. I was out of order with my Creator, out of order with the universe; I had damned myself for ever, and I wondered that I did not immediately feel the gnawing of the undying worm. Even to this hour a sight of sin causes the most dreadful emotions in my heart. Any man or woman here who has passed through that experience, or anything like it, will henceforth feel a deep horror of sin. A burnt child dreads the fire. "No," says the sinner to his tempter, "you once deceived me, and I so smarted in consequence, that I will not again be deluded. I have been delivered, like a brand from the burning, and I cannot go back to the fire." By the operations of grace we are made weary of sin; we loathe both it and its imaginary pleasures. We would utterly exterminate it from the soil of our nature. It is a thing accursed, even as Amalek was to Israel. If you, my friend, do not detest every sinful thing, I fear you are still in the gall of bitterness; for one of the sure fruits of the Spirit is a love of holiness, and a loathing of every false way. A deep inward experience forbids the child of God to sin: he has known within himself its judgment and its condemnation, and henceforth it is a thing abhorrent to him. An enmity both fierce and endless exists between the chosen seed and the serpent brood of evil: hence the fear that grace will be abused is abundantly safeguarded.

**IV.** Remember also that not only is the forgiven man thus set against sin by the process of conviction, but EVERY MAN WHO TASTES OF THE SAVING GRACE OF GOD IS MADE A NEW CREATURE IN CHRIST JESUS. Now if the doctrine of grace in the hands of an ordinary man might be dangerous, yet it would cease to be so in the hands of one who is

quickened by the Spirit, and created anew in the image of God. The Holy Spirit comes upon the chosen one, and transforms him: his ignorance is removed, his affections are changed, his understanding is enlightened, his will is subdued, his desires are refined, his life is changed — in fact, he is as one new-born, to whom all things have become new. This change is compared in Scripture to the resurrection from the dead, to a creation, and to a new birth. This takes place in every man who becomes a partaker of the free grace of God. “Ye must be born again,” said Christ to Nicodemus; and gracious men are born again. One said the other day, “If I believed that I was eternally saved, I should live in sin.” Perhaps *you* would; but if you were renewed in heart you would not. “But,” says one, “if I believed God loved me from before the foundation of the world, and that therefore I should be saved, I would take a full swing of sin.” Perhaps *you* and the devil would; but God’s regenerate children are not of so base a nature. To them the abounding grace of the Father is a bond to righteousness which they never think of breaking: they feel the sweet constraints of sacred gratitude, and desire to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. All beings live according to their nature, and the regenerated man works out the holy instincts of his renewed mind: crying after holiness, warring against sin, laboring to be pure in all things, the regenerate man puts forth all his strength towards that which is pure and perfect. A new heart makes all the difference. Given a new nature, and then all the propensities run in a different way, and the blessings of almighty love no longer involve peril, but suggest the loftiest aspirations.

**V.** One of the chief securities for the holiness of the pardoned is found in the way of CLEANSING THROUGH ATONEMENT. The blood of Jesus sanctifies as well as pardons. The sinner learns that his free pardon cost the life of his best Friend; that in order to his salvation the Son of God himself agonized even to a bloody sweat, and died forsaken of his God. This causes a sacred mourning for sin, as he looks upon the Lord whom he pierced. Love to Jesus burns within the pardoned sinner’s breast, for the Lord is his Redeemer; and therefore he feels a burning indignation against the murderous evil of sin. To him all manner of evil is detestable, since it is stained with the Savior’s heart’s blood. As the penitent sinner hears the cry of, “Eloi, sabachthani!” he is horrified to think that one so pure and good should be forsaken of heaven because of the sin which he bore in his

people's stead. From the death of Jesus the mind draws the conclusion that sin is exceedingly sinful in the sight of the Lord; for if eternal justice would not spare even the Well-beloved Jesus when imputed sin was upon him, how much less will it spare guilty men? It must be a thing unutterably full of poison which could make even the immaculate Jesus suffer so terribly. Nothing can be imagined which can have greater power over gracious minds than the vision of a crucified Savior denouncing sin by all his wounds, and by every falling drop of blood. What! live in the sin which slew Jesus? Find pleasure in that which wrought his death? Trifle with that which laid his glory in the dust? Impossible! Thus you see that the gifts of free grace, when handed down by a pierced hand, are never likely to suggest self-indulgence in sin, but the very reverse.

**VI.** Sixthly, a man who becomes a partaker of divine grace, and receives the new nature, is ever afterwards A PARTAKER OF DAILY HELPS FROM GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT. God the Holy Ghost deigns to dwell in the bosom, of every man whom God has saved by his grace. Is not that a wonderful means of sanctifying? By what process can men be better kept from sin than by having the Holy Spirit himself to dwell as Vice-regent within their hearts? The Ever-blessed Spirit leads believers to be much in prayer, and what a power for holiness is found in the child of grace speaking to the heavenly Father! The tempted man flies to his chamber, unbosoms his grief to God, looks to the flowing wounds of his Redeemer, and comes down strong to resist temptation. The divine word also, with its precepts and promises, is a never-failing source of sanctification. Were it not that we every day bathe in the sacred fountain of eternal strength we might soon be weak and irresolute; but fellowship with God renews us in our vigorous warfare with sin. How is it possible that the doctrines of grace should suggest sin to men who constantly draw near to God? The renewed man is also by God's Spirit frequently quickened in conscience; so that things which heretofore did not strike him as sinful are seen in a clearer light, and are consequently condemned. I know that certain matters are sinful to me today which did not appear so ten years ago: my judgment has, I trust, been more and more cleared of the blindness of sin. The natural conscience is callous and hard; but the gracious conscience grows more and more tender till at last it becomes as sensitive as a raw wound. He who has most grace is most conscious of his need of more grace. The



gracious are often afraid to put one foot before another for fear of doing wrong. Have you not felt this holy fear, this sacred caution? It is by this means that the Holy Spirit prevents your ever turning your Christian liberty into licentiousness, or daring to make the grace of God an argument for folly.

Then, in addition to this, the good Spirit leads us into high and hallowed intercourse with God, and I defy a man to live upon the mount with God, and then come down to transgress like men of the world. If thou hast walked the palace floor of glory, and seen the King in his beauty, till the light of his countenance has been thy heaven, thou canst not be content with the gloom and murkiness of the tents of wickedness. To lie, to deceive, to feign, as the men of the world do, will no longer beseem thee. Thou art of another race, and thy conversation is above them: "Thy speech betrayeth thee." If thou dost indeed dwell with God, the perfume of the ivory palaces will be about thee, and men will know that thou hast been in other haunts than theirs. If the child of God goes wrong in any degree, he loses to some extent the sweetness of his communion, and only as he walks carefully with God does he enjoy full fellowship; so that this rising or falling in communion becomes a sort of parental discipline in the house of the Lord. We have no court with a judge, but we have home with its fatherhood, its smile and its rod. We lack not for order in the family of love, for our Father dealeth with us as with sons. Thus, in a thousand ways, all danger of our presuming upon the grace of God is effectually removed.

**VII.** THE ENTIRE ELEVATION OF THE MAN WHO IS MADE A PARTAKER OF THE GRACE OF GOD is also a special preservative against sin. I venture to say, though it may be controverted, that the man who believes the glorious doctrines of grace is usually a much higher style of man than the person who has no opinion upon the matter. What do most men think about? Bread-and-butter, house-rent and clothes. But the men who consider the doctrines of the gospel muse upon the everlasting covenant, predestination, immutable love, effectual calling, God in Christ Jesus, the work of the Spirit, justification, sanctification, adoption, and such like noble themes. Why, it is a refreshment merely to look over the catalogue of these grand truths! Others are as children playing with little sand-heaps on the seashore; but the believer in free grace walks among hills and

mountains. The themes of thought around him tower upward, Alps on Alps; the man's mental stature rises with his surroundings, and he becomes a thoughtful being, communing with sublimities. No small matter this, for a thing so apt to grovel as the average human intellect. So far as deliverance from mean vices and degrading lusts must in this way be promoted, I say, it is no small thing. Thoughtlessness is the prolific mother of iniquity. It is a hopeful sign when minds begin to roam among lofty truths. The man who has been taught of God to think will not so readily sin as the being whose mind is buried beneath his flesh. The man has now obtained a different view of himself from that which led him to trifle away his time with the idea that there was nothing better for him than to be merry while he could. He says, "I am one of God's chosen, ordained to be his son, his heir, joint-heir with Jesus Christ. I am set apart to be a king and priest unto God, and as such I cannot be godless, nor live for the common objects of life." He rises in the object of his pursuit: he cannot henceforth live unto himself, for he is not his own, he is bought with a price. Now he dwells in the presence of God, and life to him is real, earnest, and sublime. He cares not to scrape together gold with the muck-rake of the covetous, for he is immortal, and must needs seek eternal gains. He feels that he is born for divine purposes, and enquires "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" He feels that God has loved him that his love may flow forth to others. God's choice of any one man has a bearing upon all the rest: he elects a Joseph that a whole family, a whole nation, nay, the whole world, may be preserved alive when famine had broken the staff of bread. We are each one as a lamp kindled that we may shine in the dark, and light up other lamps.

New hopes come crowding on the man who is saved by grace. His immortal spirit enjoys glimpses of the endless. As God has loved him in time, he believes that the like love will bless him in eternity. He knows that his Redeemer lives, and that in the latter days he shall behold him; and therefore he has no fears for the future. Even while here below he begins to sing the songs of the angels, for his spirit spies from afar the dawn of the glory which is yet to be revealed. Thus with joyous heart and light footstep he goes forward to the unknown future as merrily as to a wedding-feast.

Is there a sinner here, a guilty sinner, one who has no merit, no claim to mercy whatever; is there one willing to be saved by God's free grace through believing in Jesus Christ? Then let me tell thee, sinner, there is not a word in God's book against thee, not a line or syllable, but everything is in thy favor. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," even the chief. Jesus came into the world to save thee. Only do thou trust him, and rest in him. I will tell thee what ought to fetch thee to Christ at once, it is the thought of his amazing love. A profligate son had been a great grief to his father; he had robbed him and disgraced him, and at last he ended by bringing his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. He was a horrible wretch of a son: no one could have been more graceless. However, he attended his father's funeral, and he stayed to hear the will read: perhaps it was the chief reason why he was there. He had fully made up his mind that his father would cut him off with a shilling, and he meant to make it very unpleasant for the rest of the family. To his great astonishment, as the will was read it ran something like this: "As for my son Richard, though he has fearfully wasted my substance, and though he has often grieved my heart, I would have him know that I consider him still to be my own dear child, and therefore, in token of my undying love, I leave him the same share as the rest of his brothers." He left the room; he could not stand it, the surprising love of his father had mastered him. He came down to the executor the next morning, and said, "You surely did not read correctly?" "Yes I did; there it stands." "Then," he said, "I feel ready to curse myself that I ever grieved my dear old father. Oh, that I could fetch him back again!" Love was born in that base heart by an unexpected display of love. May not your case be similar? Our Lord Jesus Christ is dead, but he has left it in his will that the chief of sinners are objects of his choicest mercy. Dying he prayed, "Father, forgive them." Risen he pleads for transgressors. Sinners are ever on his mind: their salvation is his great object. His blood is for them, his heart for them, his righteousness for them, his heaven for them. Come, O ye guilty ones, and receive your legacy. Put out the hand of faith and grasp your portion. Trust Jesus with your souls, and he will save you. God bless you. Amen.


PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Romans 6.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 136, 980 645.

# KNOWLEDGE WORSHIP GRATITUDE

SERMON NO. 1763

DELIVERED AT THE METROPOLITAN  
TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“So that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.” —  Romans 1:20, 21*

THOSE who boast of their knowledge betray their ignorance. Knowledge is not a possession to be proud of, since it brings with it so great a responsibility that a nurse might as well be proud of watching over a life in peril. Knowledge may become good or ill according to the use which is made of it. If men know God, for instance, and then glorify him as God, and are thankful, their knowledge has become the means of great blessing to them; but if they know God, and fail to glorify him, their knowledge turns to their condemnation. There is a knowledge that does not puff up the mind, but builds up the soul, being joined with holy love. Did not our Lord say, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent?” But for men to know God, and not to glorify him as God, and to be unthankful, is according to our text, no benefit to them: on the contrary, it becomes a savor of death unto them, because it leaves them without an excuse. Our Savior could plead for some, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” But what plea is to be used for those who know what they do, and yet do evil; who know what they ought to do, and do it not? These have the light, and close their eyes; or, to use another figure, they have the light, and use it to sin by. They take the golden candlestick of the sanctuary into their hands, and by its help they perform their evil deeds the more dexterously, and run in the way of wickedness the more swiftly. Accursed is that man who heaps to himself knowledge till he becomes wise as Solomon, and then prostitutes it to base ends by using it to aggrandize his wealth, to pamper

his appetites, to bolster his unbelief, or to conceal his vices. A man may by knowing more become all the more a devil. His growing information may only increase his condemnation. It is clear, then, that knowledge is not a possession of such unmingled good that we may grow vain of it; better far will it be if the more we know the more we watch and pray. Go on and read, young man. Go on and study with the utmost diligence. The more of knowledge you can acquire the better; but take care that you do not, like Sardanapalus, heap up your treasures to be your own funeral pile. Do not by a rebellious pride curdle the sweet milk of knowledge, and sour your precious blessing into an awful curse. It is soon done, but not so soon undone. It was the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil the eating of which brought all this evil upon us which ye see this day. Ye may eat of that tree still, if so it please you; but if ye taste not of the tree of life at the same time, your knowledge shall only open to you the gates of hell. Knowledge of itself alone is as land which may either become a blooming garden or a howling wilderness. It is a sea out of which you shall bring pearls or dead men's bones. Life and death, heaven and hell, are here: if it was said of old, "Take heed what you know."

The people mentioned by Paul in our text fell into two great evils, or rather into two forms of one great evil — atheism: the atheism of the heart, and the atheism of the life. They knew God, but they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful.

We will first consider the first sin mentioned here, and then the second. I shall not look at these two evils as if you were Romans, because I know that you are not, but I shall adapt the text to your own case, and speak of these sins, as Englishmen are too apt to commit them. Thirdly, let us view the consequences, or, what comes of men not glorifying God, and not being thankful. Then fourthly, let us fly from these sins immediately, God helping us. O Holy Spirit, help the preacher now, for all his help is in thee!

**I.** At once, then, let us look at this first sin, a sin very common in these days. **THEY KNEW GOD, BUT THEY GLORIFIED HIM NOT AS GOD.** Even in old Rome, with all its darkness, there was some knowledge of God: how can the creature quite forget its Creator? Of course the people had not that spiritual knowledge which the Holy Ghost communicates to the renewed

heart, for the carnal mind cannot know God spiritually: its fleshly ideas cannot come near to his holy spirituality. But Paul means that they perceived the eternal power and Godhead of the Great Former of all things; and they might have perceived much more of his divine power character and glory if their foolish hearts had not been darkened by their evil passions. When you go among the heathen, whether they are Pantheists or Polytheists, or whatever they may be, there is still a notion in the background of all their mythology of some one great superior being, elevated above those whom they call gods, some serenely just father, preserver, avenger, and rewarder of men. The most debased of mankind are still found to have some measure of knowledge of the great Creator: they hold the truth, though they hold it in unrighteousness. They can as soon shut their eyes to the sun, as completely blind their mind to the fact that there is a God. Some among the heathen no doubt attained to a very considerable knowledge of God, or at least they walked upon the borders of marvellous discoveries of the Godhead. We are greatly surprised at the language of Socrates, and Plato, and Seneca, and others: such men have lately been held up as patterns; but if their lives are studied, they will be found to be sadly defaced with what Paul fitly calls “vile affections.” These were wise men, but the world by wisdom knew not God; they were great thinkers, but a clear revelation of God was not in all their thoughts. They did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and so they remained steeped in loathsome vice which we dare not mention, for it is a shame even to speak of the things which were done of the most enlightened of them in secret. They had knowledge, but they forgot its responsibilities: they knew God, but they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful.

We may now let all the heathen go, for it is more true of us than it is of them, that we know God. Those to whom I am speaking to-night dwell where the name of God is familiar, where the gospel of God sounds like a trumpet in their streets, where the character of God is painted with the finger of light upon the blessed pages of the Bible, and where the Spirit of God takes care that the consciences of men shall be enlightened. We know God, but I am afraid that there are many thousands and millions of our fellow-creatures who glorify him not as God; let us see to it that we do not ourselves belong to the unhappy number.

Those do not glorify God as God who do not trace all their good things to God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," but many ungrateful hearts forget this truth, and receive the blessings of this life with dumb mouths and cold hearts. In the old time there were those who traced everything they saw to what they called "Chance;" that misformed deity has been laid aside, and on its pedestal men have set up another idol known as "Nature." Nowadays swarms of people attribute everything that is great and wonderful to "Nature: — "they talk for ever of "the beauties of Nature," "the grandeur of Nature," "the laws of Nature;" but God is as little spoken of as if he were not alive. As to laws of Nature, these occupy with moderns much the same place as the deities of Olympus with the ancients. What are laws of Nature but the ordinary ways in which God works? I know of no other definition of them. But these people attribute to them a sort of power apart from the presence of the Creator. One standing up in the street, venting his infidelity, said that we could not do better on Sunday than go abroad and worship Nature. There was nothing that was so refining and elevating to the mind as Nature. Nature did everything. A Christian man in the crowd ventured to ask, "What is Nature?" And the gentleman said, "Well, Nature — well — it is Nature. Don't you know what it is? It is Nature." No further definition was forthcoming; I fear the term is only useful as enabling men to talk of creation without being compelled to mention the Creator. I find nowadays that people talk about "Providence," and yet discard God. Among the vulgar and the ungodly this is another subterfuge to avoid the ascribing of their blessings to the Giver of them. A farmer, whose crops had failed a second time, was consoled by a clergyman, because he suffered from the hand of Providence. "Yes," said he, "that Providence is always treating me shamefully: but there's one above that will stop him." The poor soul had heard of Providence till he thought it an evil power, and hoped that the good God would curb its mischievous influence. This comes of not speaking plainly of God. For what is Providence? Can there be such a thing without the constant working of the Great Provider? Men talk of "Foresight." But is there any foresight without an eye? Is there not some living eye that is watching for our good, some living hand that is following up the eye, and providing our needs? Man does not like to think of his God. He wants to get away into a far country, away from God his Father; and he will adopt any sort of phrase which will help him clear his

language of all trace of God. He longs to have a convenient wall built up between himself and God. The heathen often attributed their prospered, to “fortune;” some of them talked of “chance;” others discoursed of “fate.” Anything is to a man’s taste rather than blessing the great Father, and adoring the one God. If they prospered, they were “lucky;” this was instead of gratitude to God. They looked into the almanac to find lucky days; this instead of faith in the Most High. They were superstitious, and ask their priest to tell them what would be a fortunate time for commencing an undertaking; this instead of resting upon the goodness of the Lord. Have we not some now who bless their good luck, and still talk about their fortunate stars? God, whom they know, they do not honor as God.

Yes, and we have among us men who talk neither of “fortune” nor of “Nature,” but of themselves. They are styled “self-made men,” and they are very prone to worship the great self who made them: they are never backward in that cult. Their adoration of themselves is constant, reverent, and sincere. “Self-made men,” indeed! Infinitely better is it to be a God-made man. If there be anything about us that is worth the having, it must be from him from whom every good gift and every perfect gift has evermore descended; let us therefore give Him thanks. There is no other sun for our sky than your sun in the heavens: there is no other source of good but the ever-blessed God, who has made himself known to us, whom with all our hearts we adore.

But may I not be addressing some who, at this moment, do not bow before God, and bless him for their prosperity? They attribute it to their industry, and to their good luck. Oh, sirs, you come under the head of those who know God, and yet you do not glorify him as God; neither are you thankful. The Lord help such to confess this sin, and may his grace wash them clean of it, for indeed it is a great and heinous sin in the judgment of the Most High. Justice makes a black mark against those who do not ascribe their good things to God, from whom they flow with such sweet constancy of kindness.

But we can also commit that sin, in the next sense, by not feeling any obligation laid upon us through partaking of the divine bounty. Are there not many rich men to whom it never occurs to feel bound to serve the



Lord who gave them power to get wealth? Are there not many healthy persons, sound of limb, and strong in constitution, who yet do not praise the God who has kept them from sickness and death? Are we any of us sufficiently grateful for our talents, our faculties, our friends, our daily provisions? Do we not all receive a large amount of blessing for which we do not render praise to God? The fact that every mercy brings an obligation with it, and we that receive most ought to render most; for we receive nothing from God without being thereby naturally and of right laid under bonds to return to him the glory due unto his name. We are tenants, whose rent is to be paid in service and praise. It is a very blessed obligation! It is a happy bond to be bound to praise and bless God! Praise is no more a burden to a true heart than song to a bird, or perfume to a flower, or twinkling to a star. Adoration is no taxation. God's revenue of glory comes from myriads of free-will offerings, which gracious spirits delight to present to him all their days. Yet there are some who know God, but they glorify him not as God: they rob him of that which it should be their life to bring. They seem to say that they are their own, and not God's: they may live as they please; they may serve themselves. God is not in all their thoughts; and, as to spending and being spent in the service of him who gave them being, it has not yet crossed their minds. God's complaint concerning them is a just one, — "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doeth not know, my people doeth not consider." God grant us grace to avoid this cruel provocation, and may we glorify God as God by practically owning the obligation under which his mercy places us.

Many may be met with who know God, but never glorify him as God, because they never adore him, and worship him, with the love of their hearts. They go to church or to some place of worship regularly, and sing psalms and hymns, and they may even have family-prayer at home; but their heart has never adored the living God with living love. Their worship has a name to live, but it is dead. They present to the Lord all the eternal harvest of worship, but the corn is gone, only the straw and the husk are there. And what is the value of your husky prayers? your prayers without a kernel, made up of the straw of words, and the chaff of formality? What

is the value of professions of loyalty from a rebel? What is the worth of professed friendship to God when your heart is at enmity against him? Is it not a mockery of God to present to him a sacrifice “where not the heart is found?” When the Lord has to say — They come as my people, and they sit as my people, and they sing as my people, but their heart is far from me, — can he take any pleasure in them? May not God thus complain of many? Oh, let it not be so with you! I know that there are some here against whom that charge would lie if we preferred it — that they know God, but they do not glorify him as God, for they do not love him. The name and service of God are much on their tongues, but they do not delight in him, they do not hunger and thirst after him, they do not find prayer and praise to be their very element, but such service as they render is merely lip-service, the unwilling homage of bond-slaves, and not the delighted service of those who are the children of God. Oh, my brethren, if we accept Jehovah as the living God, let us give him the utmost love of our souls. Will you call a man brother, and then treat him like a dog? Dare you call God your God, and then act towards him as though he were not worthy of a thought. With what joy does David cry, “I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds!” This is the kind of spirit with which to deal with the Lord. Oh, to rejoice in God all the day, and to make him our exceeding joy! Thus, and thus only, do we glorify him as God. Without the fire of love no incense will ever rise from the censer of praise. If we do not delight in God we do not fitly adore God.

There is another way of not glorifying God as God, and that is by never recognizing his omnipresence. Have we not among us those who on Sunday feel some kind of reverence of God, but during the six days of the week are godless? When they are in a place of worship they have some sense of God’s being there; if they do not fear and tremble, yet they behave with decency and respect; but in other places they dare to act as if they were out of range of God. Do they fancy that God is not in that secret chamber where they follow out their passions? Do they imagine that he is not in that ribald company where they make mirth of sacred things? Do they imagine out of man’s sight is also out of God’s sight? Do not some men so act and live as if God were either dead, or else were blind or deaf, utterly oblivious to everything that is done on the face of the

earth? How blind must they be, who think God blind! May we never fall into this absurdity! May we feel that we cannot anywhere consent to sin for God is there. The whole earth is God's house: shall we abuse the King in his own palace? The skies are the roof of his temple, and beneath God's blue sky we ought not to find a place to sin in. Nowhere in time is there space for evil, nor in the universe is there room for sin. Yet, alas, how few recognize, "Thou God seest me," as being a death-blow to sin? "They know God, but they glorify him not as God," but think that he is absent either in person or in mind, and that in some great secret places they can hide away from him, and with impurity follow their own desires.

Are there not some again, and many, who do not admit the true glory of God because the idea of his sovereignty is very horrible to them? I lay this charge against many professing Christians — their God is not the God of the Bible, and that they have no notion of Jehovah, the true God. The one God of heaven and earth is Jehovah — that God who said of old, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Certain professed followers of Jesus will not have this God, but they make to themselves a god who is under some degree of obligation to his sinful creatures, of whom they say that he is bound to treat all alike. These are guilty of robbing Divinity of its most majestic attribute, namely, sovereignty. They are for dictating to the King of kings, and tying the hands of infinite compassion, lest the supreme will of God should have too much liberty. I know of no such God as that: the God I worship can never do other than right, yet is he under no bond to his creatures but ordereth all things according to the counsel of his own will. I believe that if the Lord had denied me mercy, I had so sinned that I could never have impugned his justice. When I see him save a sinner, I look not at it as a deed which he was bound to do, but as a spontaneous act, free as the air, full of his own goodness which arises entirely from himself. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." I, for one, am perfectly satisfied with everything that God does, whether of power, justice, or mercy. My heart says, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." I could have sung the song of Moses at the Red Sea, when all Egypt was drowned, and found in the drowning of the foe a deep background of joy, because I should have seen in it the carrying out of the divine will, the reign of righteousness, and the

avenging cruel tyranny. I make bold to say that I would have praised God as the waves went over Pharaoh; for the Lord did it, and he did right. I would have cried with Moses, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." I expect to be among the number, though some seem as if they would decline the service, who shall for ever bless God for all his dealings with mankind — the stern as well as those that seem more tender. The Lord God, even Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, is the God whom I worship. I do not know this new god that has lately come up, who they say is all tenderness and has none of the stern attributes of righteousness and wrath. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and in him my soul delights. Let him sway his scepter even as he pleases. His will be done on earth even as it is in heaven. Again will we say Hallelujah, when all his everlasting purposes shall have been fulfilled, and the wicked shall be punished, and the righteous raised to their Father's throne. To know God, and to glorify him as God, is to regard him as supreme, ungoverned, the Arbiter of all things, whose will is law. I believe in God on his throne, God giving no account of his matters, but doing his own pleasure as God over all. Short of this I could not glorify him as God.

There are some others who know God, who fail to glorify him as God, because they do not trust him. In revelation God has presented himself as the object of trust to his creatures, and he has promised that all who trust in him shall be forgiven their transgressions through the atonement of his Son, Jesus Christ. Such as trust him he declares shall be saved; and he sends out a messenger of mercy to all mankind, proclaiming — "He that believeth in him is not condemned." He bids sinners come and trust under the shadow of his wing; and he declares that none that come to him will be ever cast out. Revealing himself in Christ Jesus, he pleads with guilty men. Asking nothing of them, he entreats them to accept his mercy, which he freely presents to them without money and without price. Making no distinction in the gospel-call, he bids men come to him, saying, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth; for I am God, and besides me there is none else." When proud man replies, "No, I shall trust in myself, trust in my own works, trust in my own prayers, but I shall trust in Christ," then he knows God, but he glorifies him not as God, and when he

perishes he will be without excuse. What kind of God is that whom we will not trust? How do we honor him when we refuse to believe him? Do we accept his Godhead, and yet refuse his mercy? This cannot be.

The counts are many against men, but this one more must be mentioned — many know God, but they never glorify him as God by submitting themselves to him, and yielding up their members to be instruments of his glory. If I glorify God as God, then I desire to obey God's commandments, to spread his glory, to magnify his name. I desire in all things to please him, if indeed I treat him as God should be treated. If I know God, and yet live for my own profit, for my own honor, for my own comfort, then I do not glorify God as God. Oh, sirs, when the Lord is glorified as God, we yield ourselves to his control without a murmur. He may take what he will away from us, and we say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." He may remove every comfort from us, and cover us with sore boils and blains, but we shall sit down with Job upon the dunghill, and say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Knowing him as God will make us submissive to suffer, and quick to act. We shall feel the force of Elijah's cry, "If the Lord be God, follow him." We shall rouse ourselves to the utmost energy to serve him when he stands before us as really God. If we serve man and are faithful, we do the best we can for our master; but if God be our Master, oh, what service we are bound to render to him! What enthusiasm ought to be kindled in our breast by the belief that we are God's servants! "I am thy servant," is our happy claim, our honored challenge. This it is that makes a man of a man, and something more than man. Oh, to learn this lesson, and to practice it! To glorify God as God will make us akin to angels! Even you Christians may feel that this is much beyond you yet, but towards it you must ever fly. I shrink before my Lord in speaking of him, but I desire what I have not yet attained — that I may truly glorify him as my Lord and my God.

**II.** Now we come to consider the second sin. May the word which I may have to say about it, be blessed to many of my hearers by the power of the Holy Spirit! The second sin is "NEITHER WERE THANKFUL." Did you know, dear friends, that unthankfulness was such a sin as this? Have you ever thought of it in this light before — that men were without excuse because when they knew God they were not thankful? Unthankfulness is

a sin for which there is no excuse if it be attended with knowledge. I fear there are thousands who call themselves Christians, who are not thankful, and yet they never thought themselves very guilty on that account. Yet you see these sinners were without excuse, because they were guilty of a great sin before God, and that sin was unthankfulness. I tremble both for myself and you when I see want of thankfulness thus set in the front rank of sins.

How is it that we may be thankful?

I answer, first, there is in some a want in gratitude for mercies possessed. They receive many blessings without making a note of them, or even seeming to know that they have them. Their daily mercies seem to come in always at the back door, where the servants take them in, and never tell their master or mistress that they have arrived. They never receive their mercies at the front door with grateful acknowledgments; but they still continue dumb debtors, daily owing more, but making no attempt at a return. The Lord continues to bless them in things temporal, to keep them in health and strength, ay, and to give them the means of grace and spiritual opportunities; and they live as if these things were commonplace that they were not worth thanking God for. Many professors are of that kind — recipients of countless mercies, but destitute of such common thankfulness as even beast might manifest. From them God hears no song of gratitude, no chirp of praise, though birds would charm the woodlands with their minstrelsy: these are worse than the dumb driven cattle, or the fish in the brook, which do at least leap up, and mean their Maker's praise.

Some show this unthankfulness in another way, for they always dwell most on what they have not got. They have manna, and that is angels' food; but then they have no fish, and this is a ready theme for grumbling. They talk very loudly of "the fish we did eat in Egypt," and lament those ample feasts provided by the muddy Nile. Moreover, they have none of those delightful vegetables — the leeks and the garlic, and the onions. They have none of these rank luxuries, and therefore again they murmur, and call the manna "light bread." They put this complaint over and over again to Moses, till Moses must have been sick of them and their garlic. They said that they could not get leeks, and cucumbers, and onions, and

that they were therefore most hardly done by, and would not much longer put up with it. Thankless rebels! And have I not known some of God's servants say that they enjoy much of the presence of their Lord, but they have no riches; and so they are not among the favored ones. Over their poverty they fetch a deep groan. Some live in the presence of God, so they tell us, and they are full of divine delights, but yet they are greatly afflicted with aches and pains, and all the dolours of rheumatism, and therefore they murmur. I admit that rheumatism is a dreadful pain enough, but at the same time to dwell always on the dark side of things, and to forget our mercies, is a sad instance of ingratitude. We are few of us as thankful as we ought to be; and there are some people who are not thankful at all, for instead of a song concerning their mercies. Must we always hear the sackbut? Is the harp never to give forth a joy-note?

Some show their unthankfulness by fretting under their supposed ills. They know from Scripture that even their afflictions are working for their good, yet they do not rejoice in the prospect, or feel any gratitude for the refining process through which the Lord is passing them. Heaven and perfection are left unsung, but the present processes are groaned over without ceasing. Their monotonous note is always this pain, this loss, this burden, this uncomfortable sensation, this persecution from the world, this unkindness from the saints, and so on; all this goes to show that, though they know God, they do not glorify him as God, neither are they thankful.

We can be guilty of unthankfulness, also, by never testifying to the goodness of God. A great many people come in and out of your houses; do you ever tell them about God's goodness to you? Did you ever take up a single ten minutes with the tale of the Lord's lovingkindness to you? Oh, what backwardness there is to testify to God as God, and to all his goodness and love! Our mouths are full of anything rather than the goodness of the Lord. Shame on our wicked lips!

Some fail, also, in their singing of God's praises. I love to be singing in my heart, if I may not sing with my tongue. Is it not a good thing for you house wives, when you are about the house, to sing over everything? I remember a servant that used to sing at the washtub, and sing in the kitchen; and when some one asked her why she was always singing, she said that if it did not do anything else it kept bad thoughts out of her mind.

There is a great deal in that; for bad thoughts are bad tenants, who pay no rent and foul the house. I knew a dear old Methodist preacher, who is now in heaven, who when he came downstairs of a morning was always tooting a bit of a hymn over, and he did the same in the barn, and the field. I have passed him in the street, and noted his happy melody: indeed he was always singing. He never took much notice of anybody, so as to be afraid of being overheard. Whether people heard him or not did not make much difference to him. He was singing to the Lord not to them; and so he went on singing. I do not think he had much of a voice, or an ear for music, but his soul was made up of praise, and that is better than a musical education. God does not criticize our voice, but he accepts our heart. Oh, to be singing the praises of God every minute of our lives, and never ceasing therefrom! Do you not think that many fail in this respect? They are not preparing for heaven, where all is praise, or they would take up the joyful employment at once.

It is plain that many are not thankful to God, for they never praise him with their substance. Yet when the Jew was thankful, he took care to give a portion to the house of the Lord: before he would eat of his corn, he would send his sheaf to the sanctuary. If we are grateful to God, we shall feel that the first thing to do is to give of our substance an offering of thanksgiving to the Most High. But this does not strike some people, whose religion is so spiritual that they cannot endure to hear of money, and they faint at the sound of a collection. Their thankfulness rises to singing a hymn occasionally, but it never goes as far as giving a button to the cause of God. I am afraid their thankfulness is not worth more than what they pay to express it: that is to say, nothing at all. God deliver us from such a state of heart as that; and may we never, in any of these senses, be found amongst those professors, of whom it is said that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful.

**III.** Listen to me now carefully for two or three minutes while, in the third place, I mention, very briefly and solemnly, what was THE RESULT OF THIS.

They knew God, but they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful. And the first result of it was that they fell into vain imaginings. If we do not glorify God, the true God, we shall soon be found setting up



another god. This vain-imagination business is being done quite as extensively now as in Paul's days. Depart from the inspiration of the Bible, and from the infallibility of the Spirit of God who wrote it, and where will you go? Well I cannot tell you where you will go. One wanders into one vain imagination, and one into another, till the dreamers are on all sides. I expect to see a new doctrine every day of the week now. Our thinkers have introduced an age of inventions, wherein everything is thought of but the truth of God. We do not want these novelties. We are satisfied with the word of God as we find it. But if we do not glorify God as God, and are not thankful to him for all his teachings, then away you go into vain imaginations.

And what next? Well, away goes the mind of man into all sorts of sins. The chapter describes unnatural lusts and horribly fierce passions. Men that are not satisfied and thankful — men that have no fear of God before their eyes — it were a shame for us to think, much more to speak, of what they will do. A heart that cannot feed at God's table will riot somewhere. He that is not satisfied with the cup that God has filled will soon be a partaker of the cup of devils. An unthankful spirit is, at bottom, an atheistic spirit. If God were God to us, we should not be unthankful to him. If God were glorified in our hearts, and we were thankful for everything that he did, we should walk in holiness, and live in submission. And if we do not thus behave ourselves, the tendency will be for us to go from bad to worse, and from worse to very worst. This has been done on a large scale by nations, whose downward course of crime began with want of thankfulness to God. It is done on a smaller scale by individuals, to whom departure from God is the beginning of a vicious career. Get away from God, and where have you gone? If you do not love him, and delight in him, whither will you stray? May the Lord tether us fast to himself, and even nail us to the cross.

It seems that these people, of whom Paul wrote, fell into all kinds of bitterness, such as envy, murder, deceit, malignity, whispering, backbiting, hating of God. They became spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, and so forth. Well, if your spirit is not sweetened by the adoration and the love of God, it will grow bitter. If love does not reign, hate will rule. Look at unthankful people. Hear them talk. Nobody's character is safe. There is no neighbor whom they will not slander. There is no

Christian man whom they will not misrepresent. The very angels of God would not be safe from suspicion if they lived near to people of that kind. But when you glorify God as God, and are thankful for everything — when you can take up a bit of bread and a cup of cold water, and say with the poor Puritan, “What, all this, and Christ too?” — then are you happy, and you make others happy. A godly preacher, finding that all that there was for dinner was a potato and a herring, thanked God that he had ransacked sea and land to find food for his children. Such a sweet spirit breeds love to everybody, and makes a man go through the world cheerfully. If you give way to the other order of feeling, and do not glorify God, but quarrel with him, and have no thankfulness for his mercies, then you will suck in the spirit of the devil, and you will get into Satan’s mind, and be of his temper, and by-and-by his works you will do. Oh, brothers and sisters, dread unthankfulness! Perhaps you did not think that it was so bad, but it is horrible! God help you to escape from it!

**IV.** And that you may escape from it, let us finish up by this exhortation. **LET US FLY BY THE HELP OF GOD’S SPIRIT FROM THESE TWO SINS.** Let us glorify God, as God, every one of us.

“Oh,” says one, “I am full of sin.” Come and glorify God, then, by confessing it to him. “Oh, but I am not pardoned.” Come and glorify him by accepting pardon through the blood of his dear Son. “Oh, but I am of an evil heart.” Come and glorify him by telling him so, and asking his Spirit to renew you in your mind. Come, yield yourself to his sweet gospel. May his blessed Spirit incline you so to do. Come, take him now to be your God. Have you forgotten him? Remember him. Have you neglected him? Seek him. Have you offended him? Mourn before him. Say, “I will arise, and go unto my Father.” Your Father waits to receive you. Glorify him as God.

And then, next, let us begin to be very thankful, if we have not been so before. Let us praise God for common mercies, for they prove to be uncommonly precious when they are once taken away. Bless God that you were able to walk here, and are able to walk home again. Bless God for your reason: bless him for your existence. Bless God for the means of grace, for an open Bible, for the throne of grace, for the preaching of the Word. You that are saved must lead the song. “Bless the Lord, O my soul:

and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” Bless him for his Son. Bless him for his Spirit. Bless him for his Fatherhood. Bless him that you are his child. Bless him for what you have received. Bless him for what he has promised to give. Bless him for the past, the present, and the future. Bless him in every way, for everything, at all times, and in all places. Let all that is within you bless his holy name. Go your way rejoicing. May his Spirit help you so to do!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Romans 1:1-22.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 103 (First version), 1032, 699.

# A HEAVENLY PATTERN FOR OUR EARTHLY LIFE

SERMON NO. 1778

PREACHED ON WEDNESDAY MORNING, APRIL 30TH, 1884,

AT EXETER-HALL

Being the Annual Sermon of the Baptist Missionary Society.

*“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” —  Matthew 6:10.*

OUR Father's will shall certainly be done, for the Lord “doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.” Let us adoringly consent that it shall be so, desiring no alteration therein. That “will” may cost us dear; yet let it never cross our wills: let our minds be wholly subjugated to the mind of God. That “will” may bring us bereavement, sickness, and loss; but let us learn to say, “It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good.” We should not only yield to the divine will, but acquiesce in it so as to rejoice in the tribulation which it ordains. This is a high attainment, but we set ourselves to reach it. He that taught us this prayer used it himself in the most unrestricted sense. When the bloody sweat stood on His face, and all the fear and trembling of a man in anguish were upon Him, He did not dispute the decree of the Father, but bowed His head and cried, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” When we are called to suffer bereavements personally, or when, as a holy brotherhood, we see our best men taken away, let us know that it is well, and say most sincerely, “The will of the Lord be done.”

God knows what will best minister to His gracious designs. To us it seems a sad waste of human life that man after man should go to a malarious region, and perish in the attempt to save the heathen: but infinite wisdom may view the matter very differently. We ask why the infinite wisdom may view the matter very differently. We ask why the Lord does not

work a miracle, and cover the heads of His messengers from the death shaft? No reason is revealed to us, but there is a reason, for the will of the great Father is the sum of wisdom. Reasons are not made known to us, else were there no scope for our faith; and the Lord loves that this noble grace should have ample room and verge enough. Our God wastes no consecrated life: He has made nothing in vain: He ordains all things according to the counsel of His will, and that counsel never errs. Could the Lord endow us with His own omniscience, we should not only consent to the deaths of His servants, but should deprecate their longer life. The same would also be true of our own living or dying. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints"; and therefore we are sure that He does not afflict us by bereavement without a necessity of love. We must still see one missionary after another cut down in his prime; for there are arguments with God, as convincing with Him as they are obscure to us, which require that by heroic sacrifice the foundations of the African church should be laid. Lord, we do not ask Thee to explain Thy reasons to us. Thou canst screen us from a great temptation by hiding Thyself; for if even now we sin by asking reasons, we might soon go further, and provoke Thee sorely by contending against Thy reasons. He who demands a reason of God is not in a fit state to receive one. In the case of the honored men whom the Lord has removed from us this year, there is assuredly no loss to the great cause as it is viewed by the eye of God. See the great stones and costly stones laboriously brought from the quarry to the edge of the sea! Can it be possible that these are deliberately thrown into the deep? It swallows them up! Wherefore is so much labor thrown away? These living stones might surely have been built into a temple for the Lord; why should the waves of death engulf them? Yet more are sought for, and still more: will the hungry abyss never cease to devour? Alas, that so much precious material should be lost! It is not lost. No, not a stone of it. Thus the Lord layeth the foundation of His harbour of refuge among the people. "Mercy shall be built up for ever." In due time massive walls shall rise out of the deep, and we shall no longer ask the reason for the losses of early days.

Peace be to the memories of the heroic dead! Men die that the cause may live. "Father, Thy will be done." With this prayer upon our lips let us bend low in child-like submission to the will of the great Jehovah, and then

gird up our loins anew to dauntless perseverance in our holy service. Though more should be taken away next year, and the next, yet we must pray on, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

My heart is grieved for the death of beloved Hartley, and those noble men who preceded him to "the white man's grave." I had seen him especially, for it had been a joy to assist him for three years in preparing for missionary service. Alas! the preparation led to small visible results. He left us, he landed, and he died. Surely the Lord means to make further use of him; if he did not make him a preacher to the natives, he must intend that he should preach to us. I may say of each fallen missionary, "He being dead yet speaketh." "Faithful unto death," they inspire us by their example. Dying without regret in the cause of such a Master, they remind us of our own indebtedness to Him. Their spirits rising to His throne are links between this Society and the glorified assembly above. Let not our thoughts go downward to their graves, but rise upward to their thrones. Does not our text point with a finger of flame from earth to heaven? Do not the dear departed ones mark a line of light between the two worlds?

If the prayer of our text had not been dictated by the Lord Jesus Himself, we might think it too bold. Can it ever be that this earth, a mere drop of a bucket, should touch the great sea of life and light above and not be lost in it? Can it remain earth and yet be made like to heaven? Will it not lose its individuality in the process? This earth is subject to vanity, dimmed with ignorance, defiled with sin, furrowed with sorrow; can holiness dwell in it as in heaven? Our Divine Instructor would not teach us to pray for impossibilities; he puts such petitions into our mouths as can be heard and answered. Yet certainly this is a great prayer; it has the hue of the infinite about it. Can earth be tuned to the harmonies of heaven? Has not this poor planet drifted too far away to be reduced to order and made to keep rank with heaven? Is it not swathed in mist too dense to be removed? Can its grave-clothes be loosed? Can Thy will, O God, be done in earth as it is in heaven? It can be, and it must be; for a prayer wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit is ever the shadow of a coming blessing, and He that taught us to pray after this manner did not mock us with vain words. It is a brave prayer, which only heaven-born faith can utter; yet it is not the offspring of presumption, for presumption never longs for the will of the Lord to be perfectly performed.

**I.** May the Holy Spirit be with us, while I first lead you to observe that THE COMPARISON IS NOT FAR FETCHED. That our present obedience to God should be like to that of holy ones above is not a strained and fanatical notion. It is not far-fetched, for earth and heaven were called into being by the same Creator. The empire of the Maker comprehends the upper and the lower regions. "The heaven, even the heavens are the Lord's"; and "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." He sustaineth all things by the word of his power both in heaven above and in the earth beneath. Jesus reigneth both among angels and men, for He is the Lord of all. If, then, heaven and earth were created by the same God, and are sustained by the same power, and governed from the same throne, we believe that the same end will be subserved by each of them, and that both heaven and earth shall tell out the glory of God. They are two bells of the same chime, and this is the music that peals forth from them: "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah!" If earth were of the devil and heaven were of God, and two self-existent powers were contending for the mastery, we might question whether earth would ever be as pure as heaven; but as our ears have twice heard the divine declaration, "Power belongeth unto God," we expect to see that power triumphant, and the dragon cast out from earth as well as heaven. Why should not every part of the great Creator's handiwork become equally radiant with His glory? He that made can remake. The curse which fell upon the ground was not eternal; thorns and thistles pass away. God will bless the earth for Christ's sake even as once He cursed it for man's sake.

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." It was so once. Perfect obedience to the heavenly upon this earth will only be a return to the good old times which ended at the gate of Eden. There was a day when no gulf was digged between earth and heaven; there was scarce a boundary line, for the God of heaven walked in Paradise with Adam. All things on earth were then pure, and true, and happy. It was the garden of the Lord. Alas, that the trail of the serpent has now defiled everything. Then earth's morning son was heard in heaven, and heaven's hallelujahs floated down to earth at eventide. Those who desire to set up the kingdom of God are not instituting a new order of things; they are restoring, not inventing. Earth will drop into the old groove again. The Lord is king; and He has never left the throne. As it was in the beginning so shall it be yet again. History

shall, in the divinest sense, repeat itself. The temple of the Lord shall be among men, and the Lord God shall dwell among them. "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven."

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." It will be so at the last. I shall not venture far into prophecy. Some brethren are quite at home where I should lose myself. I have scarcely yet been able to get out of the gospels and the epistles; and that deep book of Revelation, with its waters to swim in, I must leave to better instructed minds. "Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of that book;" to that blessing I would aspire, but I cannot yet make claim to interpret it. This much, however, seems plain, — there is to be "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." This creation, which now "groaneth and travaileth in pain," in sympathy with man, is to be brought forth from its bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Blessed be the Lord Jesus, when He brought His people out of their bondage, He did not redeem their spirits only, but their bodies also: hence their material part is the Lord's as well as their spiritual nature, and hence again this very earth which we inhabit shall be uplifted in connection with us. The creation itself shall be delivered. Materialism, out of which there has been once made a vesture for the Godhead in the person of Christ, shall become a fit temple for the Lord of hosts. The New Jerusalem shall come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride is prepared for her husband. We are sure of this. Therefore unto this consummation let us strive mightily, praying evermore, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Meanwhile, remember also that there is an analogy between earth and heaven, so that the one is the type of the other. You could not describe heaven except by borrowing the things of earth to symbolize it; and this shows that there is a real likeness between them. What is heaven? It is Paradise, or a garden. Walk amid your fragrant flowers and think of heaven's bed of spices. Heaven is a kingdom: thrones, and crowns, and palms are the earthly emblems of the heavenlies. Heaven is a city; and there, again, you fetch your metaphor from the dwelling-places of men. It is a place of "many mansions" — the homes of the glorified. Houses are of earth, yet is God our dwelling-place. Heaven is a wedding-feast; and even such is this present dispensation. The tables are spread here as well as there; and it is our privilege to go forth and bring in the hedge-birds and the



highwaymen, that the banqueting-hall may be filled. While the saints above eat bread in the marriage supper of the Lamb, we do the like below in another sense.

Between earth and heaven there is but a thin partition. The home country is much nearer than we think. I question if “the land that is very far off” be a true name for heaven. Was it not an extended kingdom on earth which was intended by the prophet rather than the celestial home? Heaven is by no means the far country, for it is the Father’s house. Are we not taught to say, “Our Father which art in heaven”? Where the Father is the true spirit of adoption counts itself near. Our Lord would have us mingle heaven with earth by naming it twice in this short prayer. See how He makes us familiar with heaven by mentioning it next to our usual food, making the next petition to be, “Give us this day our daily bread.” This does not look as if it should be thought of as a remote region. Heaven, is at any rate, so near that in a moment we can speak with Him that is King of the place, and He will answer to our call. Yea, before the clock shall tick again you and I may be there. Can that be a far-off country which we can reach so soon? Oh, brothers, we are within hearing of the shining ones; we are well-nigh home. A little while and we shall see our Lord. Perhaps another day’s march will bring us within the city gate. And what if another fifty years of life on earth should remain, what is it but the twinkling of an eye?

Clear enough is it that the comparison between the obedience of earth and that of heaven is not far-fetched. If heaven and heaven’s God be, in truth, so near to us, our Lord has set before us a homely model taken from our heavenly dwelling-place. The petition only means — let all the children of the one Father be alike in doing His will.

**II.** Secondly, THIS COMPARISON IS EMINENTLY INSTRUCTIVE. Does it not teach us that what we do for God is not everything, but how we do it is also to be considered? The Lord Jesus Christ would not only have us do the Father’s will, but do it after a certain model. And what an elevated model it is! Yet is it none too elevated, for we would not wish to render to our heavenly Father service of an inferior kind. If none of us dare say that we are perfect, we are yet resolved that we will never rest until we are. If none of us dare hope that even our holy things are without a flaw, yet none of us will be satisfied while a spot remains upon them. We would

give to our God the utmost conceivable glory. Let the mark be as high as possible. If we do not as yet reach it, we will aim higher and yet higher. We do not desire that our pattern should be lowered, but that our imitation should be raised.

“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Mark the words “be done,” for they touch a vital point of the text. God’s will is done in heaven. How very practical! On earth His will is often forgotten, and His rule ignored. In the church of the present age there is a desire to be doing something for God, but few enquire what He wills them to do. Many things are done for the evangelizing of the people which were never commanded by the great Head of the Church, and cannot be approved of by Him. Can we expect that He will accept or bless that which He has never commanded? Will-worship is as sin in His sight. We are to do His will in the first place, and then to expect a blessing upon the doing of that will. My brethren, I am afraid that Christ’s will on earth is very much more discussed than done. I have heard of brethren spending days in disputing upon a precept which their dispute was breaking. In heaven they have no disputes, but they do the will of God without discord. We are best employed when we are actually doing something for this fallen world, and for the glory of our Lord. “Thy will be done”: we must come to actual works of faith and labors of love. Too often we are satisfied with having approved of that will, or with having spoken of it in words of commendation. But we must not stay in thought, resolve, or word; the prayer is practical and business-like, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” An idle man stretched himself on his bed when the sun had risen high in heaven, and as he rolled over, he muttered to himself that he wished this were hard work, for he could do any quantity of it with pleasure. Many might wish that to think and to speak were to do the will of God; for them they would have effected it very thoroughly. Up yonder there is no playing with sacred things: they do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Would God His will were not alone preached and sung below, but actually done as it is in heaven.

In heaven the will of God is done in spirit, for they are spirits there. It is done in truth with undivided heart, and unquestioned desire. On earth, too often, it is done and yet not done; for a dull formality mocks real obedience. Here obedience often shades off into dreary routine. We sing

with the lips, but our hearts are silent. We pray as if the mere utterance of words were prayer. We sometimes preach living truth with dead lips. It must no longer be so. Would God we had the fire and fervor of those burning ones who behold the face of God. We pray in that sense, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." I hope there is a revival of spiritual life among us, and that, to a large extent, our brotherhood is instinct with fervor; but there is room for far more zeal. Ye that know how to pray, go down upon your knees, and with the warm breath of prayer arouse the spark of spiritual life until it becomes a flame. With all the powers of our innermost being, with the whole life of God within us, let us be stirred up to do the will of the Lord on earth as it is done in heaven.

In heaven they do God's will constantly, without failure. Would God it could be so here! We are aroused to-day, but we fall asleep tomorrow. We are diligent for one hour, but sluggish the next. This must not be, dear friends. We must be steadfast, unmovable — always abounding in the work of the Lord. We need to pray for sacred perseverance, that we may imitate the days of heaven upon the earth by doing the Lord's will without a break.

They do God's will in heaven universally, without making a selection. Here men pick and choose — take this commandment to be obeyed, and lay that commandment by as non-essential. We are, I fear, all tinctured, more or less, with this odious gall. A certain part of obedience is hard, and therefore we try to forget it. It must no longer be so; but whatsoever Jesus saith unto us we must do. Partial obedience is actual disobedience. The loyal subject respects the whole law. If anything be the will of the Lord, we have no choice in the matter, the choice is made by our Lord. Let us pray that we may neither misunderstand the Lord's will, or forget it, nor violate it. Perhaps we are, as a company of believers, ignorantly omitting a part of the Lord's will, and this may have been hindering our work these many years; possibly there is something written by the pen of inspiration which we have not read, or something read that we have not practiced; and this may hold back the arm of the Lord from working. We should often make diligent search, and go through our churches to see wherein we differ from the divine pattern. Some goodly Babylonish garment or wedge of gold may be as an accursed thing in the camp, bringing disaster to the

Lord's armies. Let us not neglect anything which our God commands lest He withhold His blessing.

His will is done in heaven instantly, and without hesitation. We, I fear, are given to delays. We plead that we must look the thing round about.

"Second thoughts are best," we say, whereas the first thoughts of eager love are the prime production of our being. I would that we were obedient at all hazard, for therein lies the truest safety. Oh, to do what God bids us, as God bids us, on the spot, and at the moment! It is not ours to debate, but to perform. Let us dedicate ourselves as perfectly as Esther consecrated herself when she espoused the cause of her people, and said, "If I perish, I perish." We must not consult with flesh and blood, or make a reserve for our own selfishness, but at once most vigorously follow the divine command.

Let us pray the Lord that we may do His will on earth as it is done in heaven; that is, joyfully, without the slightest weariness. When our hearts are right, it is a glad thing to serve God, though it be only to unloose the latchets of our Master's shoes. To be employed by Jesus in service which will bring us no repute, but much reproach, should be our delight. If we were altogether as we should be, sorrow for Christ's sake would be joy: ay, we should have joy right along, in dark nights as well as in bright days. Even as they are glad in heaven, with a felicity born of the presence of the Lord, so should we be glad, and find our strength in the joy of the Lord.

In heaven the will of the Lord is done right humbly. There perfect purity is set in a frame of lowliness. Too often we fall into self-gratulation, and it defiles our best deeds. We whisper to ourselves, "I did that very well." We flatter ourselves that there was no self in our conduct, but while we are laying that flattering unction to our souls, we are lying, as our self-contentment proves. God might have allowed us to do ten times as much, had He not known that it would not be safe. He cannot set us upon the pinnacle, because our heads are weak, and we grow dizzy with pride. We must not be permitted to be rulers over many things, for we should become tyrants if we had the opportunity. Brother, pray the Lord to keep thee low at His feet, for in no other place canst thou be largely used of Him.

The comparison being thus instructive, I pray that we may be the better for our mediation upon it. I do not find it an easy thing even to describe the model; but if we essay to copy it: “this is the work; this is the difficulty.” Unless we are girded with the divine strength we shall never do the will of God as it is done in heaven. Here is a greater labor than those of Hercules, bringing with it victories nobler than those of Alexander. To this the unaided wisdom of Solomon could not attain; the Holy Ghost must transform us, and lead the earthly in us captive to the heavenly.

**III.** Thirdly, I beg you to notice, dear friends, that THIS COMPARISON of holy service on earth to that which is in heaven, IS BASED UPON FACTS. The facts will both comfort and stimulate us. Two places are mentioned in the text which seems very dissimilar, and yet the likeness exceeds the unlikeness — earth and heaven.

Why should not saints do the will of the Lord on earth as their brethren do it in heaven? What is heaven but the Father’s house, wherein there are many mansions? Do we not abide in that house even now? The Psalmist said, “Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee.” Have we not often said of our Bethels, “This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven”? The spirit of adoption causes us to be at home with God even while we sojourn here below. Let us therefore do the will of God at once.

We have the same fare on earth as the saints in heaven, for “the Lamb in the midst of the throne doth feed them:” He is the Shepherd of His flock below, and daily feeds us upon Himself. His flesh is meat indeed, His blood is drink indeed. Whence come the refreshing draughts of the immortals? The Lamb doth lead them to living fountains of waters; and doth He not even here below say to us, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink”? The same river of the water of life which makes glad the city of our God above, also waters the garden of the Lord below.

Brethren, we are in the same company below as they enjoy above. Up there they are with Christ, and here He is with us, for He hath said — “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” There is a difference as to the brightness of His presence; but not as to the reality of it. Thus you see we are partakers of the same privileges as the shining

ones within the city gates. The church below is a chamber of the one great house, and the partitions which separates it from the church above is a mere veil of inconceivable thinness. Wherefore should we not do the Lord's will on earth as it is done in heaven?

"But heaven is a place of peace," says one; "there they rest from their labors." Beloved, our estate here is not without its peace and rest. "Alas," cries one, "I find it far otherwise." I know it. But whence come wars and fightings but of our fretfulness and unbelief? "We which have believed do enter into rest." That is not in all respects a fair allegory which represents us as crossing the Jordan of death to enter into Canaan. No, my brethren, believers are in Canaan now; how else could we say that the Canaanite is still in the land? We have entered upon the promised heritage, and we are warring for the full possession of it. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. I for one do not feel like a lone dove flying over waters dark, seeking rest for the sole of her foot. No, I have found my Noah: Jesus has given me rest. There is a difference between the best estate of earth and the glory of heaven, but the rest which every soul may have that learns to conquer its will, is most deep and real. Brethren, having rest already, and being participators of the joy of the Lord, why should we not serve God on earth as they do in heaven?

"But we have not their victory," cries one, "for they are more than conquerors." Yes, and "our warfare is accomplished." We have prophetic testimony to that fact. Moreover, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." In the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord giveth us the victory, and maketh us to triumph in every place. We are warring; but we are of good cheer, for Jesus has overcome the world, and we also overcome by His blood. Ever is this our war-cry, "Victory! Victory!" The Lord will tread Satan under our feet shortly. Why should we not do the Lord's will on earth as it is done in heaven?

Heaven is the place of fellowship with God, and this is a blessed feature of its joy; but in this we are now participators, for "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." The fellowship of the Holy Ghost is with us all; it is our joy and our delight. Having communion with the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are uplifted and

sanctified, and it is becoming that by us the will of the Lord should be done on earth as it is in heaven.

“Up there,” says a brother, “they are all accepted, but here we are in a state of probation.” Did you read that in the Bible? for I never did. A believer is in no state of probation; he has passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation. We are already “accepted in the Beloved,” and that acceptance is so given as never to be reversed. The Redeemer brought us up out of the horrible pit of probation, and He has set our feet on the rock of salvation, and there He has established our goings. “The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger.” Wherefore should we not, as the accepted of the Lord, do His will on earth as it is in heaven?

“Ay,” saith one, “but heaven is the place of perfect service; for his servants shall serve him.” “But is not this the place, in some respects, of a more extensive service still? Are there not many things which perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do? If we had choice of a sphere in which we could serve God with widest range, we should choose not heaven but earth. There are no slums and over-crowded rooms in heaven to which we can go with help, but there are plenty of them here. There are no jungles and regions of malaria where missionaries may prove their unreserved consecration by preaching the gospel at the expense of their lives. In some respects this world has a preference beyond the heavenly state as to the extent of doing the will of God. Oh, that we were better men, and then the saints above might almost envy us! If we did but live as we should live, we might hake ours to lead the van in daily conflict with sin and Satan, and at the same time ours to bring up the rear, battling with the pursuing foe. God help us, since we are honored with so rare a sphere, to do His will on earth as it is done in heaven.

“Ay,” say you, “but heaven is the place of overflowing joy.” Yes, and have you no joy even now? A saint who lives near to God is so truly blessed that he will not be much astonished when he enters heaven. He will be surprised to behold its glories more clearly; but he will have the same reason for delight as he possesses to-day. We live below the same spiritual life which we shall live above, for we are quickened by the same Spirit, are looking to the same Lord, and rejoicing in the same security.

Joy! Do you not know it? Your Lord says, "That my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." You will be larger vessels in heaven, but you will not be fuller; you will be brighter, doubtless, but you will not be cleaner than you are when the Lord has washed you and made you white in His own blood. Do not be impatient to go to heaven. Nay, do not have a wish about it. Set very loose by the things of earth; yet count it a great privilege to have a long life in which to serve the Lord on earth. Our mortal life is but a brief interval between the two eternities, and if we judged unselfishly, and saw the needs of earth, we might almost say, "Give us back the antediluvian periods of human life, that through a chiliad we might serve the Lord in suffering and in reproach, as we cannot do in glory." This life is the vestibule of glory. Array yourselves in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, for this is the court-dress of earth and heaven. Manifest at once the spirit of saints, or else you will never abide with them. Now begin the song which your lips shall carol in Paradise, or else you will never be admitted to the heavenly choirs; none can unite in the music but those who have rehearsed it here below.

**IV.** Lastly, THIS COMPARISON, which I feel I can so feebly bring out, of doing the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven, OUGHT TO BE BORNE OUT BY HOLY DEEDS. Here is the urgency of the missionary enterprise. God's will can never be intelligently done where it is not known; therefore, in the first place, it becomes us as followers of Jesus to see to it that the will of the Lord is made known by heralds of peace sent forth from among us. Why has it not been already published in every land? We cannot blame the great Father, nor impute the fault to the Lord Jesus. The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, nor the mercy of God restrained. Is it not probably true that the selfishness of Christians is the main reason for the slow progress of Christianity? If Christianity is never to spread in the world at a more speedy rate than the present, it will not even keep pace with the growth of the population. If we are going to give to Christ's kingdom no larger a percentage than we have usually given, I suppose it will require about an eternity-and-a-half to convert the world; or, in other words, it will never be done. The progress made is so slow, that it threatens to be like that of the crab, which is always described in the fable as going backward. What do we give, brethren? What do we do? A friend exhorts me to say that the Baptist Missionary Society ought to raise a



million a-year. I have my doubts about that; but he proposes that we should, at least, try to do so for one year. There is nothing like having a high mark to aim at. A million a-year seems hugely too much by the general consent of you all, and yet I am not sure. What amount of property is now held by Baptists? The probable estimate of money now in the hands of baptized believers in the United Kingdom might make us ashamed that a million is not put down at once. Far more than that is spent by a similar number of Englishmen upon strong drink. We do not know how much wealth lies in the custody of God's stewards; and some of them are not likely to let us know until we read it in the paper, and then we shall discover that they died worth so many hundreds of thousands. The world counts men to be worth what they hoard; but in truth they were not worth much, or else they could not have retained so much from the work of the Lord when it was needed for the spread of the gospel. As a denomination we are improving a little. We are improving a little. I was obliged to repeat that sentence, and place a little emphasis in the right place. We may not congratulate ourselves: considerable room for improvement yet remains: the income of the Society might be doubled and no one oppressed in the process. It is not for us to say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven: but, Lord Thou hast many ways and means of accomplishing that will; I pray Thee do it, but let me not be asked to help on the work." No, when I utter this prayer, if I am sincere I shall be searching my stores to see what I can give to make known the truth. I shall be enquiring whether I cannot personally speak the saving word. I shall not decline to give because the times are very hard, neither shall I fail to speak because I am of a retiring disposition. An opportunity is a golden gift. Now, do not offer the prayer of the text if you do not mean it. Better omit the petition than play the hypocrite with it. You who fail to support missions when it is in your power to do so should never say, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," but leave out that petition for fear of mocking God.

Our text, dear friends, leads me to say that as God's will must be known that it may be done, it must be God's will that we should make it known; because God is love, and the law under which He has placed us is that we love. What love of God dwelleth in that man who denies to a benighted heathen that light without which he will be lost? Love is a grand word to

talk of, but it is nobler as a principle to be obeyed. Can there be love of God in that man's heart who will not help to send the gospel to those who are without it? We want to bless the world; we have a thousand schemes by which to bless it, but if ever God's will is done in earth as it is done in heaven it will be an unmixed and comprehensive blessing. Join the Peace Society by all means, and be forgiving and peaceable yourself; but there is no way of establishing peace on the earth except by God's will being done in it, and that can only be done through the renewing of men's hearts by the gospel of Jesus Christ. By all manner of means let us endeavor so to control politics, as Christian men, that oppression shall not remain in the earth; but, after all, there will be oppression unless the gospel is spread. This is the one balm for all earth's wounds. They will bleed still until the Christ shall come to bind them up. Oh, let us then, since this is the best thing that can be, show our love to God and man by spreading His saving truth.

The text says, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Suppose any one of you had come from heaven. It is but a supposition; but let it stand for a minute: suppose that a man here has come fresh from heaven. Some would be curious to see what his bodily form would be like. They would expect to be dazzled by the radiance of his countenance. However, we will let that pass. We want to see how he would live. Coming newly from heaven, how would he act? Oh, sirs, if he came here to do the same as all men do on earth, only after a heavenly sort, what a father he would be, what a husband, what a brother, what a friend! I would sit down and let him preach this morning, most assuredly; and when he had done preaching, I would go home with him, and have a chat. I should be very careful to observe what he would do with his substance. His first thought would be, if he had a shilling, to lay it out for God's glory. "But," says one, "I have to go to shop with my shilling." Be it so, but when you go say, "Oh! Lord, help me to lay it out to Thy glory." There should be as much piety in buying your necessities as in going to a place of worship. I do not think this man coming fresh from heaven would say, "I must have this luxury; I must have this goodly raiment; I must have this grand house." But he would say, "How much can I save for the God of heaven? How much can I invest in the country I came from?" I am sure he would be pinching and screwing to save money to serve God with; and he himself, as he went

about the streets, and mingled with ungodly men and women, would be sure to find out ways of getting at their consciences and hearts; he would be always trying to bring others to the felicity he had enjoyed. Think that over, and live so — so as he did who really did come down from heaven. For after all, the best rule of life is, what would Jesus do if He were here to-day, and the world still lying in the wicked one? If Jesus were in your business, if He had your money, how would He spend it? For that is how you out to spend it. Now think, my brother, you will be in heaven very soon. Since last year a great number have gone home: before next year many more will have ascended to glory. Sitting up in those celestial seats, how shall we wish that we had lived below? It will not give any man in heaven even a moment's joy to think that he gratified himself while here. It will give him no reflections suitable to the place to remember how much he amassed, how much he left behind to be quarrelled over after he was gone; he will say to himself, "I wish I had saved more of my capital by sending it on before me, for what I saved on earth was lost, but what I spent for God was really laid up where thieves do not break through and steal."

Oh, brothers, let us live as we shall wish we had lived when life is over; let us fashion a life which will bear the light eternal. Is it life to live otherwise? Is it not a sort of fainting fit, a coma, out of which life may not quite have gone, but all that is worth calling life has oozed away? Unless we are striving mightily to honor Jesus, and bring home His banished, we are dead while we live. Let us aim at a life which will outlast the fires which shall try every man's work.


If I may have moved any person here to resolve, "I will so live," I have not spoken in vain. I have at least stirred myself with the intense desire to cast off the mere outsides and husks of life, and to ripen the real kernel of my being. Thy will by me be done on earth, as yet, my Lord, I hope to do it in the skies. May I begin here a life worthy to be perpetuated in eternity. God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

# THOUGH HE WERE DEAD

## SERMON NO. 1799

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
SEPTEMBER 14TH, 1884,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?” —  John 11:24-26.

MARTHA is a very accurate type of a class of anxious believers. They do believe truly, but not with such confidence as to lay aside their care. They do not distrust the Lord, or question the truth of what He says, yet they puzzle their brain about “How shall this thing be?” and so they miss the major part of the present comfort which the word of the Lord would minister to their hearts if they received it more simply. How? and why? belong unto the Lord. It is His business to arrange matters so as to fulfill His own promises. If we would sit at our Lord’s feet with Mary, and consider what He has promised, we should choose a better part than if we ran about with Martha, crying, “How can these things be?”

Martha, you see, in this case, when the Lord Jesus Christ told her that her brother would rise again, replied, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” She was a type, I say, of certain anxious believers, for she set a practical bound to the Savior’s words. “Of course there will be a resurrection, and then my brother will rise with the rest.” She concluded that the Savior could not mean anything beyond that. The first meaning and the commonest meaning that suggests itself to her must be what Jesus means. Is not that the way with many of us? We had a statesman once, and a good man too, who loved reform; but whenever he

had accomplished a little progress, he considered that all was done. We called him at last "Finality John," for he was always coming to an ultimatum, and taking for his motto "Rest, and be thankful." Into that style Christian people too frequently drop with regard to the promises of God. We limit the Holy one of Israel as to the meaning of His words. Of course they mean so much, but we cannot allow that they intend more. It were well if the spirit of progress would enter into our faith, so that we felt within our souls that we had never beheld the innermost glory of the Lord's words of grace. We often wonder that the disciples put such poor meanings upon our Lord's words, but I fear we are almost as far off as they were from fully comprehending all His gracious teachings. Are we not still as little children, making little out of great words? Have we grasped as yet a tithe of our Lord's full meaning, in many of His sayings of love? When He is talking of bright and sparkling gems of benediction, we are thinking of common pebble-stones in the brook of mercy; when He speaketh of stars and heavenly crowns, we think of sparks and childish coronals of fading flowers. Oh that we could but have our intellect cleared; better still, could have our understanding expanded, or, best of all, our faith increased, so as to reach to the height of our Lord's great arguments of love!

Martha also had another fault in which she was very like ourselves: she laid the words of Jesus on the shelf, as things so trite and sure that they were of small practical importance. "Thy brother shall rise again." Now, if she had possessed faith enough, she might truthfully have said, "Lord, I thank Thee for that word! I expect within a short space to see him sitting at the table with Thee. I put the best meaning possible upon Thy words, for I know that Thou art always better than I can think Thee to be; and therefore I expect to see my beloved Lazarus walk home from the sepulcher before the sun sets again." But no, she lays the truth aside as a matter past all dispute, and says, "I know that my brother shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." A great many precious truths are laid up by us like the old hulks in the Medway, never to see service any more, or like aged pensioners at Chelsea, as relics of the past. We say "Yes, quite true, we fully believe that doctrine." Somehow it is almost as bad to lay up a doctrine in lavender as it is to throw it out of the window. When you so believe a truth as to put it to bed and smother it with the bolster of

neglect, it is much the same as if you did not believe it at all. An official belief is very much akin to infidelity. Some persons never question a doctrine: that is not their line of temptation; they accept the gospel as true, but then they never expect to see its promises practically carried out; it is a proper thing to believe, but by no means a prominent, practical factor in actual life. It is true but it is mysterious, misty, mythical, far removed from the realm of practical common sense. We do with the promises often as a poor old couple did with a precious document, which might have cheered their old age had they used it according to its real value. A gentleman stepping into a poor woman's house saw framed and glazed upon the wall a French note for a thousand francs. He said to the old folks, "How came you by this?" They informed him that a poor French soldier had been taken in by them and nursed until he died, and he had given them that little picture when he was dying as a memorial of him. They thought it such a pretty souvenir that they had framed it, and there it was adorning the cottage wall. They were greatly surprised when they were told that it was worth a sum which would be quite a little fortune for them if they would but turn it into money. Are we not equally unpractical with far more precious things? Have you not certain of the words of your great Lord framed and glazed in your hearts, and do you not say to yourselves, "They are so sweet and precious"? and yet you have never turned them into actual blessing — never used them in the hour of need. You have done as Martha did when she took the words, "Thy brother shall rise again," and put round about them this handsome frame, "in the resurrection at the last day." Oh that we had grace to turn God's bullion of gospel into current coin, and use them as our present spending money.

Moreover, Martha made another blunder, and that was setting the promise in the remote distance. This is a common folly, this distancing the promises of the Most High. "In the resurrection at the last day" — no doubt she thought it a very long way off, and therefore she did not get much comfort out of it. Telescopes are meant to bring objects near to the eye, but I have known people use the mental telescope in the wrong way: they always put the big end of it to their eye, and then the glass sends the object further away. Her brother was to be raised that very day: she might so have understood the Savior, but instead of it she looked at His words through the wrong end of the glass, and said, "I know that he will rise

again in the resurrection at the last day.” Brethren, do not refuse the present blessing. Death and heaven, or the advent and the glory, are at your doors. A little while and He that will come shall come, and will not tarry. Think not that the Lord is slack concerning His promise. Do not say in your heart, “My Lord delayeth His coming”; or dream that His words of love are only for the dim future. In the ages to come marvels shall be revealed, but even the present hour is bejewelled with loving-kindness. To-day the Lord has rest, and peace, and joy to give to you. Lose not these treasures by unbelief.

Martha also appears to me to have made the promise unreal and impersonal. “Thy brother shall rise again”; to have realized that would have been a great comfort to her, but she mixes Lazarus up with all the rest of the dead. “Yes, he will rise in the resurrection at the last day; when thousands of millions shall be rising from their graves, no doubt Lazarus will rise with the rest.” That is the way with us; we take the promise and say, “This is true to all the children of God.” If so it is true to us; but we miss that point. What a blessing God has bestowed upon the covenanted people! Yes, and you are one of them; but you shake your head, as if the word was not for you. It is a fine feast, and yet you are hungry; it is a full and flowing stream, but you remain thirsty. Why is this? Somehow the generality of your apprehension misses the sweetness which comes of personal appropriation. There is such a thing as speaking of the promises in a magnificent style, and yet being in deep spiritual poverty; as if a man should boast of the wealth of old England, and the vast amount of treasure in the Bank, while he does not possess a penny wherewith to bless himself. In your case you know it is your own fault that you are poor and miserable, for if you would but exercise an appropriating faith you might possess a boundless heritage. If you are a child of God all things are yours, and you may help yourself. If you are hungry at this banquet it is for want of faith: if you are thirsty by the brink of this river it is because you do not stoop down and drink. Behold, God is your portion: the Father is your shepherd, the Son of God is your food, and the Spirit of God is your comforter. Rejoice and be glad, and grasp with the firm hand of a personal faith that royal boon which Jesus sets before you in His promises.

I beg you to observe how the Lord Jesus Christ in great wisdom dealt with Martha. In the first place, He did not grow angry with her. There is not a

trace of petulance in His speech. He did not say to her, "Martha, I am ashamed of you that you should have such low thoughts of me." She thought that she was honoring Jesus when she said, — "I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." Her idea of Jesus was that He was a great prophet Who would ask of God and obtain answers to His prayers; she has not grasped the truth of His own personal power to give and sustain life. But the Savior did not say, "Martha, these are low and grovelling ideas of your Lord and Savior." He did not chide her, though she lacked wisdom, — wisdom which she ought to have possessed. I do not think God's people learn much by being scolded; it is not the habit of the great Lord to scold His disciples, and therefore they do not take it well when His servants take upon themselves to rate them. If ever you meet with one of the Lord's own who falls far short of the true ideal of the gospel, do not bluster and upbraid. Who taught you what you know? He that has taught you did it of His infinite love and grace and pity, and He was very tender with you, for you were doltish enough; therefore be tender with others, and give them line upon line, even as your Lord was gentle towards you. It ill becomes a servant to lose patience where his Master shows so much.

The Lord Jesus, with gentle spirit, proceeded to teach her more of the things concerning Himself. More of Jesus! More of Jesus! That is the sovereign cure for our faults. He revealed Himself to her, that in Him she might behold reasons for a clearer hope and a more substantial faith. How sweetly fell those words upon her ear: "I am the resurrection and the life"! Not "I can get resurrection by my prayers," but "I am, myself, the resurrection." God's people need to know more of what Jesus is, more of the fullness which it has pleased the Father to place in Him. Some of them know quite enough of what they are themselves, and they will break their hearts if they go on reading much longer in that black-letter book: they need, I say, to rest their eyes upon the person of their Lord, and to spy out all the riches of grace which lie hidden in Him; then they will pluck up courage, and look forward with surer expectancy. When our Lord said, "I am the resurrection and the life," He indicated to Martha that resurrection and life were not gifts which He must seek, nor even boons which He must create; but that He Himself was the resurrection and the life: these things were wherever He was. He was the author, and giver, and maintainer of



life, and that life was Himself. He would have her to know that He was Himself precisely what she wanted for her brother. She did know a little of the Lord's power, for she said, "If Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," which being very kindly interpreted might mean, "Lord, Thou art the life." "Ah, but," saith Jesus, "you must also learn that I am the resurrection! You already admit that if I had been here Lazarus would not have died; I would have you further learn that I being here your brother shall live though he has died; and that when I am with my people none of them shall die for ever, for I am to them the resurrection and the life." Poor Martha was looking up into the sky for life, or gazing down into the deeps for resurrection, when the Resurrection and the Life stood before her, smiling upon her, and cheering her heavy heart. She had thought of what Jesus might have done if He had been there before; now let her know what He is at the present moment.

Thus I have introduced the text to you, and I pray God the Holy Spirit to bless these prefatory observations; for if we learn only these first lessons we shall not have been here in vain. Let us construe promises in their largest sense, let us regard them as real, and set them down as facts. Let us look to the Promisor, even to Jesus the Lord, and not so much to the difficulties which surround the accomplishment of the promise. In beginning the divine life let us look to Jesus, and in afterwards running the heavenly race let us still be looking unto Jesus, till we see in Him our all in all. When both eyes look on Jesus we are in the light; but when we have one eye for Him, and one eye for self, all is darkness. Oh, to see Him with all our soul's eyes!

Now, I am going to speak as I am helped of the Spirit; and I shall proceed thus — first, by asking you to view the text as a stream of comfort to Martha and other bereaved persons; and, secondly, to view it as a great deep of comfort to all believers.

**I.** First, I long for you to VIEW THE TEXT AS A STREAM OF COMFORT TO MARTHA AND OTHER BEREAVED PERSONS.

Observe, in the beginning, that the presence of Jesus Christ means life and resurrection. It meant that to Lazarus. If Jesus comes to Lazarus, Lazarus must live. Had Martha taken the Savior's words literally, as she should

have done, as I have already told you, she would have had immediate comfort from them; and the Savior intended her to understand them in that sense. He virtually says, "I am to Lazarus the Power that can make him live again; and I am the Power that can keep him in life. Yea, I am the resurrection and the life." A statement so understood would have been very comfortable to her. Nothing could have been more so. It would there and then have abolished death so far as her brother was concerned. Somebody says, "But I do not see that this is any comfort to us, for if Jesus be here, yet it is only a spiritual presence, and we cannot expect to see our dear mother, or child, or husband raised from the dead thereby." I answer that our Lord Jesus is able at this moment to give us back our departed ones, for He is still the resurrection and the life. But let me ask you whether you really wish that Jesus would raise your departed ones from the dead. You say at first, "Of course I do wish it"; but I would ask you to reconsider that decision; for I believe that upon further thought you will say, "No, I could not wish it." Do you really desire to see your glorified husband sent back again to this world of care and pain? Would you have your father or mother deprived of the glories which they are now enjoying in order that they might help you in the struggles of this mortal life? Would you discrown the saints? You are not so cruel. That dear child, would you have it back from among the angels, and from the inner glory, to come here and suffer again? You would not have it so. And to my mind it is a comfort to you, or should be, that it is not within your power to have it so; because you might be tempted in some selfish moment to accept the doubtful boon. Lazarus could return, and fit into his place again, but scarcely one in ten thousand could do so. There would be serious drawbacks in the return of those whom we have loved best. Do you cry, "Give back my father! Give me back my friend"? You know not what you ask. It might be a cause of regret to you as long as they lingered here, for you would each morning think to yourself, "Beloved one, I have brought you out of heaven by my wish. I have robbed you of infinite felicity to gratify myself." For my own part, I had rather that the Lord Jesus should keep the keys of death than that He should lend them to me. It would be too dreadful a privilege to be empowered to rob heaven of the perfected merely to give pleasure to imperfect ones below. Jesus would raise them now if He knew it to be right; I do not wish to take the government from His shoulder. It is more comfortable to me to think that Jesus Christ could

give them back to me, and would if it were for His glory and my good. My dear ones that lie asleep could be awakened in an instant if the Master thought it best; but it would not be best, and therefore even I would hold His skirt, and say, "Tread softly, Master! Do not arouse them! I shall go to them, but they shall not return to me. It is not my wish they should return: it is better that they should be with Thee where Thou art, to behold Thy glory." It does not seem to me, then, dear friend, that you are one whit behind Martha: and you ought to be comforted while Jesus says to you, "I am even now the resurrection and the life."

Furthermore, here is comfort which we may each one safely take, namely, that when Jesus comes the dead shall live. The Revised Version has it, "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live." We do not know when our Lord will descend from heaven, but we do know the message of the angel, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." The Lord will come; we may not question the certainty of His appearing. When He cometh, all His redeemed shall live with Him. The trump of the archangel shall startle the happy sleepers, and they shall wake to put on their beauteous array; the body transformed and made like unto Christ's glorious body shall be once more wrapt about them as the vesture of their perfected and emancipated spirits. Then our brother shall rise again, and all our dear ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus the Lord will bring with Him. This is the glorious hope of the church, wherein we see the death of death, and the destruction of the grave. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Then we are also told that when Jesus comes, living believers shall not die. After the coming of Christ there shall be no more death for His people. What does Paul say? "Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed." Did I see a little school-girl put up her finger? Did I hear her say, "Please, sir, you made a mistake." So I did; I made it on purpose. Paul did not say, "We shall not all die," for the Lord had already said, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die"; Paul would not say that any of us should die, but he used his Master's own term, and said, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." When the Lord comes there will be no more death; we who are alive and remain (as some of us may be — we cannot tell) will undergo a sudden transformation —

for flesh and blood, as they are, cannot inherit the kingdom of God — and by that transformation our bodies shall be made meet to be “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” There shall be no more death then. Here, then, we have two sacred handkerchiefs with which to wipe the eyes of mourners: when Christ cometh the dead shall live; when Christ cometh those that live shall never die. Like Enoch, or Elias, we shall pass into the glory state without wading through the black stream, while those who have already forded it shall prove to have been no losers thereby. All this is in connection with Jesus. Resurrection with Jesus is resurrection indeed. Life in Jesus is life indeed. It endears to us resurrection, glory, eternal life, and ultimate perfection, when we see them all coming to us in Jesus. He is the golden pot which hath this manna, the rod which beareth these almonds, the life whereby we live.

But further, I have not made you drink deep enough of this stream yet, — I think our Savior meant that even now His dead are alive. “He that believeth on me, though he die, but yet they live. They are not in the grave, they are for ever with the Lord. They are not unconscious, they are with their Lord in Paradise. Death cannot kill a believer, it can only usher him into a freer form of life. Because Jesus lives, His people live. God is not the God of the dead but of the living: those who have departed have not perished. We laid the precious body in the cemetery, and we set up stones at the head and foot; but we might engrave on them the Lord’s words, “She is not dead, but sleepeth.” True, and unbelieving generation may laugh us to scorn, but we scorn their laughing.

Again, even now His living do not die. There is an essential difference between the decease of the godly and the death of the ungodly. Death comes to the ungodly man as a penal infliction, but to the righteous as a summons to his Father’s palace: to the sinner it is an execution, to the saint an undressing. Death to the wicked is the King of terrors: death to the saint is the end of terrors, the commencement of glory. To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing. Death is ours; it is set down in the list of our possessions among the “all things”, and it follows life in the list as if it were an equal favor. No longer is it death to die. The name remains, but the thing itself is changed. Wherefore, then, are we in bondage through fear of death? Why do we dread the process which gives us liberty? I am told that persons who in the cruel ages had lain in prison for years suffered much

more in the moment of the knocking off of their fetters than they had endured for months in wearing the hard iron; and yet I suppose that no man languishing in a dungeon would have been unwilling to stretch out his arm or leg, that the heavy chains might be beaten off by the smith. We should all be content to endure that little inconvenience to obtain lasting liberty. Now, such is death — the knocking off of the fetters; yet the iron may never seem to be so truly iron as when that last liberating blow of grace is about to fall. Let us not mind the harsh grating of the key as it turns in the lock; if we understand it aright it will be as music to our ears. Imagine that your last hour is come! The key turns with pain for a moment; but, lo, the bolt is shot! The iron gate is open! The spirit is free! Glory be unto the Lord for ever and ever!

**II.** I leave the text now as a stream of comfort for the bereaved, for I wish you to VIEW IT AS A GREAT DEEP OF COMFORT FOR ALL BELIEVERS. I cannot fathom it, any more than I could measure the abyss, but I can invite you to survey it by the help of the Holy Ghost.

Methinks, first, this text plainly teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ is the life of His people. We are dead by nature, and you can never produce life out of death: the essential elements are wanting. Should a spark be lingering among the ashes, you may yet fan it to a flame; but from human nature the last spark of heavenly life is gone, and it is vain to seek for life among the dead. The life of every Christian is Christ. He is the beginning of life, being the Resurrection: when He comes to us we live. Regeneration is the result of contact with Christ: we are begotten again unto living hope by His resurrection from the dead. The life of the Christian in its commencement is in Christ alone; not a fragment of it is from himself, and the continuance of that life is equally the same; Jesus is not only the resurrection to begin with, but the life to go on with. “I have life in myself,” saith one. I answer — not otherwise than as you are one with Christ: your spiritual life in every breath it draws is in Christ. If you are regarded for a moment as separated from Christ, you are cast forth as a branch and are withered. A member severed from the head is dead flesh and no more. In union to Christ is your life. Oh that our hearers would understand this! I see a poor sinner look into himself, and look again, and then cry, “I cannot see any life within!” Of course you cannot; you have no life of your own. “Alas,” cries a Christian, “I cannot find anything

within to feed my soul with!" Do you expect to feed upon yourself? Must not Israel look up for the manna? Did one of all the tribes find it in his own bosom? To look to self is to turn to a broken cistern which can hold no water. I tell you, you must learn that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Harken to that great "I" — that infinite EGO! This must cover over and swallow up your little ego. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." What are you? Less than nothing, and vanity; but over all springs up that divine, all-sufficient personality, "I am the resurrection and the life." Take the two first words together, and they seem to me to have a wondrous majesty about them — "I AM!" Here is Self-Existence. Life in Himself! Even as the Mediator, the Lord Jesus tells us that it is given Him to have life in Himself, even as the Father hath life in Himself (~~John~~ John 5:26). I am fills the yawning mouth of the sepulcher. He that liveth and was dead and is alive for evermore, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, declares, "I am the resurrection and the life." If, then, I want to live unto God, I must have Christ; and if I desire to continue to live unto God I must continue to have Christ; and if I aspire to have that life developed to the utmost fullness of which it is capable, I must find it all in Christ. He has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly. Anything that is beyond the circle of Christ is death. If I conjure up an experience over which I foolishly dote, which puffs me up as so perfect that I need not come to Christ now as a poor empty-handed sinner, I have entered into the realm of death, I have introduced into my soul a damning leaven. Away with it! Away with it! Everything of life is put into this golden casket of Christ Jesus: all else is death. We have not a breath of life anywhere but in Jesus, Who ever liveth to give life. He saith, "Because I live, ye shall live also," and this is true. We live not for any other reason — not because of anything in us or connected with us, but only because of Jesus. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Now, further, in this great deep to which we would conduct you, faith is the only channel by which we can draw from Jesus our life. "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me": that is it. He does not say, "He that loves me," though love is a bright grace, and very sweet to God: He does not say, "He that serves me," though every one that believes in Christ will endeavor to serve Him: but it is not put so: He does

not even say, "He that imitates me," though every one that believes in Christ must and will imitate Him; but it is put, "He that believeth in me." Why is that? Why doth the Lord so continually make faith to be the only link between Himself and the soul? I take it, because faith is a grace which arrogates nothing to itself, and has not operation apart from Jesus, to Whom it unites us. You want to conduct the electric fluid, and, in order to this, you find a metal which will not create any action of its own; if it did so, it would disturb the current which you wish to send along it. If it set up an action of its own, how would you know the difference between what came of the metal and what came of the battery? Now, faith is an empty-handed receiver and communicator; it is nothing apart from that upon which it relies, and therefore it is suitable to be a conductor for grace. When an auditorium has to be erected for a speaker in which he may be plainly heard, the essential thing is to get rid of all echo. When you have no echo, then you have a perfect building: faith makes no noise of its own, it allows the Word to speak. Faith cries, "Non nobis Domine! Not unto us! Not unto us! Christ puts His crown on faith's head, exclaiming, "Thy faith hath saved thee;" but faith hastens to ascribe all the glory of salvation to Jesus only. So you see why the Lord selects faith rather than any other grace, because it is a self-forgetting thing. It is best adapted to be the tubing through which the water of life runs, because it will not communicate a flavour of its own, but will just convey the stream purely and simply from Christ to the soul. "He that believeth in me."

Now notice, to the reception of Christ by faith there is no limit. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever" — I am deeply in love with that word "whosoever." It is a splendid word. A person who kept many animals had some great dogs and some little ones, and in his eagerness to let them enter his house freely he had two holes cut in the door, one for the big dogs and another for the little dogs. You may well laugh, for the little dogs could surely have come in wherever there was room for the larger ones. This "whosoever" is the great opening, suitable for sinners of every size. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Has any man a right to believe in Christ? The gospel gives every creature the right to believe in Christ, for we are bidden to preach it to every creature, with this command, "Hear, and your soul shall live." Every man has a right to believe in Christ, because he will be damned if he

does not, and he must have a right to do that which will bring him into condemnation if he does it not. It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," and that makes it clear that I, whoever I may be, as I have a right to endeavor to escape from damnation, have a right to avail myself of the blessed command, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and live." Oh that "whosoever," that hole in the door for the big dog! Do not forget it! Come along with you, and put your trust in Christ. If you can only get linked with Christ you are a living man; if but a finger touches His garment's hem you are made whole. Only the touch of faith, and the virtue flows from Him to you, and He is to you the resurrection and the life.

I desire you to notice that there is no limit to this power. Before I was ill this time, and even since, I have had to deal with such a swarm of despairing sinners, that if I have not pulled them up they have pulled me down. I have been trying to speak very large words for Christ when I have met with those disconsolate ones. I hear one say, "How far can Christ be life to a sinner? I feel myself to be utterly wrong, I am altogether wrong; there is nothing right about me: though I have eyes I cannot see, though I have ears I do not hear; if I have a hand I cannot use it, if I have a foot I cannot run with it — I seem altogether wrong." Yes, but if you believe in Christ, though you were still more wrong — that is to say, though you were dead, which is the wrongest state in which a man's body can be, — though you were dead yet shall you live. You look at the spiritual thermometer, and you say, "How low will the grace of God go? will it descend to summer heat? will it touch the freezing point? will it go to zero?" Yes, it will go below the lowest conceivable point, — lower than any instrument can indicate: it will go below the zero of death. If you believe in Jesus, though you are not only wrong, but dead, yet shall you live.

But, says another, "I feel so weak. I cannot understand, I cannot lay hold of things; I cannot pray. I cannot do anything. All I can do is feebly to trust in Jesus." All right! Though you had gone further than that, and were so weak as to be dead, yet should you live. Though the weakness had turned to a dire paralysis, that left you altogether without strength, yet it is written, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "Oh, Sir," says one, "I am so unfeeling." Mark you, these generally



are the most feeling people in the world. "I am sorry every day because I cannot be sorry for my sin" — that is the way they talk; it is very absurd, but still very real to them. "Oh," cries one, "the earth shook, the sun was darkened, the rocks rent, the very dead came out of their graves at the death of Christ.

*"Of feeling all things show some sign  
But this unfeeling heart of mine."*

Yet if thou believest, unfeeling as thou art, thou livest; for if thou wert gone further than numbness to deadness, yet if thou believest in Him thou shalt live.

But the poor creature fetches a sigh, and cries, "Sir, it is not only that I have no feeling, but I am become objectionable and obnoxious to everybody. I am a weariness to myself and to others. I am sure when I come to tell you my troubles you must wish me at Jericho, or somewhere else far away." Now, I admit that such a thought has occurred to us sometimes when we have been very busy, and some poor soul has grown prosy with rehearsing his seven-times-repeated miseries; but if you were to get more wearisome still, if you were to become so bad that people would as soon see a corpse as see you, yet remember Jesus says, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

"Oh, sir, I have no hope; my case is quite hopeless!" Very well; but if you had got beyond that, so that you were dead, and could not even know you had no hope, yet if you believed in Him you should live. "Oh, but I have tried everything, and there is nothing more for me to attempt. I have read books, I have spoken to Christians, and I am nothing bettered." No doubt it is quite so; but if you had even passed beyond that stage, so that you could not try anything more, yet if you did believe in Jesus you should live. Oh, the blessed power of faith! Nay, rather say the matchless power of Him Who is the resurrection and the life; for though the poor believer were dead, yet shall he live! Glory be to the Lord Who works so wonderfully.

To conclude, if you once do believe in Christ, and come to live, there is this sweet reflection for you, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Our Arminian friends say that you may be a child of God to-

day and a child of the devil to-morrow. Write out that statement, and place at the bottom of it the name “Arminius,” and then put the scrap of paper into the fire: it is the best thing you can do with it, for there is no truth in it. Jesus says, “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” Here is a very literal translation — “And every one who lives and believes on me, in no wise shall die forever.” This is from “The Englishman’s Greek New Testament,” and nothing can be better. The believer may pass through the natural change called death, as far as his body is concerned; but as for his soul it cannot die, for it is written,

“I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish,  
neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

“He that believeth in me hath everlasting life.”

“The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water  
springing up into everlasting life.”

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

These are not “ifs” and “buts,” and faint hopes; but they are dead certainties, nay, living certainties, out of the mouth of the living Lord Himself. You get the life of God in your soul, and you shall never die. “Do you mean that I may do as I like, and live in sin?” No, man, I mean nothing of the sort; what right have you to impute such teaching as that to me? I mean that you shall not love sin and live in it, for that is death; but you shall live unto God. Your likes shall be so radically changed that you shall abhor evil all your days, and long to be holy as God is holy; and you shall be kept from transgression, and shall not go back to wallow in sin. If in some evil hour you back-slide, yet shall you be restored; and the main current of your life shall be from the hour of your regeneration towards God, and holiness, and heaven. The angels that rejoiced over you when you repented made no mistake; they shall go on to rejoice till they welcome you amidst the everlasting songs and Hallelujahs of the blessed at the right hand of God. Believest thou this? Come, poor soul, believest thou this? Who are you? That does not matter, you can get into the “whosoever.” That ark will hold all God’s Noahs. What is any man that he should have the filth of another man’s drains poured into his ear? No, no:

confess to God, but not to man unless you have wronged him, and confession of the wrong is due to him.

“Ah,” saith one, “you don’t know what I am.” No, and I don’t want to know what you are; but if you are so far gone that there seems to be not even a ghost of a shade of a shadow of a hope anywhere about you, yet if you believe in Jesus you shall live. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is worthy to be trusted. Throw yourself upon Him, and He will carry you in His bosom. Cast your whole weight upon His atonement; it will bear the strain. Hang on Him as the vessel hangs on the nail, and seek no other support. Depend upon Christ with all your might just as you now are, and as the Lord liveth you shall live, and as Christ reigneth you shall reign over sin, and as Christ cometh to glory you shall partake of that glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  John 11:1-27.


HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 414, 839, 327.

# THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

SERMON NO. 1801

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1884,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over nine and nine just persons, which need no repentance” —  Luke 15:4-7.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ while he was here below was continually in the pursuit of lost souls. He was seeking lost men and women, and it was for this reason that he went down among them, even among those who were most evidently lost, that he might find them. He took pains to put himself where he could come into communication with them, and he exhibited such kindness toward them that in crowds they drew near to hear him. I dare say it was a queer-looking assembly, a disreputable rabble, which made the Lord Jesus its center. I am not astonished that the Pharisee, when he looked upon the congregation, sneered and said, “He collects around him the pariahs of our community, the wretches who collect taxes for the foreigner of God’s free people; the fallen women of the towns and suchlike riffraff make up his audiences; he, instead of repelling them, receives them, welcomes them, looks upon them as a class to whom he has a peculiar relationship. He even eats with them. Did he not go into the house of

Zaccheus, and the house of Levi, and partake of the feasts which these low people made for him?" We cannot tell you all the Pharisees thought, it might not be edifying to attempt it; but they thought as badly of the Lord as they possibly could because of the company which surrounded him. And so, he deigns in this parable to defend himself — not that he cared much about what they might think, but that they might have no excuse for speaking so bitterly of him. He tells them that he is seeking the lost, and where should he be found but among those whom he is seeking? Should a physician shun the sick? Should a shepherd avoid the lost sheep? Was he not exactly in his right position when there "drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him"?

Our divine Lord defended himself by what is called an *argumentum ad hominem*, an argument to the men themselves; for he said, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not go after that which is lost, until he find it?" No argument tells more powerfully upon people than one which comes close home to their own daily lives, and the Savior put it so. They were silenced, if they were not convinced. It was a peculiarly strong argument, because in their case it was only a sheep that they would go after, but in his case it was something infinitely more precious than all the flocks of sheep that ever fed on Sharon or Carmel, for it was the souls of human beings which he sought to save. The argument had in it not only the point of peculiar adaptation, but a force at the back of it unusually powerful for driving it home upon every honest mind. It may be opened out in this fashion — "If you would each one of you go after a lost sheep, and follow in its track until you found it, how much more may I go after lost souls, and follow them in all their wanderings until I can rescue them?" The going after the sheep is a part of the parable which our Lord meant them to observe: the shepherd pursues a route which he would never think of pursuing if it were only for his own pleasure; his way is not selected for his own ends, but for the sake of the stray sheep. He takes a track up hill and down dale, far into a desert, or into some dark wood, simply because the sheep has gone that way, and he must follow it until he finds it. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a matter of taste and pleasure, would never have been found among the publicans and sinners, nor among any of our guilty race; if he had consulted his own ease and comfort he would have consorted only with pure and holy angels, and

the great Father above. But he was not thinking of himself, his heart was set upon the lost ones, and therefore he went where the lost sheep were “for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” The more steadily you look at this parable the more clearly you will see that our Lord’s answer was complete. We need not this morning regard it exclusively as an answer to Pharisees, but we may look at it as an instruction to ourselves, for it is quite as complete in that direction. May the good Spirit instruct us as we muse upon it.

**I.** In the first place, I call attention to this observation: THE ONE SUBJECT OF THOUGHT to the man who had lost his sheep. This sets forth to us the one thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, when he sees a person lost to holiness and happiness by wandering into sin.


The shepherd, on looking over his little flock of one hundred, can only count ninety-and-nine. He counts them again, and he notices that a certain one has gone, it may be a white-faced sheep with a black mark on its foot. He knows all about it, for “the Lord knoweth them that are his.” The shepherd has a photograph of the wanderer in his mind’s eye, and now he thinks but little of the ninety and nine who are feeding in the pastures of the wilderness, but his mind is in a ferment about the one lost sheep. This one idea possesses him: “a sheep is lost!” This agitates his mind more and more — “a sheep is lost.” It masters his every faculty. He cannot eat bread; he cannot return to his home; he cannot rest while one sheep is lost.

To a tender heart a lost sheep is a painful subject of thought. It is a sheep, and therefore utterly defenseless now that it has left its defender. If the wolf should spy it out, or the lion or the bear should come across its track, it would be torn in pieces in an instant. Thus the shepherd asks his heart the question — “What will become of my sheep? Perhaps at this very moment a lion may be ready to spring upon it, and, if so, it cannot help itself!” A sheep is not prepared for fight, and even for flight it has not the swiftness of its enemy. That makes its compassionate owner the more sad as he thinks again — “A sheep is lost, it is in great danger of a cruel death.” A sheep is of all creatures the most senseless. If we have lost a dog, it may find its way home again; possibly a horse might return to its master’s stable; but a sheep will wander on and on, in endless mazes lost. It is too foolish a thing to think of returning to the place of safety. A lost

sheep is lost indeed in countries where lands lie unenclosed and the plains are boundless. That fact still seems to ring in the man's soul — "A sheep is lost, and it will not return, for it is a foolish thing. Where may it not have gone by this time? Weary and worn, it may be fainting; it may be far away from green pastures, and be ready to perish with hunger among the bare rocks or upon the arid sand." A sheep is shiftless; it knows nothing about providing for itself. The camel can scent water from afar, and a vulture can spy its food from an enormous distance, but the sheep can find nothing for itself. Of all wretched creatures a lost sheep is one of the worst. If anybody had stepped up to the shepherd just then and said, "Good sir, what aileth you? You seem in great concern." He would have replied, "And well I may be, for a sheep is lost." "It is only one, sir, and I see you have ninety-and-nine left." "Do you call it nothing to lose one? You are no shepherd yourself, or you would not trifle so. Why, I seem to forget these ninety-and-nine that are all safe, and my mind only remembers that one which is lost."

What is it which makes the Great Shepherd lay so much to his heart the loss of one of his flock? What is it that makes him agitated as he reflects upon that supposition — "if he lose one of them"?

I think it is, first, because of his property in it. The parable does not speak so much of a hired shepherd, but of a shepherd proprietor. "What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them." Jesus, in another place, speaks of the hireling, whose own the sheep are not, and therefore he flees when the wolf comes. It is the shepherd proprietor who lays down his life for the sheep. It is not a sheep alone, and a lost sheep, but it is one of his own lost sheep that this man cares for. This parable is not written about lost humanity in the bulk — it may be so used if you please — but in its first sense it is written about Christ's own sheep — as also is the second parable concerning the woman's own money, and the third, not concerning any prodigal youth, but the father's own son. Jesus has his own sheep, and some of them are lost. Yes, they were all once in the same condition, for "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." The parable refers to the unconverted, whom Jesus has redeemed with his most precious blood, and whom he has undertaken to seek and to save. These are those other sheep whom also he must bring in. "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I, will both search my

sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." The sheep of Christ are his long before they know it — his even when they wander; when they are brought into the fold by the effectual working of his grace they become manifestly what they were in covenant from of old. The sheep are Christ's, first, because he chose them from before the foundations of the world — "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." His, next, because the Father gave them to him. How he dwells upon that fact in his great prayer in  John 17:

"Thine they were, and thou gavest them me"; "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am."

We are the Lord's own flock, furthermore, by his purchase of us. He says: "I lay down my life for the sheep." It is nearly nineteen centuries since he paid the ransom price, and bought us to be his own and we shall be his, for that purchase money was not paid in vain. And so the Savior looks upon his hands, and sees the marks of his purchase; he looks upon his side, and sees the token of the effectual redemption of his own elect to himself by the pouring out of his own heart's blood before the living God. This thought, therefore, presses upon him, "One of my sheep is lost." It is a wonderful supposition that is contained in this parable — "if he lose one of them." What! lose one whom he loved before ever the earth was? It may wander for a time, but he will not have it lost forever, that he cannot bear. What! lose one whom his Father gave him to be his own? Lose one whom he has bought with his own life? He will not endure the thought. That word — "if he lose one of them" sets his soul on fire. It shall not be. You know how much the Lord has valued each one of his chosen, laying down his life for his redemption. You know how dearly he loves every one of his people. It is no new passion with him, neither can it grow old. He has loved his own and must love them to the end. From eternity that love has endured already, and it must continue throughout the ages, for he changes not. Will he lose one of those so dearly loved? Never; never. He has eternal possession of them by a covenant of salt, wherein the Father has given them to him. This it is that in great measure stirs his soul so that he thinks of nothing but this fact — One of My sheep is lost.



Secondly, he has yet another reason for this all-absorbing thought, namely, his great compassion for his lost sheep. The wandering of a soul causes Jesus deep sorrow; he cannot bear the thought of its perishing. Such is the love and tenderness of his heart that he cannot bear that one of his own should be in jeopardy. He can take no rest as long as a soul for whom he shed his blood still abides under the dominion of Satan and under the power of sin; therefore the Great Shepherd neither night nor day forgets his sheep. he must save his flock, and he is constrained until it be accomplished.

He has a deep sympathy with each stray heart. He knows the sorrow that sin brings, the deep pollution and the terrible wounding that comes of transgression, even at the time, and the sore heart and the broken spirit that will come of it before long. So the sympathetic Savior grieves over each lost sheep, for he knows the misery which lies in the fact of being lost. If you have ever been in a house with a mother and father, and daughters and sons, when a little child has been lost, you will never forget the agitation of each member of the household. See the father as he goes to the police station, and calls at every likely house, for he must find his child or break his heart. See the deep oppression and bitter anguish of the mother; she is like one distracted until she has news of her darling. You now begin to understand what Jesus feels for one whom he loves, who is graven on the palms of his hands, whom he looked upon in the glass of his foreknowledge when he was bleeding his life away upon the tree; he has no rest in his spirit until his beloved is found. He has compassion like a God, and that does transcend all the compassion of parents or of brothers — the compassion of an infinite heart brimming over with an ocean of love. This one thought moves the pity of the Lord — “if he lose one of them.”

Moreover, the man in the parable had a third relation to the sheep, which made him possessed with the one thought of its being lost — he was a shepherd to it. It was his own sheep, and he had therefore for that very reason become its shepherd, and he says to himself, “If I lose that one of them my shepherd work will be ill-done.” What dishonor it would be to a shepherd to lose one of his sheep! Either it must be for want of power to keep it, or want of will, or want of watchfulness; but none of these can appertain to the Chief Shepherd. Our Lord Jesus Christ will never have it said of him that he has lost one of his people, for he glories in having

preserved them all. "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." The Devil shall never say that Jesus suffered one whom his Father gave him to perish. His work of love cannot in any degree become a failure. His death in vain! No, not in jot or tittle. I can imagine, if it were possible, that the Son of God should live in vain, but to die in vain! It shall never be. The purpose that he meant to achieve by his passion and death he shall achieve, for he is the Eternal, the Infinite, the Omnipotent, and who shall stay his hand, or baffle his design? He will not have it. "If he lose one of them," says the passage; imagine the consequence. What scorn would come from Satan! What derision would he pour upon the shepherd! How hell would ring with the news, "He hath lost one of them." Suppose it to be the feeblest; then would they cry, "He could keep the strong, who could keep themselves." Suppose it to be the strongest; then would they cry, "He could not even keep one of the mightiest of them, but must let him perish." This is good argument, for Moses pleaded with God, "What will the Egyptians say?" It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones shall perish, neither is it for the glory of Christ that one of his own sheep should be eternally lost.

You see the reason for the Lord's heart being filled with one burning thought; for first, the sheep is his own; next, he is full of compassion; and then again, it is his office to shepherd the flock.

All this while the sheep is not thinking about the shepherd, or caring for him in the least degree. Some of you are not thinking at all about the Lord Jesus. You have no wish nor will to seek after him! What folly! Oh, the pity of it, that the great heart above should be yearning over you today, and should fall to rest because you are in peril, and you, who will be the greater loser, for you will lose your own soul, are sporting with sin, and making yourself merry with destruction. Ah, me! how far you have wandered! How hopeless would your case be if there were not an Almighty Shepherd to think upon you.

**II.** Now we come to the second point, and observe THE ONE OBJECT OF SEARCH. This sheep lies on the shepherd's heart, and he must at once set

out to look for it. He leaves the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness and goes after that which is lost until he find it.

Observe here that it is a definite search. The shepherd goes after the sheep, and after nothing else, and he has the one particular sheep in his mind's eye. I should have imagined, from the way in which I have seen this text handled, that Christ, the shepherd, went down into the wilderness to catch anybody's sheep he could find. Many were running about, and he did not own any one of them more than another, but was content to pick up the one that he could first lay hold upon or rather, that which first came running after him. Not so is the case depicted in the parable. It is his own sheep that he is seeking, and he goes distinctly after that one. It is his sheep which was lost — a well-known sheep, well known not only to himself, but even to his friends and neighbors — for he speaks to them as if it was perfectly understood which sheep it was that he went to save. Jesus knows all about his redeemed, and he goes definitely after such and such a soul. When I am preaching in the name of the Lord, I delight to think that I am sent to individuals with the message of mercy. I am not going to draw the bow at a venture at all, but when the Divine hands are put on mine to draw the bow, the Lord takes such aim that no arrow misses its mark — into the very center of the heart the Word finds its way, for Jesus goes not forth at a peradventure in his dealings with men and women. He subdues the will and conquers the heart, making his people willing in the day of his power. He calls individuals and they come. He says, "Mary," and the response is, "Rabboni." I say, the man in the parable sought out a distinct individual, and rested not until he found it; so does the Lord Jesus in the movements of his love go forth at no uncertainty. He does not grope about to catch whom he may, as if he played at blindman's buff with salvation, but he seeks and saves the one out of his own sheep which he has his eye upon in its wanderings. Jesus knows what he means to do, and he will perform it to the glory of the Father.

Note that this is an all-absorbing search. The shepherd is thinking of nothing but his own lost sheep. The ninety-and-nine are left in safety, but they are left. When we read that he leaves them in the wilderness we are apt to think of some barren place, but that is not intended. It simply means the open pasturage, the steppe, the prairie. He leaves them well

provided for, leaves them because he can leave them. For the time being he is carried away with the one thought that he must seek and save the lost one, and therefore he leaves the ninety-and-nine in their pasture.

“Shepherd, the way is very rocky!” He does not seem to know what the way is, his heart is with his lost sheep. “Shepherd, it is a heavy climb up yon Mountainside.” He does not note his toll; his excitement lends him the feet of the wild goat; he stands securely where at other times his foot would slip. He looks around for his sheep and seems to see neither crag nor chasm. “Shepherd, it is a terrible path by which you must descend into yonder gloomy valley.” It is not terrible to him, his only terror is lest his sheep should perish; he is taken up with that one fear, and nothing else. He leaps into danger, and escapes it by the one strong impulse which bears him on. It is grand to think of the Lord Jesus Christ with his heart set immovably upon the rescue of a soul which at this moment is lost to him.

It is an active search too; for observe, the shepherd goes after that which is lost until he finds it and he does this with a personal search. He does not say to one of his underlings, “Here, hasten after that sheep which was lost, and bring it home.” No, he follows it himself. And if ever there is a soul brought from sin to grace, it is not by us poor ministers working alone, but it is by the Master himself who goes after his own sheep. It is glorious to think of him still personally tracking sinners, who, though they fly from him with a desperateness of folly, yet are still pursued by him — pursued by the Son of God, by the Eternal Lover of human beings — pursued by him until he finds them.

For notice the perseverance of the search; “until he find it.” The shepherd does not stop until he has done the deed. You and I ought to seek after a soul, how long? Why, until we find it, for such is the model set before us by the Master. The parable says nothing about his not finding it, no hint of failure is given. We dream not that there may be a sheep belonging to Jesus which he will never find. Oh, friends, there are a great many whom you and I would never find, but when Jesus is after his own lost sheep, depend upon it such is his skill, so clearly does he see, and so effectually does he intervene, that he will surely bring them in. A defeated Christ I cannot conceive of. It is a personal search, and a persevering search, and a

successful search, until he finds it. Let us praise and bless his name for this.

Observe that when the shepherd does find it, there is a little touch in the parable not often noticed — he does not appear to put it back into the fold again. I mean, we do not find it so written, as a fact to be noted. I suppose he did so place it ultimately, but for the time being he keeps it with himself rather than with its fellows. The next scene is the shepherd at home, saying, “Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.” It looks as if Jesus did not save a soul so much to the church as to himself, and though the saved are in the flock, the greatest joy of all is that the sheep is with the shepherd. This shows you how thoroughly Christ lays himself out that he may save his people. There is nothing in Christ that does not tend toward the salvation of his redeemed. There are no pullbacks with him, no half-consecrated influences which make him linger. In the pursuit of certain objects we lay out a portion of our faculties, but Jesus lays out all his powers upon the seeking and saving of souls.

The whole Christ seeks after each sinner, and when the Lord finds it, he gives himself to that one soul as if he had but that one soul to bless. How my heart admires the concentration of all the Godhead and humanity of Christ in his search after each sheep of his flock.

**III.** Now, we must pass on very briefly to notice a third point. We have had one subject of thought and one object of search; now we have ONE BURDEN OF LOVE. When the seeking is ended, then the saving appears — “When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.” Splendid action this! How beautifully the parable sets forth the whole of salvation. Some of the old writers delight to put it thus: in his incarnation he came after the lost sheep, in his life he continued to seek it, in his death he laid it upon his shoulders, in his resurrection he bore it on its way, and in his ascension he brought it home rejoicing. Our Lord’s career is a course of soulwinning, a life laid out for his people, and in it you may trace the whole process of salvation.

But now, see, the shepherd finds the sheep, and he lays it on his shoulders. It is an uplifting action, raising the fallen one from the earth whereon he has strayed. It is as though he took the sheep just as it was,

without a word of rebuke, without delay or hesitancy, and lifted it out of the slough or the briers into a place of safety. Do you not remember when the Lord lifted you up from the horrible pit? When he sent from above, and delivered you, and became your strength? I shall never forget that day. What a wonderful lift it was for me when the Great Shepherd lifted me into newness of life. The Lord said of Israel, "I bare you on eagles' wings," but it is a dearer emblem still to be born upon the shoulders of the incarnate Lord.

This laying on the shoulders was an appropriating act. He seemed to say, "You are my sheep, and therefore I lay you on my shoulders." He did not make his claim in so many words, but by a rapid action he declared it: for someone does not bear away a sheep to which he has no right: this was not a sheep-stealer, but a shepherd-proprietor. He holds fast the sheep by all four of its legs so that it cannot stir, and then he lays it on his own shoulders, for it is all his own now. He seems to say, "I am a long way from home, and I am in a weary desert; but I have found my sheep, and these hands shall hold it." Here are our Lord's own words, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Hands of such might as those of Jesus will hold fast the found one. Shoulders of such power as those of Jesus will safely bear the found one home. It is all well with that sheep, for it is positively and experimentally the Good Shepherd's own, just as it always had been his in the eternal purpose of the Father. Do you remember when Jesus said to you, "you are Mine"? Then I know you also appropriated him, and began to sing —

*So I my best Beloved's am,  
And he is mine.*

More condescending still is another view of this act: it was a deed of service to the sheep. The sheep is uppermost, the weight of the sheep is upon the shepherd. The sheep rides, the shepherd is the burden-bearer. The sheep rests, the shepherd labors. "I am among you as he that serveth," said our Lord long ago. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." On that cross he bore the burden of our sin, and what is more, the burden of our very selves. Blessed be his name, "The Lord hath laid on

him the iniquity of us all,” and he hath laid us on him, too, and he bears us. Remember that choice Scripture: “In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.” Soul-melting thought, the Son of God became subservient to the sons of man! The Maker of heaven and earth bowed his shoulders to bear the weight of sinners.

It was a rest-giving act, very likely needful to the sheep which could go no further, and was faint and weary. It was a full rest to the poor creature if it could have understood it, to feel itself upon its shepherd’s shoulders, irresistibly carried back to safety. What a rest it is to you and to me to know that we are born along by the eternal power and Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ! “The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.” The Christ upbears us today. We have no need of strength; our weakness is no impediment, for he bears us. Hath not the Lord said, “I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you”? We shall not even stumble, much less fall to ruin; the shepherd’s feet shall traverse all the road in safety. No portion of the way back should cause us fear, for he is able to bear us even to his home above. What a sweet word is that in Deuteronomy:

“The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.”

Blessed rest of faith, to give yourself up entirely to those hands and shoulders to keep and carry you even to the end! Let us bless and praise the Lord. The shepherd is consecrated to his burden; he bears nothing on his shoulders but his sheep; and the Lord Jesus seems to bear no burden but that of his people. He lays out his omnipotence to save his chosen, having redeemed them first with price of blood, he redeems them still with all his power. “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels.” Oh, the glorious grace of our unfailing Savior, who consecrates himself to our salvation, and concentrates upon that object all that he has and is!

**IV.** We close by noticing one more matter — THE ONE SOURCE OF JOY. This man who had lost his sheep is filled with joy, but his sheep is the sole source of it. His sheep has so taken up all his thought, and so

commanded all his faculties, that as he found all his care centered upon it, so he now finds all his Joy flowing from it.

I invite you to notice the first mention of joy we get here: "When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing..... That is a great load for you, shepherd!" Joyfully he answers, "I am glad to have it on my shoulders." The mother does not say when she has found her lost child, "This is a heavy load." No; she presses it to her bosom. She does not mind how heavy it is; it is a dear burden to her. She is rejoiced to bear it once again. "He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." Remember that text: "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." A great sorrow was on Christ when our load was laid on him, but a greater joy flashed into his mind when he thought that we were thus recovered from our lost estate. He said to himself, "I have taken them up upon My shoulders, and none can hurt them now, neither can they wander to destruction. I am bearing their sin, and they shall never come into condemnation. The penalty of their guilt has been laid on Me that it may never be laid on them. I am an effectual and efficient Substitute for them. I am bearing, that they may never bear, My Father's righteous ire." His love to them made it a JOY to feel every lash of the scourge of justice; his love to them made it a delight that the nails should pierce his hands and feet, and that his heart should be broken with the absence of his Father, God. Even "Elol, Elol, lama sabachthant," when the deeps of its woe have been sounded, will be found to have pearls of joy in its caverns. No shout of triumph can equal that cry of grief, because our Lord joyed to bear even the forsaking by his Father for the sin of his chosen whom he had loved from before the foundation of the world. Oh, you cannot understand it except in a very feeble measure! Let us try to find an earthly miniature likeness. A son is taken ill far away from home. He is laid sick with a fever, and a telegram is sent home. His mother says she must go and nurse him; she is wretched until she can set out upon the journey. It is a dreary place where her boy lies, but for the moment it is the dearest spot on earth to her. She joys to leave the comforts of her home to tarry among strangers for the love of her boy. She feels an intense joy in sacrificing herself; she refuses to retire from the bedside, she will not leave her charge; she watches day and night, and only from utter exhaustion does she fall asleep. You could not have kept her in England, she would have been too



wretched. It was a great, deep, solemn pleasure for her to be where she could minister to her own beloved. Soul, remember you have given Jesus great joy in his saving you. He was forever with the Father, eternally happy, infinitely glorious as God over all; yet he must come hither out of boundless love, take upon himself our nature, and suffer in our stead to bring us back to holiness and God. "He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." That day the shepherd knew but one joy. He had found his sheep, and the very pressure of it upon his shoulders made his heart light, for he knew by that sign that the object of his care was safe beyond all question.

Now he goes home with it, and this joy of his was then so great that it filled his soul to overflowing. The parable speaks nothing as to his joy in getting home again, nor a word concerning the joy of being saluted by his friends and neighbors. No, the joy of having found his sheep eclipsed all other gladness of heart, and dimmed the light of home and friendship. He turns around to friends and neighbors and entreats them to help him to bear the weight of his happiness. He cries, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." One sinner had repented, and all heaven must make holiday concerning it. Oh, brethren, there is enough joy in the heart of Christ over his saved ones to flood all heaven with delight. The streets of Paradise run knee-deep with the heavenly waters of the Savior's joy. They flow out of the very soul of Christ, and angels and glorified spirits bathe in the mighty stream. Let us do the same. We are friends if we are not neighbors. He calls us today to come and bring our hearts, like empty vessels, that he may fill them with his own joy, that our joy may be full. Those of us who are saved must enter into the joy of our Lord. When I was trying to think over this text I rejoiced with my Lord in the bringing in of each of his sheep, for each one makes a heaven full of joy. But, oh, to see all the redeemed brought in! Jesus would have no joy if he should lose one: it would seem to spoil it all. If the purpose of mercy were frustrated in any one instance it were a dreary defeat of the great Savior. But his purpose shall be carried out in every instance. He "shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He shall not fail nor be discouraged. He shall carry out the will of the Father. He shall have the full reward of his passion. Let us joy and rejoice with him this morning!

But the text tells us there was more joy over that one lost sheep than over the ninety-and-nine that went not astray. Who are these just persons that need no repentance? Well, you should never explain a parable so as to make it run on four legs if it was only meant to go on two. There may not be such persons at all, and yet the parable may be strictly accurate. If all of us had been such persons, and had never needed repentance, we would not have given as much joy to the heart of Christ as one sinner does when he repents. But suppose it to mean you and I who have long ago repented — who have, in a certain sense, now no need of repentance, because we are justified men and women — we do not give so much JOY to the heart of God, for the time being, as a sinner does when he first returns to God. It is not that it is a good thing to go astray, or a bad thing to be kept from it. You understand how that is: there are seven children in a family, and six of them are all well; but one dear child is taken seriously ill, and is brought near to the gates of death. It has recovered, its life is spared, and do you wonder that for the time being it gives more joy to the household than all the healthy ones? There is more expressed delight about it a great deal than over all those that have not been ill at all. This does not show it is a good thing to be ill. No, nothing of the kind; we are only speaking of the joy which comes of recovery from sickness. Take another case: you have a son who has been long away in a far country, and another son at home. You love them both equally, but when the absent son comes home he is for a season most upon your thoughts. Is it not natural that it should be so? Those at home give us joy constantly from day to day, but when the stream of joy has been dammed back by his absence, it pours down in a flood upon his return. Then we have “high days and holy days” and “bonfire nights.”

There are special circumstances about repentance and conversion which produce joy over a restored wanderer. There was a preceding sorrow, and this sets off the joy by contrast. The shepherd was so touched with compassion for the lost sheep that now his sorrow is inevitably turned into joy. He suffered a dreadful suspense, and that is a killing thing; it is like an acid eating into the soul. That suspense which makes one ask, Where is the sheep? Where can it be? is a piercing of the heart. All those weary hours of searching, and seeking, and following are painfully wearing to the heart. You feel as if you would almost sooner know that you never

would find it than be in that doubtful state of mind. That suspense when it is ended naturally brings with it a sweet liberty of joy. Moreover, you know that the joy over penitents is so unselfish that you who have been kept by the grace of God for many years do not grieve that there should be more joy over a repenting sinner than over you. No, you say to yourself, "There is good cause. I am myself among those who are glad." You remember that good people made great rejoicing over you when you first came to Jesus, and you heartily unite with them in welcoming newcomers. You will not act the elder brother and say, I will not share the joy of my Father. Not a bit of it; enter heartily into the music and dancing, and count it your joy to see souls saved from hell. I feel a sudden flush and flood of delight when I meet with a poor creature who once lay at hell's dark door, but is now brought to the gate of heaven. Do not you?

The one thing I want to leave with you is how our gracious Lord seems to give himself up to his own redeemed. How entirely and perfectly every thought of his heart, every action of his power, goes toward the needy, guilty, lost soul. He spends his all to bring back his banished. Poor souls who believe in him have his whole strength engaged on their behalf. Blessed be his name! Now let all our hearts go forth in love toward him. We cannot love him as he loved us as to measure but let us do so in like manner. Let us love him with all our hearts and souls. Let us feel as if we saw nothing, knew nothing, loved nothing save Jesus crucified. As we filled all his heart let him fill all our hearts!

Oh, poor sinner here to-day, will you not yield to the Good Shepherd? will you not stand still as he draws near? Will you not submit to his mighty grace? Know that your rescue from sin and death must be of him and of him alone. Breathe a prayer to him — "Come, Lord, I wait for Your salvation! Save me, for I trust in You." If you do thus pray, you have the mark upon you of Christ's sheep, for he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Come to him, for he comes to you. Look to him, for he looks to you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  John 15:1-24.


HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 387, 403, 388.

# A SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE AND A BODY OF DIVINITY

SERMON NO. 1806

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
OCTOBER 26TH, 1884,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” —  1 Thessalonians 1:9-10.

IN Thessalonica the conversions to the faith were remarkable. Paul came there without prestige, without friends, when he was in the very lowest condition; for he had just been beaten and imprisoned at Philippi, and had fled from that city. Yet it mattered not in what condition the ambassador might be; God, who worketh mighty things by weak instruments, blessed the word of his servant Paul. No doubt when the apostle went into the synagogue to address his own countrymen he had great hopes that, by reasoning with them out of their own scriptures, he might convince them that Jesus was the Christ. He soon found that only a few would search the Scriptures and form a judgment on the point; but the bulk of them refused, for we read of the Jews of Berea, to whom Paul fled from Thessalonica, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Paul must have felt disappointed with his own countrymen; indeed, he had often cause to do so. His heart was affectionately warm toward them, but their hearts were very bitter towards him, reckoning him to be a pervert and an apostate. But if he seemed to fail with the Jews, it is evident that he was abundantly

successful with the Gentiles. These turned from their idols to serve the living God, and their turning was so remarkable that the Jew's charged Paul and Silas with turning the world upside down.

In those days there was a good deal of practical atheism abroad, and therefore the wonder was not so much that men left their idols, as that they turned unto the living God. It became a matter of talk all over the city, and the Jews in their violence helped to make the matter more notorious; for the mobs in the street and the attack upon the house of Jason all stirred the thousand tongues of rumor. Everybody spoke of the sudden appearance of three poor Jews, of their remarkable teaching in the synagogue, and of the conversion of a great multitude of devout Greeks, and of the chief women not a few. It was no small thing that so many had come straight away from the worship of Jupiter and Mercury to worship the unknown God, who could not be seen, nor imaged; and to enter the kingdom of one Jesus who had been crucified. It set all Macedonia and Achaia wondering; and as with a trumpet blast it aroused all the dwellers in those regions. Every ship that sailed from Thessalonica carried the news of the strange ferment which was moving the City; men were caring for religion and were quitting old beliefs for a new and better faith.

Thessalonica, situated on one of the great Roman roads, and center of a large trade, thus became a center for the gospel. Wherever there are true conversions there will be more or less of this kind of sounding forth of the gospel. It was especially so at Thessalonica; but it is truly so in every church where the Spirit of God is uplifting men from the dregs of evil, delivering them from drunkenness, and dishonesty, and uncleanness, and worldliness, and making them to become holy and earnest in the cause of the great Lord. There is sure to be a talk when grace triumphs. This talk is a great aid to the gospel: it is no small thing that men should have their attention attracted to it by its effects; for it is both natural and just that thoughtful men should judge of doctrines by their results; and if the most beneficial results follow from the preaching of the word, prejudice is disarmed, and the most violent objectors are silenced.

You will notice that in this general talk the converts and the. hers were greatly mixed up: — "For they themselves show of us manner of entering in we had unto you." I do not know that it is possible for the preacher to keep himself distinct from those who profess to be converted by him. He

is gladly one with them in love to, their souls, but he would have it remembered that he cannot be responsible for all their actions. Those who profess to have been converted under any ministry have it in their power to damage that ministry far more than any adversaries can do. "There!" says the world, when it detects a false professor, "this is what comes of such preaching." They judge unfairly, I know; but most men are in a great hurry, and will not examine the logic of their opponents; while many others are so eager to judge unfavorably, that a very little truth, or only a bare report, suffices to condemn both the minister and his doctrine. Every man that lives unto God with purity of life brings honor to the gospel which converted him, to the community to which he belongs, and to the preaching by which he was brought to the knowledge of the truth; but the reverse is equally true in the case of unworthy adherents. Members of churches, will you kindly think of this? Your ministers share the blame of your ill conduct if ever you disgrace yourselves. I feel sure that none of you wish to bring shame and trouble upon your pastors, however careless you may be about your own reputations. Oh, that we could be freed from those of whom Paul says, "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." When these are in a church they are its curse. The Thessalonians were not such: they were such a people that Paul did not blush to have himself implicated in what they did. He was glad to say that the outsiders "show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven."

Quitting this line of thought, I would observe that these two verses struck me as being singularly full. Oceans of teaching are to be found in them. A father of the church in the first ages was wont to cry, "I adore the infinity of Holy Scripture." That remark constantly rises from my lips when I am studying the sacred Word. This book is more than a book, — it is the mother of books, a mine of truth, a mountain of meaning. It was an ill-advised opinion which is imputed to the Mahommedans at the destruction of the Alexandrian Library, when they argued that everything that was good in it was already in the Koran, and therefore it might well be destroyed. Yet it is true with regard to the inspired Word of God, that it

contains everything which appertains to eternal life. It is a revelation of which no man can take the measure, it compasses heaven and earth, time and eternity. The best evidence of its being written by an Infinite mind is its own infinity. Within a few of its words there lie hidden immeasurable meanings, even as perfume enough to sweeten leagues of space may be condensed into a few drops of otto of roses.

The first part of my text contains a summary of Christian experience; and the second part contains a body of divinity. Here is ample room and verge enough. It is not possible to exhaust such a theme.

**I.** The first part of the text contains A SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE; “What manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.” Here we have in miniature the biography of a Christian man.

It begins, first, with the entering in of the word, — “What manner of entering in we had unto you.” When we preach the word you listen, and, so far, the word is received. This is a very hopeful circumstance. Still, the hearing with the outward ear is comparatively a small matter; or, at least, only great because of what may follow from it. The preacher feels even with some who listen with attention that he is outside the door; he is knocking, and he hopes that he is heard within; but the truth is not yet received, the door remains shut, an entrance is not granted, and in no case can he be content to speak with the person outside the door; he desires an entrance for the Word. All is fruitless until Christ entereth into the heart. I have seen the following: the door has been a little opened, and the man inside has come to look at the messenger, and more distinctly to hear what he may have to say; but he has taken care to put the door on the chain, or hold it with his hand, for he is not yet ready to admit the guest who is so desirous of entertainment. The King’s messenger has sometimes tried to put his foot within when the door has stood a little open, but he has not always been successful, and has not even escaped from a painful hurt when the door has been forced back with angry violence. We have called again and again with our message, but we have been as men who besieged a walled city, and were driven from the gates; yet we had our reward, for when the Holy Spirit sweetly moved the hard heart the city gates have opened of their own accord, and we have been received joyfully. We have

heard the hearty cry, "Let the truth come in! Let the gospel come in! Let Christ come in! Whatever there is in him we are willing to receive; whatever he demands we are willing to give; whatever he offers us we are glad to accept. Come and welcome! The guest-chamber is prepared. Come and abide in our house for ever!"

The truth has its own ways of entrance; but in general it first affects the understanding. The man says, "I see it: I see how God is just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. I see sin laid on Christ that it may not be laid on me, and I perceive that if I believe in Jesus Christ my sins are put away by his atonement." To many all that is wanted is that they should understand this fundamental truth; for their minds are prepared of God to receive it. Only make it plain and they catch at it as a hungry man at a piece of bread. They discover in the gospel of our Lord Jesus the very thing for which they have been looking for years, and so the truth enters by the door of the understanding.

Then it usually commences to work upon the conscience, conscience being the understanding exercised upon moral truth. The man sees himself a sinner, discovering guilt that he was not aware of; and he is thus made ready to receive Christ's pardoning grace. He sees that to have lived without thinking of God, without loving God, without serving God was a great and grievous crime: he feels the offensiveness of this neglect. He trembles; he consents unto the law that it is good, and he allows that, if the law condemns him, he is worthy to be condemned.

When it has thus entered into the understanding and affected the conscience, the word of God usually arouses the emotions. Fear is awakened, and hope is excited. The man begins to feel as he never felt before. His whole manhood is brought under the heavenly spell; his very flesh doth creep in harmony with the amazement of his soul. He wonders and dreads, weeps and quivers, hopes and doubts; but no, emotion is asleep; life is in all. When a tear rises to his eye he brushes it away, but it is soon succeeded by another. Repentance calls forth one after another of these her sentinels. The proud man is broken down; the hard man is softened. The love of God in providing a Savior, the unsearchable riches of divine grace in passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin, — these things amaze and overwhelm the penitent. He finds himself suddenly dissolved,



where aforetime he was hard as adamant for the word is entering into him, and exercising its softening power.

By-and-by the entrance is complete; for the truth carries the central castle of Mansoul, and captures his heart. He who once hated the gospel now loves it. At first he loves it, hoping that it may be his, though fearing the reverse; yet owning that if it brought no blessing to himself, yet it was a lovable and desirable thing. By-and-by the man ventures to grasp it, encouraged by the word that bids him lay hold on eternal life. One who in digging his land finds a treasure, first looks about for fear lest some one else should claim it; anon he dares to examine his prize more carefully, and at length he bears it in his bosom to his own home. So is it with the gospel; when a man finds it by the understanding, he soon embraces it with his heart; and, believe me, if it once gets into the heart, the arch-enemy himself will never get it out again. Oh, that such an entrance with the gospel might commence the spiritual life of all here present who are as yet unsaved.

What comes next? Well, the second stage is conversion. "They themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned from idols to serve the living and true God." There came a turning, a decided turning. The man has come so far in carelessness, so far in sin and unbelief; but now he pauses, and he deliberately turns round, and faces in that direction to which hitherto he had turned his back. Conversion is the turning of a man completely round, to hate what he loved and to love what he hated. Conversion is to turn to God decidedly and distinctly by an act and deed of the mind and will. In some senses we are turned; but in others, like these Thessalonians, we turn. It is not conversion to think that you will turn, or to promise that you will turn, or resolve that you will turn, but actually and in very deed to turn, because the word has had a true entrance into your heart. You must not be content with a reformation; there must be a revolution: old thrones must fall, and a new king must reign. Is it so with you?

These Thessalonians turned from their idols. Do you tell me that you have no idols? Think again, and you will not be quite so sure. The streets of London are full of fetich worship, and almost every dwelling is a joss-house crammed with idols. Why, multitudes of men are worshipping not calves of gold, but gold in a more portable shape. Small circular idols of

gold and silver are much sought after. They are very devoutly worshipped by some, and great things are said concerning their power. I have heard the epithet of “almighty” ascribed to an American form of these idols. Those who do not worship gold may yet worship rank, name, pleasure, or honor. Most worship self, and I do not know that there is a more degrading form of worship than for a man to put himself upon a pedestal and bow down thereto and worship it. You might just as well adore cats and crocodiles with the ancient Egyptians as pay your life’s homage to yourselves. No wooden image set up by the most savage tribe can be more ugly or degrading than our idol when we adore ourselves. Men worship Bacchus still. Do not tell me they do not: why, there is a temple to him at every street corner. While every other trade is content with a shop or a warehouse, this fiend has his palaces, in which plentiful libations are poured forth in his honor. The gods of unchastity and vice are yet among us. It would be a shame even to speak of the things which are done of them in secret. The lusts of the flesh are served even by many who would not like to have it known. We have gods many and lords many in this land. God grant that we may see, through the preaching of the gospel, many turning from such idols. If you love anything better than God you are idolaters: if there is anything you would not give up for God it is your idol: if there is anything that you seek with greater fervor that is your idol, and conversion means a turning from every idol.

But then that is not enough, for some men turn from one idol to another. If they do not worship Bacchus they become teetotalers, and possibly they worship the golden calf, and become covetous. When men quit covetousness they sometimes turn to profligacy. A change of false gods is not the change that will save: we must turn unto God, to trust, love, and honor him, and him alone.

After conversion comes service. True conversion causes us “to serve the living and true God.” To serve him means to worship him, to obey him, to consecrate one’s entire being to his honor and glory, and to be his devoted servant.

We are, dear friends, to serve the “living” God. Many men have a dead God still. They do not feel that he hears their prayers, they do not feel the power of his Spirit moving upon their hearts and lives. They never take

the Lord into their calculations; he never fills them with joy, nor even depresses them with fear; God is unreal and inactive to them. But the true convert turns to the living God, who is everywhere, and whose presence affects him at every point of his being. This God he is to worship, obey, and serve.

Then it is added, to serve the true God; and there is no serving a true God with falsehood. Many evidently serve a false god, for they utter words of prayer without their hearts, and that is false prayer, unfit for the true God, who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. When men's lives are false and artificial they are not a fit service for the God of truth. A life is false when it is not the true outcome of the soul, when it is fashioned by custom, ruled by observation, restrained by selfish motives, and governed by the love of human approbation. What a man does against his will is not in truth done by himself at all. If the will is not changed the man is not converted, and his religious life is not true. He that serves the true God acceptably does it with delight; to him sin is misery, and holiness is happiness. This is the sort of service which we desire our converts to render: we long to see rebels become sons. Oh the sacred alchemy of the Holy Spirit, who can turn men from being the slaves of sin to become servants of righteousness!

Carefully notice the order of life's progress: the entering in of the word produces conversion, and this produces service. Do not put those things out of their places. If you are converts without the word entering into you, you are unconverted; and if professing to receive the word you are not turned by it, you have not received it. If you claim to be converted, and yet do not serve God, you are not converted; and if you boast of serving God without being converted, you are not serving God. The three things are links which draw on each other.

A fourth matter follows to complete this Christian biography, namely, waiting — "To wait for his Son from heaven." That conversion which is not followed up by waiting is a false conversion, and will come to nothing. We wait, dear brethren, in the holy perseverance of faith; having begun with Christ Jesus our Lord we abide in him; we trust, and then we wait. We do not look upon salvation as a thing which requires a few minutes of faith, and then all is over; salvation is the business of our lives. We receive

salvation in an instant, but we work it out with fear and trembling all our days. He that is saved continues to be saved, and goes on to be saved from day to day, from every sin and from every form of evil. We must wait upon the Lord, and renew the strength of the life which he has imparted. As a servant waiteth on her mistress, or a courtier upon his king, so must we wait upon the Lord.

This waiting also takes the shape of living in the future. A man who, waits is not living on the wages of today, but on the recompenses of a time which is yet to come; and this is the mark of the Christian, that his life is spent in eternity rather than in time, and his citizenship is not of earth but of heaven. He has received a believing expectancy which makes him both watch and wait. He expects that the Lord Jesus will come a second time, and that speedily. He has read of his going up. into heaven, and he believes it; and he knows that he will so come in like manner as he went up into heaven. For the second advent he looks with calm hope: he does not know when it may be, but he keeps. himself on the watch as a servant who waits his lord's return. He hopes it may be today, he would not wonder if it were tomorrow, for he is always looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Son of God. The coming of the Lord is his expected reward. He does not expect to be rewarded by men, or even to be rewarded of God with temporal things in this life, for he has set his affection upon things yet to be revealed, things eternal and infinite. In the day when the Christ shall come, and the heavens which have received him shall restore him to our earth, he shall judge the world in righteousness, and his people with his truth, and then shall our day break and our shadows flee away. The true believer lives in this near future; his hopes are with Jesus on his throne, with Jesus crowned before an assembled universe.

The convert has come to this condition, he is assured of his salvation. See how he has been rising from the time when he first held the door ajar! He is assured of his salvation; for Paul describes him as one who is delivered from the wrath to come; and therefore he looks with holy delight to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Once he was afraid of this, for he feared that he would come to condemn him; but now he knows that when the Lord appears his justification will be made plain to the eyes of all men. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father." And so he cries, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" He would hasten

rather than delay the appearing of the Lord. He groans in sympathy with travailing creation for the manifestation of the sons of God. He cries with all the redeemed host for the day of the Savior's glory. He could not do this were he not abundantly assured that the day would not seal his destruction, but reveal his full salvation.

Here, then, you have the story of the Christian man briefly summed up, and I think you will not find a passage of merely human writing which contains so much in so small a compass. It has unspeakable wealth packed away into a narrow casket. Do you understand it? Is this the outline of your life? If it is not, the Lord grant that his word may have an entrance into you this morning, that you may now believe in Jesus Christ and then wait for his glorious appearing.

**II.** I shall want you to be patient with me while I very briefly unfold the second half of this great roll. Here even to a greater degree we have *mullum in parvo*, much in little; A BODY OF DIVINITY packed away in a nutshell. "To wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

To begin my body of divinity, I see here, first, the Deity of Christ. "To wait for his Son." "His Son." God has but one Son in the highest sense. The Lord Jesus Christ has given to all believers power to become the sons of God, but not in the sense in which he, and he alone, is the Son of God." Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" "When he bringeth in the First-begotten into the world he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him." The Eternal Filiation is a mystery into which it is better for us never to pry. Believe it; but how it is, or how it could be, certainly it is not for you or for me to attempt to explain. There is one "Son of the Highest," who is "God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before all worlds," whom we with all our souls adore, and own to be most truly God; doing so especially every time in the benediction we associate him with the Father and with the Holy Spirit as the one God of blessing.

Side by side with this in this text of mine is his humanity. "His son, whom he raised from the dead." It is for man to die. God absolutely considered dieth not; he therefore took upon himself our mortal frame, and was made

in fashion as a man; then willingly for our sakes he underwent the pangs of death, and being crucified, was dead, and so was buried, even as the rest of the dead. He was truly man, “of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting”: of that we are confident. There has been no discussion upon that point in these modern times, but there was much questioning thereon in years long gone; for what is there so clear that men will not doubt it or mystify it? With us there is no question either as to his Deity, which fills us with reverence; or his manhood, which inspires us with joy. He is the Son of God and the Son of Mary. He, as God, is “immortal, invisible”; and yet for our sakes he was seen of men and angels, and in mortal agony yielded up the ghost. He suffered for our salvation, died upon the cross, and was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea, being verily and truly man.

Notice a third doctrine which is here, and that is the unity of the Divine Person of our Lord; for while the apostle speaks of Christ as God’s Son from heaven, and as one who had died, he adds, “even Jesus”: that is to say, one known, undivided Person. Although he be God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ. There is but one Person of our blessed and adorable Lord: “one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of Person.” He is God, he is man; perfect God and perfect man; and, as such, Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man. There have been mistakes about this also made in the church, though I trust not by any one of us here present. We worship the Lord Jesus Christ in the unity of his divine Person as the one Savior of men.

Furthermore, in our text we perceive a doctrine about ourselves very plainly implied, namely, that men by nature are guilty, for otherwise they would not have needed Jesus, a Savior. They were lost, and so he who came from heaven to earth bore the name of Jesus, “for he shall save his people from their sins.” It is clear, my brethren, that we were under the divine wrath, otherwise it could not be said, “He hath delivered us from the wrath to come.” We who are now delivered were once “children of wrath, even as others.” And when we are delivered it is a meet song to sing, “O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.” We were guilty, else we had not needed a propitiation by the Savior’s death: we were lost, else we had not needed one who should seek and save that which is lost; and we

were hopelessly lost, otherwise God himself would not have shared our nature to work the mighty work of our redemption. That truth is in the text, and a great deal more than I can mention just now.

But the next doctrine, which is one of the fundamentals of the gospel, is that the Lord Jesus Christ died for these fallen men. He could not have been raised from the dead if he had not died. That death was painful, and ignominious; and it was also substitutionary: “for the transgression of my people was he stricken.” In the death of Christ lay the essence of our redemption. I would not have you dissociate his life from his death, it comes into his death as an integral part of it; for as the moment we begin to live we, in a sense, begin to die, so the Man of Sorrows lived a dying life, which was all preparatory to his passion. He lived to die, panting for the baptism wherewith he was to be baptized, and reaching forward to it. But it was especially, though not only, by his death upon the cross that Jesus put away our sin. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Not even the tears of Christ, nor the labors of Christ could have redeemed us if he had not given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice. “Die he, or justice must,” or man must die. It was his bowing the head and giving up of the ghost which finished the whole work. “It is finished” could not have been uttered except by a bleeding, dying Christ. His death is our life. Let us always dwell upon that central truth, and when we are preaching Christ risen, Christ reigning, or Christ coming, let us never so preach any of them as to overshadow Christ crucified. “We preach Christ crucified.” Some have put up as their ensign, “We preach Christ glorified”; and we also preach the same; but yet to us it seems that the first and foremost view of Jesus by the sinner is as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Therefore do we preach first Christ crucified, while at the same time we do not forget that blessed hope of the child of God, — namely, Christ in glory soon to descend from heaven.

The next doctrine I see in my text is the acceptance of the death of Christ by the Father. “Where is that?” say you. Look! “Whom he raised from the dead.” Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but the Father had a distinct hand therein. God as God gave the token of his acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice by raising him from the dead. It is true, as we sometimes sing,

*“If Jesus had not paid the debt,  
He ne’er had been at freedom set.”*

The Surety would have been held in prison to this day if he had not discharged his suretyship engagements, and wiped out all the liabilities of his people. Therefore it is written, “He was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.” In his glorious uprising from the dead lies the assurance that we are accepted, accepted in the Beloved: the Beloved being himself certainly accepted because God brought him again from the dead.

Further on, we have another doctrine, among many more. We have here the doctrine of our Lord’s resurrection, of which we spake when we mentioned the acceptance of his offering. Christ is risen from the dead. I pray you, do not think of the Lord Jesus Christ as though he were now dead. It is well to dwell upon Gethsemane, Golgotha, and Gabbatha; but pray remember the empty tomb, Emmaus, Galilee, and Olivet. It is not well to think of Jesus as for ever on the cross or in the tomb. “He is not here, but he is risen.” Ye may “come and see the place where the Lord lay,” but he lies there no longer he hath burst the bands of death by which he could not be holden: for it was not possible that God’s holy One could see corruption. The rising of Jesus from the dead is that fact of facts which establishes Christianity upon an historical basis, and at the same time guarantees to all believers their own resurrection from the dead. He is the firstfruits and we are the harvest.

Further, there is here the doctrine of his ascension: “to wait for his Son from heaven.” It is clear that Jesus is in heaven, or he could not come from it. He has gone before us as our Forerunner. He has gone to his rest and reward; a cloud received him out of sight; he has entered into his glory.

I doubt not our poet is right when he says of the angels —

*“They brought his chariot from on high,  
To bear him to his throne;  
Clapped their triumphant wings and cried,  
‘The glorious work is done!’“*

That ascension of his brought us the Holy Spirit. He “led captivity captive, and received gifts for men,” and he gave the Holy Ghost as the largess of his joyous entry to his Father’s courts, that man on earth might



share in the joy of the Conqueror returning from the battle. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in," was the song of that bright day.

But the text tells us more: not only that he has gone into heaven, but that he remains there; for these Thessalonians were expecting him to come "from heaven," and therefore he was there. What is he doing? "I go to prepare a place for you." What is he doing? He is interceding with authority before the throne. What is he doing? He is from yonder hill-top looking upon his church, which is as a ship upon the sea buffeted by many a storm. In the middle watch ye shall see him walking on the waters; for he perceives the straining of the oars, the leakage of the timbers, the rending of the sails, the dismay of the pilot, the trembling of the crew; and he will come unto us, and save us. He is sending heavenly succors to his weary ones; he is ruling all things for the salvation of his elect, and the accomplishment of his purposes. Glory be to his blessed name!

Jesus is in heaven with saving power, too, and that also is in the text: "His Son from heaven, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come." I alter the translation, for it is a present participle in the case of each verb, and should run, "Even Jesus, delivering us from the wrath coming." He is at this moment delivering. "Wherefore also he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." He is away in heaven, but he is not divided from us; he is working here the better because he is there. He has not separated himself from the service and the conflict here below; but he has taken the post from which he can best observe and aid. Like some great commander who in the day of battle commands a view of the field, and continues watching, directing, and so winning the fight, so is Jesus in the best place for helping us. Jesus is the master of legions, bidding his angels fly hither and thither, where their spiritual help is needed. My faith sees him securing victory in the midst of the earth. My God, my King, thou art working all things gloriously from thy vantage ground, and ere long the groans and strifes of battle shall end in Hallelujahs unto the Lord God Omnipotent! Christ's residence in the heavens is clearly in the text.

Here is conspicuously set forth the second coming, a subject which might well have occupied all our time, — "To wait for his Son from heaven."

Every chapter of this epistle closes with the Second Advent. Do not deceive yourselves, oh ye ungodly men who think little of Jesus of Nazareth! The day will come when you will change your minds about him. As surely as he died, he lives, and as surely as he lives he will come to this earth again! With an innumerable company of angels, with blast of trumpet that shall strike dismay into the heart of all his enemies, Jesus comes! And when he cometh there shall be a time of judgment, and the rising again of the dead, and “Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” He may come tomorrow! We know not the times and the seasons; these things are in the Father’s keeping; but that he comes is certain, and that he will come as a thief in the night to the ungodly is certain too. Lay no flattering unction to your souls as though when he was crucified there was an end of him; it is but the beginning of his dealings with you, though you reject him. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

A further doctrine in the text is that Christ is a deliverer — “Jesus delivering us from the wrath coming,.” What a blessed name is this! Deliverer! Press the cheering title to your breast. He delivereth by himself bearing the punishment of sin. He has delivered, he is delivering, he always will deliver them that put their trust in him.

But there was something to be delivered from, and that is, the coming wrath, which is mentioned here. “Oh,” saith one, “that is a long, way off, that wrath to come!” If it were a long way off it were wise for you to prepare for it. He is unsafe who will be destroyed most certainly, however distant that destruction may be. A wise man should not be content with looking as an ox doth, as far as his eye can carry him, for there is so much beyond, as sure as that which is seen. But it is not far-off wrath which is here mentioned; the text saith, “who delivereth us from the wrath coming”; that is, the wrath which is now coming; for wrath is even now upon the unbelieving. As for those Jews who had rejected Christ. the apostle says of them in the sixteenth verse of the next chapter, “Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” The siege of Jerusalem, and the blindness of Israel, are a terrible comment upon these words. “Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man

that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.” It is said of every one that believeth not in Christ Jesus, that “the wrath of God abideth on him.” “God is angry with the wicked every day.” This wrath abideth upon some of you. It is the joy of believers that they are delivered from this wrath which is daily coming upon unbelievers, and would come upon themselves if they had not been delivered from it by the atoning sacrifice.

There is evidently in the text the doctrine of a great division between men and men. “He hath delivered us.” All men have not faith, and therefore all men are not delivered from wrath. Today there is such a division; the “condemned-already” and the “justified” are living side by side; but ere long the separation shall be more apparent. While some will go away into everlasting punishment, the people of God will be found pardoned and absolved, and so will be glorified for ever.

Lastly, there is here the doctrine of assurance. Some say, “How are you to know that you are saved?” It can be known; it ought to be known. “Surely,” cries one, “it is presumption to say that you are sure.” It is presumption to live without knowing that you are delivered from wrath. Here the apostle speaks of it as a thing well known, that “Jesus delivers us from the wrath coming.” He does not say “if,” or “perhaps,” but he writes that it is so, and therefore he knew it, and we may know it. My brother, you may know that you are saved. “That would make me inexpressibly happy,” cries one. Just so, and that is one of the reasons why we would have you know it this day. God saith, “He that believeth in him hath everlasting life,” and therefore the believer may be sure that he has it. Our message is, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” God make you to escape that dreadful doom! May you be delivered from the wrath which is coming for Jesus’ sake. Amen.


PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~400~~ Acts 17:1-10; ~~300~~ 1 Thessalonians 1.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 485, 483, 484.

# THE SONG OF A CITY, AND THE PEARL OF PEACE

## SERMON NO. 1818

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, JANUARY 4TH, 1885,  
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” —  Isaiah 26:3

THIS is no dry, didactic statement, but a verse from a song. We are among the poets of revelation, who did not compose ballads for the passing hour, but made sonnets for the people of God to sing in after days. I quote to you a stanza from the song of a city. Judah has not aforetime thus chanted before her God, but she has much to learn, and one day she shall learn this psalm also: — “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.” Into the open country the adversary easily advances, but walled cities are a check upon the invading foe. Those people who had been hurried to and from as captives, and had frequently been robbed of their property by invaders, were glad when they saw builded among them a city, a well-defended city, which should be the center of their race, and the shield of their nation.

This song of a city may, however, belong to us as much as to the men of Judah, and we may throw into it a deeper sense of which they were not aware. We were once unguarded from spiritual evil, and we spent our days in constant fear; but the Lord has found for us a city of defense, a castle of refuge. We have a burgess-ship in the new Jerusalem which is the mother of us all; and within that strong city we dwell securely. Let us sing this morning, “We have a strong city.” The man that hath come into fellowship with God through the atoning sacrifice, hath gotten into a place of perfect safety, where he may dwell, ay, dwell for ever, without fear of assault. We are no longer hunted by hosts of fears, and trodden down by dark

despairs; but “We have a strong city” which overawes the foe, and quiets ourselves. Our gospel hymns are the songs of men who, in the truest sense, have seen an end of alarm, by accepting God’s provision against trouble of heart.

Observe how the song goes on to dilate upon the city’s strength. “Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.” Our refuge will repay a close examination. We are doubly defended. Its lofty walls are the mainstay of a city’s security; when they are strong, and high, they keep out the foe, whether he assail by scaling-ladder, or battering-engine. Outside the wall, on the other side of the moat, lies what is called the bulwark; the earthwork where, in times of peace, the citizens delight to take their walks. The bulwark of their confidence is the boulevard of their communion. The Lord our God has set ring upon ring, defense upon defense, around His people. All the powers of providence and grace protect the saints. Material and spiritual forces alike surround her. The Lord keeps His people doubly fenced by walls and bulwarks, and hence He speaks of a double peace. “Thou wilt keep him in peace, peace,” saith the Hebrew. God does nothing by halves, but everything by doubles. His salvation is decreed and appointed, and this is made the basis for the unbroken serenity of all His chosen.

The song, however, does not end with verses concerning the city, but it conducts us within its walls. “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.” Entrance into this grace, wherein we stand, is a choice privilege. The greatest joy of true godliness lies in our being able to enter into it. If the City of God were shut against us, it were sad, indeed, for us. If, to-day, you and I were outside of her, of what value would her walls and bulwarks be to us? Whatever God has done to His people, it is just so much additional sorrow rather than increased joy to ourselves if we are not partakers therein. That there should be a Christ, and that I should be Christless; that there should be a cleansing, and I should remain foul; that there should be a Father’s love, and I should be an alien; that there should be a heaven, and I should be cast into hell, is grief embittered, sorrow aggravated. Come, then, let us sing of personal entrance into the City of God. The music and the feasting are not outside the door: to enjoy them we must enter in. Our citizenship is now in heaven. Nothing is barred against us, for the Son of David has set before us an open door,

and no man can shut it. Let us not neglect our opportunities. Let it not be said, “They could not enter in because of unbelief.” No, let it be ours to sing of salvation because we enjoy it to the full. Let our music never cease.

Now, when we get as far as this, — a strong city, and a city into which we have entered, we are still further glad to learn who the keeper and garrison of that city may be, for a city needs to be kept while there are so many foes abroad. To render all secure there needs to be some leader and commander for the people, who has strength with which to man the walls, and drive off besiegers. Our text tells us how securely this strong city will be held — so securely that none of her citizens shall ever be disturbed in heart, — “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”

Permit me to remind you again that my text is the verse of a song. I earnestly desire you to feel like singing all the time while I am preaching, and let the words of the text ring in your heart with deep mysterious chimes, as of a land beyond these clouds and tempests, — “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” I do not want you to be thinking, “I wish that the Lord would keep me in peace;” I would have you now enter into rest before the Lord. Do not say, “I am fretting and worrying, because I cannot reach this peace;” but pray to enjoy it this morning. O Lord and Giver of peace, vouchsafe it to our faith at once! O ye trustful ones, enter at once into the opened gates of the city of peace, and then bless God that you cannot be driven out again, for the Lord promises to be your garrison and safeguard. May the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter, and whose fruit is peace, now work peace in each of us!

**I.** First, we are going to answer this question as best we can, **WHAT IS THIS PERFECT PEACE?** The text in the original, as I have told you, is — “Thou wilt keep him in peace, peace.” It is the Hebrew way of expressing emphatic peace; true and real peace; double peace, peace of great depth and vast extent. Many of you know what it is; and you will probably think my answer a very poor one. I shall give the best I can, I can do no more; and if you try to make up for my deficiencies, our brethren will be gainers. I confess that I cannot to the full describe the peace that may be enjoyed if our faith is strong, and our confidence in God has reached its

appropriate height. We are not limited as to quality or measure of this precious thing. Peace is a jewel of so rare a price that he only hath valued it aright who has sold all that he hath to buy it. Describe it? Nay, verily, there we fail.

This “peace, peace” means, I think, an absence of all war, and of all alarm of war. You who can imagine the full meaning of siege, storm, sack, and pillage, can also guess the happier state of things when a city hears no longer the tramp of armies, when from her ramparts and towers no sign of adversary can be discovered; but all is peace. That is very much the condition of the people of God when the Lord keepeth them in peace. God Himself, at one time, seemed to be against us: the ten great cannon of His Law were turned against our walls; all heaven and earth mustered for battle; God Himself was against us, at least, so conscience reported from her look-out. But, now, at this moment, having believed in Jesus Christ, we have entered into rest, and we have perfect peace as to our former sins. Who is he that can harm you, O ye that are reconciled to God? “If God be for us, who can be against us?” “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” We have by faith arrived at a state of perfect reconciliation with God. The divine Fatherhood has covered us. We inherit the spirit of children, the spirit of love and of unquestioning confidence. Everything is quiet, for we dwell in our Father’s house. Look upward, and you will perceive no seat of fiery wrath to shoot devouring flame. Look downward, and you discover no hell, for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Look back, and sin is blotted out. Look around, and all things work together for good to them that love God. Look beyond, and glory shineth through the veil of the future, like the sun through a morning’s mist. Look outward, and the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field, are at peace with us. Look inward, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeps our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. The Lord leadeth us by still waters at such happy times, along that road of which we read, “No lion shall be there.” If you who are believers in Jesus do not usually enjoy this peace, the blame must be laid to your own door: you make your own disquietude, for God saith to you, “Peace, peace,” and He will keep you there if your mind is stayed on Him. Happy is he whose conflict is ended, and whose warfare is accomplished by faith in Christ Jesus.

Further, this perfect peace reigns over all things within its circle. Not only is no enemy near, but the inhabitants of the city are all at rest, and all their affairs are happy. No man can be said to be at perfect peace who has any cause of disquietude at all. Yet the child of God has this perfect peace according to our Lord's own statement; and, therefore, it must be true that the believer is raised above all disquietude. "What," say you, "has he not an evil heart of unbelief?" Yes, and that demands his watchfulness, but should not create in him any kind of terror, for God is greater than our hearts, and where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound. The flesh has received its death-warrant, and unbelief is but a part of the flesh doomed to die. The holy life within us must triumph. "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." Though we be as yet like the smoking flax, we shall soon shine forth, and He will bring forth judgment unto victory. "Ah," saith one, "but I have disquietude in my family: I have a wild, unruly son; or, I have a sick, pining child, who will soon be taken away from me by consumption!" Yes, friend, but if your mind is stayed on God, and you can trust God with such matters, you should not lose your perfect peace even through this. For, what if your heart be troubled? Will that make the consumptive child any the stronger? Or will your melancholy be likely to restrain your rebellious son? No, but "The just shall live by faith," and shall triumph by faith, too. It shall be your strength to bring your sick, and lay them at Jesus feet; it shall be your hope to bring your unruly one, and say, "Lord, cast out the devil from my child, and let him live unto Thee." Nothing ought to avail to break the peace of the believer; the shield of faith should quench every fiery dart. For, observe, that your sin is forgiven you for Christ's sake, and that is done once for all. Observe, that Christ has taken possession of you, and you are His; neither will He lose you, but He will hold you single-handed against the world, and death, and hell. Observe, too, that your heavenly Father rules in providence, giving you what you need, for He has said, "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly." He reigns in power, anticipating every danger, for He hath declared, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." God's peace covers the whole extent of the territory. Tell it out through every street of Mansoul that the Prince Emmanuel has come, and to every creature within the city



walls the peace of God is granted, to be possessed with gladness and delight.

We are getting some idea, I trust, of this peace, though words cannot fully convey it; we must know it ourselves. Yet it is pleasant to note that this peace is deeply real and true. No perfect peace can be enjoyed unless every secret cause of fear is met and removed. Whisper it at the gates, and in the hostelryes, that the city might be taken by surprise, and that spies had been seen in the meadows, down by the East gate; and straightway the city would be in a ferment. No; peace cannot breathe while suspicion haunts the streets. Our peace may be a false peace, a fools peace; we may be lulled into a carnal security. Politically, nations have become self-confident, have dreamed of peace when the forges were ringing with the hammers of war; and so ill has happened unto them. Spiritually, there are multitudes of persons who think that all is right with their souls, when, indeed, all is wrong, for eternity. It is to be feared that some have received a "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." Now, we cannot call that perfect peace which lies only on the surface, and will not bear to be looked into. We desire a peace which sits in open court, and neither blindfolds nor muzzles ambassadors. The peace which requires that there should be a hushing-up of this and that is an evil thing. Such is the direct opposite of the peace of God. If there be any charge against God's people, men are challenged to bring it, — "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" The pardon which God gives us is not a smothering-up of our sins, nor a blinding of justice. God is as just in His pardons as in His punishments. It shall be seen at the last, when believers enter into their glory, that they rise there by law, just as surely as the lost sink down to hell by law: that is to say, that the Lord Jesus Christ hath rendered to the law such recompense by His perfect obedience, and His matchless atonement, that it shall be as just on God's part to save His elect as to condemn the unbelieving world. We claim that our peace is just and right. It may be examined and tested; for here we have NO FICTION. If truth is to be found beneath the stars, it is in the peace which come through the precious blood of the Son of God. The peace which God gives goes through the very bottom of things, and brings us into the eternal harmonies.

We may gaze upon this truth with the most attentive eye, but we shall see only the more clearly that he that believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ hath salvation for walls and bulwarks. Under any light believers in Jesus are secure. You may be put in circumstances of a very trying kind, especially you may be brought to the brink of death, and near to the bar of God; and yet, dear friend, the God in whom ye trust will not fail you. Your heart rests on His promises and faithfulness, and there is no reason why its peace should be broken.

Is not this a perfect peace? If I stood here to preach up a sort of enthusiastic confidence, which would not bear the test, I would be ashamed of myself; but in preaching this peace of God, which passeth all understanding, which has no back-reckonings to disturb it, which has nothing behind that can come in ultimately to break it up, I preach something worth the having. I do desire and pray that every man and woman here may know it as I know it; for I have peace with God, and therefore my heart is glad. Oh that all of you here present might now believe God, and stay yourselves upon Him; then would you hear the Lord say "Peace! peace!"

One thing more, peace in a city would not be consistent with the stoppage of commerce. During perfect peace intercourse goes on with all surrounding places, and the city by its trade is enriched. Where there is perfect peace with God, commerce prospers between the soul and heaven. Good men commune with the good, and thereby their sense of peace increases. If you have perfect peace, you have fellowship with all the saints: personal jealousies, sectarian bitternesses, and unholy emulations are all laid aside. Oh, it is a happy state of mind when we have no prejudices which can wall out the godly from fellowship with us! Oh, how blessed to say spontaneously, "If he is a child of God, I love him; if he is a member of the heavenly family, he is my brother, and I welcome him!" When we are at one with all the people of God, we are quit of a world of wars.

Better still, there is a sweet peace between the heart and its God when from day to day, by prayer and praise, we commune with the Most High. Any peace that is linked with forgetfulness of God is a horrible thing: it is the peace of the miasma, which is brooding in quiet before it strikes with

the arrow of death; it is that dead calm which precedes the cyclone or the earthquake. The perfect peace which God giveth sunneth itself in the presence of God; it is a tropical flower, which lives in the flaming sunlight; a bird with rainbow-wings, which is at home in the high-noon of heavens summertide. God gives us to know more and more of this perfect peace, by enabling us to plunge more and more completely into His own self! One with God in Christ Jesus, we have reached everlasting peace.

Further let me speak upon this peace that God gives to us. It consists in rest of the soul. You know how the body casts all the limbs upon the bed, and they lie at ease; so does our spiritual nature stretch itself at ease. The heart reclines upon God's love, and the judgment leans on His wisdom; the desires recline, the hopes repose, the expectations rest, the soul throws all its weight and all its weariness upon the Lord, and then a perfect peace follows. To this absolute recumbency add a perfect resignation to the divine will. If you quarrel with God, your peace is at an end; but when you say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good," you have obtained one of the main elements of perfect peace. When the Lord's will is owned and love, all ground for quarrel is over: the peace must be deep. It consists also in sweet confidence in God, when there is not the shadow of doubt about anything God does, for you are sure of this, if of nothing else, that He must be true, and He must be right and kind, and in all things better to you than you are to yourself. Then to leave everything with God, trusting in Him for ever, because in Him there is everlasting strength — this is peace. It means, in fact, the swallowing up of self in the great sea of God, the giving up of all we are, and all we have, so entirely to God that henceforth we cannot be troubled, or be disturbed, because that which could make trouble is already bound over to keep the peace. Then comes a blessed contentment; we want no more, we have enough. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." Having Him, my desires all stay at home with Him. Let me but know Him better, and I shall grow even more satisfied with unutterable beauties, His indescribable perfections.

I hope you know this peace; and if you do, I need not tell you it means freedom from everything like despondency. The mind cannot yield to mistrust, for the Lord's peace keeps it. The compass on board an iron steam-vessel is placed aloft, so that it may not be so much influenced by

the metal of the ship: though surrounded by that which would put it out of place, the needle faithfully adheres to the pole because it is set above the misleading influence. So with the child of God, when the Lord has given him peace: he is lifted beyond the supremacy of his sorrowful surroundings, and his heart is delivered from its sad surroundings.

Thus we are kept from everything like rashness: resting in God, we are not in sinful haste; we can wait God's time to deliver us, knowing that there is love in every second of the delay. We do not kick, as the untutored bullock kicks against the goad, but we push on the more eagerly with our furrow, toiling on to the end, till God shall appear for us. Thus we are saved from the temptations which come with our trials. We get the smelting of the furnace without its smut. We endure the sorrow, but escape the sin, and this is joy enough for a pilgrim in this vale of tears.

O friends, he that hath this perfect peace is the richest man in the world! What are broad acres if you have a troubled spirit? What are millions of gold, laid by in the bank, if you have no God to go to in the hour of distress? What would it be to be a prince, a king, an emperor, if you had no hope for the hereafter, no treasure of eternal love? I, therefore, charge you to get and keep this "peace," — this perfect peace.

**II.** May the Lord strengthen me, in this time of painful weakness, while I speak upon another question. WHO ALONE CAN GIVE US THIS PEACE, AND PRESERVE IT IN US? The answer is in the words of the song, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace." See, it is God Himself that can give us this peace, and keep us in it. The answer is one and indivisible. I know that while I was speaking some of you were saying, "The pastor is setting forth a high style of living; how can we reach to it?" But if peace be God's gift, and if the Lord Himself is to keep us in it, how easily can we attain it by putting ourselves into His hands! To be striving after peace is hard work, for by our very anxiety to find it we miss its trail. How differently does the matter appear when we read, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace!"

How does the Lord keep His people in peace? I answer, first, by a special operation upon the mind in the time of its trial. We read in the 12th verse, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us." If this be so, we can understand how the Lord can work

peace in us among all the other works. There is an operation of God upon the human mind, mysterious and inscrutable, of which the effects are manifest enough; and among those effects is this, a quiet of heart, a calm of spirit, which never comes in any other way. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace." The Creator of our mind knows how to operate upon it by His Holy Spirit. Let the heart and will be allowed to be as free as you choose, yet is the Lord free to act upon them. As we can tune the strings of an harp, so can the Lord adjust the chords of our heart to joyous serenity. Not only by the Word of God, and by our meditation thereon, but by His own direct operation, the Lord can create peace within the land-locked sea of the human spirit. The Lord can get at men, and influence them for the highest ends, apart from the outward means. I have noticed that, altogether apart from the subjects of my reflections, I have, on a sudden, received a singular calm and peace of spirit directly from God. I can remember occasions when I had been hurried through broken water; the winds were wild, and my little vessel was at one instant lifted out of the water, and at the next beaten under the waves. Then, in a moment, everything was calm as a summer's evening, quiet as when the hush of Sabbath falls on a hamlet in the lone Highlands. My heart was royally glad, for it had entered into perfect peace. I think you must have noticed such matters in your own case. Generally, I grant you, we are led into this peace by the consideration of the promises of God; but sometimes, apart from that, without our knowing why or wherefore, we have upon a sudden glided from darkness into light, by the distinct operation of the Spirit of God upon the mind.

But usually the Lord keeps His people in perfect peace by the operation of certain considerations, intended by His infinite wisdom to work in that manner. For instance, if sin be before the mind, it may well disquiet us, but when a man considereth that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, he hath that before him which allayeth the disquietude. When he considereth that, in dying, the Lord Jesus rendered unto God a full and satisfactory atonement for all the sin of all His believing people, then the man is at once, by that consideration, brought into perfect peace. Or suppose that a temporal trial ruffles the mind; the uneasy one turns to Scripture, and he finds that affliction is not sent as a legal punishment, but only as a fatherly chastisement of love: then is the bitterness of it passed

away. Let a man know that all his trials work together for his good, and every sufficient reason for discontent is removed. The man noteth that there is good in the evil which surrounds him; indeed, he perceives the Lord to be at work everywhere, and henceforth he accepts the arrangements of providence without mistrust, and his heart is at peace. Depend upon it, dear friend, if you are tossed up and down, like the locust, you will only find peace by flying to the fields of Scripture. In this garden of the Lord, flowers are blooming which yield a balm for every wound of the heart. Never was there a lock of soul-trouble yet, but what there was a key to open it in the Word of God. For our pain, here is an anodyne; for our darkness, a lamp; for our loneliness, a friend. It is like the garden of Eden: a double river of peace glideth through it. Turn you then to the Lord's Word, to communion with His people, to prayer, to praise, or some form of holy service, and God will thus keep you in perfect peace.

I believe, also, that the Lord keeps His people in perfect peace by the distinct operations of His providence. When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. By secret workings he can quiet foes so that they are as still as a stone till Thy people pass over, O Lord. When one providence apparently fights against you, another will come in to deliver you. The Lord's thoughts towards His people are thoughts of good, and not of evil; and they shall see it to be so. Either the afflicted shall reach a place of rest, or else double strength shall be given for the double trial. God will allow no war in His providence against His own child, all must be for you there. If you are God's Jonah, and are thrown into the sea, a whale must wait upon you; and if you are God's servant, and are brought into the lowest dungeon in Egypt, Pharaohs own self must send and fetch you out of it to sit upon a throne. Lift up now your eyes, O you that crouch among the ashes because of your daily fret! Be no longer grovellers in the dust! The Lord is your King; nothing can break your peace. The Creator of yon stars and clouds, Lord of the universe, Monarch of all nature: thinkest thou that He cannot speedily send thee deliverance? All these ages has He loved thee; canst thou mistrust Him? Knowest thou not that He feeds the sparrows, ay, and the fish of the sea, and the myriads of living creatures which only His eye can see? There is no limit to His stores, nor bounds to His power. Canst thou not trust in Him, that He will help thee through, and give thee rest?

Thus, you see, our peace comes from God in some way or other; and I therefore the more earnestly ask you never to seek peace elsewhere. Do not seek peace by praying for the absence of trial. You may be just as happy in affliction as out of it, if the Lord be with you. Do not seek peace by cultivating hardness of heart, and indifference of spirit. No, when you are afflicted, you ought to feel it: God means you should; and you must learn to feel it, and yet be fully at peace. Do not imagine you can get peace by philosophy, or by considerations derived from reason, or by knowledge fetched from experience. There is but one well from which you can draw the sweet waters of perfect peace, and it bears about its rim this dainty inscription — “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, O Jehovah.” Such peace as God giveth makes us like to God, it fills us with His love, it sets us acting according to His holiness; and, meanwhile, it prepares us for His palace, where everlasting peace perfumes every chamber, and covers the whole fabric with glory.

**III.** I have to answer another question this morning, and that is — WHO SHALL OBTAIN THIS PEACE? “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.” The Hebrew is very involved and difficult to understand, but we shall not err if we permit it to teach us this, — that the whole of our being is stayed upon God in order to this peace. The word for “mind” is very vague, but it must include our thoughts. If your thoughts are stayed on God, you will have perfect peace: our misery comes from stray, vagabond, unsettled thoughts. If you will think of nothing except in connection with God, if you will only think of your sin in connection with a merciful God, if you will only think of tribulation in connection with a faithful God, if you will set the Lord always before you, so that he is at your right hand, you shall not be moved; but you certainly cannot be perfectly at peace till each thought, being held captive, learns to stay itself on Him. This includes the imagination. The imaginations are most untamable wild beasts, and cause a world of terror in timid minds. Oh for grace to fasten up imagination in the Lord’s own cage! We must not imagine anything to be possible which would make the Lord appear to be unkind or untrue. Pray that your imagination may be stayed on God, that you may never again imagine anything contrary to the grace, goodness, and love of your heavenly Father. What peace would rule if this were the case! I think our text includes especially the desires. Desires are very grasping

things. It is utterly impossible to satisfy a worldly mans heart: if he had all he now wishes for, he would be sure then to enlarge his desires as hell, and ask for more. But you, dear friend, must stay your desires at some bound or other, and what more fit than to stay them upon God? Say, "I want nothing but what God wills to give me; I desire to have nothing but what He thinks is for His glory, and for my profit." When you once come to this point, when your imaginations and desires all pitch their tents within the compass of God Himself, Who is your heavenly portion, then you will be kept in perfect peace.

What else is meant by being stayed? Does it not mean rested? When your thoughts recline at their ease in God's revealed will, that is staying upon God. When your desires are filled, and no longer open their greedy mouths for more, because God has filled them, that is staying. Does it not mean stopping there? We speak of staying at a place. Well, when our minds are stayed upon God, we just stop at God; we do not propose any further journeying; we do not wish to push on in advance of where He leads the way. Our heart is rooted and grounded in the great Father's love, and so we stay our souls on Him.

Staying means upholding. We speak of a stay, and of a mainstay; it is something upon which we are depending. Such a person is the stay of the house, — its chief upholder and support. See, then, what it is to stay your souls on God, and mind that you daily carry it out. Some are staying themselves upon a friend, others are staying themselves upon their own ability, but blessed is the man who stays himself upon God. We are to have no confidence except in the Almighty arm; our reliance must be place there only. When in our God we live, and move, and have our being, this is the crowning condition of a creature. Oh, to feel to the utmost that we are wholly the Lord's, and that, whether His will appoints us joy or woe, we shall be equally satisfied, for we have come to lie down on His will, and go no further. I like staid persons — you know what they are and where they are. They are not easily put about, neither do they readily forsake a cause which they have espoused. He that is stayed upon God is the most staid in the world; he is steadfast, grounded, settled, and he cannot be removed from the blessed hope of the gospel. He that is fully staid is the man that shall have perfect peace. Oh, whither away, ye undecided ones? Oh, whither away, poor hearts? Will ye wander over every mountain? Will ye



never take up lodging with your God, and dwell at ease in Him? Of this be ye well assured, your souls are on the wing, and are bound to fly on and on for ever unless they make bold to settle down upon the Lord their God. In God is rest, but in none else. All earth and heaven, time and eternity, cannot make up a peace for a bruised spirit, and yet a word from the Lord bestows it beyond recall.

Observe, it says, “stayed on thee.” Dwell with emphasis upon that, for there are many ways of staying yourself, but you must mind that all your staying is on God; on your heavenly Father, who will withhold no good thing from you; on your divine Savior, who pleads for you at the right hand of God; on the Holy Ghost, who dwells in you; on the triune God, who hath said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

Now, instead of saying more, I should like, if God the Holy Spirit would help us, for each one to go through the mental act of rolling our care upon the Lord. Let us commit ourselves, and all that we are, and all that we have, and all that we have to do, and all that we have to suffer, to the guardian care of our loving God, casting all our care upon Him, for He careth for us. Here we are in God, and here we mean to abide. We are not regretting the grace of yesterday, nor sighing for the grace of to-morrow. We stay where we are — at home with God. Our anchor is down, and we do not mean to draw it up again. “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.” “Oh,” saith one, “you do not know my troubles!” No, but I remember the story of a poor Methodist at the battle of Fontenoy. He had both his legs shot away, and when the surgeon came to attend to him, he was evidently bleeding to death, but he cried, “I am as happy as I can be out of Paradise!” Well, if in the very article of death, and suffering as he was, he could overflow with happiness, surely you and I can rejoice in perfect peace. I want you all to be like Dr. Watts, who said that for many years he went to his bed without the slightest solicitude as to whether he should wake up in this world, or in the next. To rest in God’s Word, to rejoice in God’s covenant, to trust in the divine sacrifice, to be conformed to God’s will, to delight in God’s self — this is to stay yourself upon God, and the consequence of it is perfect peace.

**IV.** WHY IS IT THAT THE LORD WILL KEEP THAT MAN IN PERFECT PEACE WHO STAYS HIMSELF ON HIM? The answer is, “because he trusteth in

thee.” Dear friends, that means surely this, that in faith there is the tendency to create and nourish peace. In all other ways of trying to live before God there is a tendency to produce uneasiness; but he that believes shall rest. Faith lays a cool hand upon a burning brow, and removes the fever of the fearful heart. Faith hath a voice of silver, wherewith she whispers, “Peace, be still.” Nothing can conduce so much to a quiet life as a firm, unwavering confidence in the faithfulness of God’s promise, and in the fact that what He has promised He is able also to perform.

Further, the text means this, that when a man stays himself upon God it is not only his faith that brings him peace, but his faith is rewarded by peace, which the Lord gives him as a token of approval. A kind of discipline is going on in our heavenly Father’s family, not rewards and punishments such as judges award to criminals, but such as fathers give to their children. By this we are being trained for the many mansions in the Father’s house above. If we will stay ourselves on God, we shall have peace; if we will not do so, we shall have no rest, and shall be in sore disquietude. “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” The pressure of the trouble comes with the decline of faith. If thou believest more, it may not make thee richer, but thou wilt not feel thy poverty so keenly. If thou believest more, it may not make thee healthy in body, but thou shalt not fret because of thy sickness: if thou believest more, it will not give thee back thy buried ones, but it shall fill thy heart with a still higher love. “All things are possible to him that believeth,” and peace, peace is among those possibilities; but if thou wilt not believe, neither shalt thou be established, thine unbelief shall be a rod for thine own back, a bitter for thine own cup. If thou wilt not trust thy God, thou shalt wander into a weary land, seeking rest and finding none. Come, brothers and sisters, let us fly from such a fate, and win perfect peace as the reward of perfect confidence.

I think, lastly, this peace comes out of faith, because it is faiths way of proclaiming herself. If God gives you perfect peace, you will not need, when you go home, to shout to your friends, “I am a believer.” They will soon see it. You have lost one that was very dear to you, and instead of fretting and repining, you kiss the hand of God, and go about your daily duties with patience. That is a very wonderful fruit of the Spirit, wrought by faith, and thus faith is seen. A man has had a fire, or some other form of loss,

and his comforts are destroyed. If he is an unbeliever, we do not wonder that he tears his hair, and curses God, and rages and fumes. But if he has stayed himself on God, he will be at peace, and he will say, “The Lord hath done it. It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good.” By this will you be known to be the disciples of Christ, when in patience ye possess your souls. Faith which only operates when all goes well, is the mockery of faith; the love that praises God when God gives thee according to thy desire is no more than the love of some dogs to their masters, who care just as much for them as the number of the scraps may be. Wilt thou have such a cupboard love as that? It were far better to get to this state, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” If thou hast this faith within thee, then shall thy peace be like a river. The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep thy heart and mind by Christ Jesus.

I am very much concerned in leaving you, that you, dear friend, should aim much at the possession of this peace. It is a mode of propagating the gospel never to be despised. Multitudes of people have been converted by seeing the holy patience of God’s people: they have been impressed by it, and have said, “There must be something in a religion that can give such a peace as this.” When you are fretting and worrying, you are undoing your ministers work. When the people of God are over and above troubled, when they count life to be a burden to them because things are not as they would wish them to be, they are really slandering their heavenly Father, and they are preventing the wandering from coming back. The unconverted say, “Why should be go to God to be made miserable?” O ye banished seed, be glad! O ye troubled ones, rejoice! Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations, yet lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. Within a short time you shall put on the garments of your excellency and beauty, and the weeds of your mourning shall be laid aside. Wherefore play the man: better still, play the Christian; and let all men know where God is, and where the Lord rules the heart, there is, there must be, a deep and profound peace. May God bless you, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Isaiah 26.

HYMNS FROM OUR OWN HYMN BOOK — 46, 738, 552.

# THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR

## SERMON NO. 1826

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON MARCH 23RD, 1884,

*“And he said, Nay; but I will die here.” — ~~1~~1 Kings 2:30*

HE MUST tell you the story. Solomon was to be the king after David, but his elder brother, Adonijah, was preferred by Joab, the captain of the host, and by Abiathar, the priest; and, therefore, they got together, and tried to steal a march upon dying David, and set up Adonijah. They utterly failed in this; and when Solomon came to the throne Adonijah was afraid for his life, and fled to the horns of the altar at the tabernacle for shelter. Solomon permitted him to find sanctuary there, and forgave him his offense, and said that if he proved himself a worthy man he should live without further molestation. But very soon he began plotting again, and sought to undermine Solomon now that their venerable father was dead. It became therefore necessary, especially according to oriental ideas, for Solomon to strike a heavy blow; and he determined to begin with Joab — the bottom of all the mischief, who, though he had not followed after Absalom in David's time, was now following after Adonijah. No sooner had the king determined upon this, than Joab, conscience-stricken, began to look to himself and fly. Read the twenty-eighth verse.

*“Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.”*

I suppose that he thought that, as Adonijah had done this successfully before, Joab might repeat it, and have some hope for his life. Of course, he had no right to enter into the holy place, and lay hold on the horns of the altar; but being driven to desperation, he knew not what else to do. He was a man of hoary head, who had thirty or more years before committed two atrocious murders, and now they came home to him. He did not know

where to fly except he fled to the horns of an altar, which he had very seldom approached before. As far as we can judge, he had shown little respect to religion during his lifetime. He was a rough man of war, and cared little enough about God, or the tabernacle, or the priests, or the altar; but when he was in danger, he fled to that which he had avoided, and sought to make a refuge of that which he had neglected. He was not the only man that had done the same. Perhaps there are some here who before long will be trying to escape from impending woe by like means.

Now, I want you to notice that when Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord, and took hold of the horns of the altar, it was of no use to him. "And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord; and, behold, he is by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the Lord and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus saith Joab, and thus he answered me. And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. And the Lord shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men, more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing thereof, to wit, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa, the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab. So Benaiah the son of Jehoida went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness."

I have two lessons I am anxious to teach at this time. The first is derived from the fact that Joab found no benefit of sanctuary even though he laid hold of the horns of the altar of God's house, from which I gather this lesson — that outward ordinances will avail nothing. Before the living God, who is greater and wiser than Solomon, it will be of no avail to any man to lay hold upon the horns of the altar. But, secondly, there is an altar — a spiritual altar — whereof if a man do but lay hold upon the horns, and say, "Nay; but I will die here," he shall never die; but he shall be safe against the sword of justice for ever; for the Lord has appointed an altar in the person of his own dear Son, Jesus Christ, where there shall be shelter for the very vilest of sinners if they do but come and lay hold thereon.

**I.** To begin, then, first, OUTWARD ORDINANCES AVAIL NOT. The laying hold upon the literal horns of an altar, which can be handled, availed not Joab. There are many — oh, how many still! — that are hoping to be saved, because they lay hold, as they think, upon the horns of the sacraments. Men of unhallowed life, nevertheless, come to the sacramental table, looking for a blessing. Do they not know that they pollute it? Do they not know that they are committing a high sin, and a great misdemeanour against God, by coming amongst his people, where they have no right to be? And yet they think that by committing this atrocity they are securing to themselves safety. How common it is to find in this city, when an irreligious man is dying, that someone will say, “Oh, he is all right; for a clergyman has been, and given him the sacrament.” I often marvel how men calling themselves the servants of God can dare thus to profane the ordinance of the Lord. Did he ever intend the blessed memorial of the Lord’s supper to be a kind of superstitious vialicum, a something upon which ungodly men may depend in their last hour, as if it could put away sin. I do not one half so much blame the poor ignorant and superstitious persons who seek after the sacrament in their dying hours, as I do the men who ought to know better, but who pander to what is as downright a superstition as anything that ever came from the church of Rome, or, for the matter of that, from the fetish worship of the most deluded African tribe. Do they conceive that grace comes to men by bits of bread and drops of wine? These things are meant to put us in memory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as far as they do that, and quicken our thoughts of him, they are useful to us; but there is no wizardry or witchcraft linked with these two emblems, so they convey as form of grace. If you do rely upon such things, I can only say that this error is all of a piece: it is a superstition which begins with, “In my baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven”; which statement is altogether false; and then it continues the delusion by prostituting an ordinance meant for the living child of God, and giving it to the ungodly, the ignorant, and the superstitious, as though it could make them meet for entering heaven. I charge you, as before the Lord, cleanse yourselves of this superstition. There is no salvation apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and you might as well trust in your sins as in sacraments. In fact, the sacraments become sins to men who trust in them, for those men sin against the

ordinances of the Lord by putting them where they never ought to be, and making an Antichrist of them, so as to push Christ out of his place with their baptisms and their masses. If you died with the sacramental bread in your mouths, ye will lost unless your faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Your hands, which are superstitiously laid upon the altar's horns, might as well be placed upon your weapons of rebellion. Outward emblems can do you no good whatsoever if you remain unspiritual. Without faith in Christ, even the ordinances of God become things to condemn you. If ye eat and drink unworthily ye eat and drink condemnation to yourselves, not discerning the Lord's body; and, if this be true, how dare any unconverted, unbelieving man put his trust in the outward ordinance of which he has no right to partake?

There are others who put their trust in religious observances of sundry kinds. Their visible altar-horn is something which they believe to be very proper and right, and which, indeed, may be so if wisely used, for the thing is good if used lawfully; but it will be their ruin if it be put out of its own place. For instance, there are, doubtless, some who think that they are all right because they frequent sermons. They delight to be found hearing the gospel. Now, in this you do well, for, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"; but, if you suppose that the mere hearing of a sermon with the outward ear can save you, you suppose what is untrue, and you build the house of your hope on sand. "Oh, sir, I have sat to hear the true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ these many years." Yes, and these many years you have rejected it. The kingdom of God has come nigh unto you, but I fear it will work your damnation through your unbelief; for it will be a savor of death unto you. I fear that in the last great day it shall be seen that I have ministered unto some of you to your hurt. It will not be laid to my charge, but to yours, if I have been faithful in the declaration of the word. Oh, may God grant that no man or woman among you may ever put the slightest faith in the mere hearing of the word! Except ye receive it by faith ye deceive your own souls; if ye are hearers only, what good can come of it?

"Oh, but," says another, "I attend prayer meetings." I admit that it is not every hypocrite that will regularly come to prayer-meetings, but there are some that do; and, though you are so fond of prayer-meetings, yet, my dear friend, unless it can be said of you, "Behold he prayeth," you need

not make sure of safety. Your being found in the place where prayer is wont to be made may be no true sign of grace. “Ay, but I do more than that, for I have prayers in my own house.” Yes, and very proper, too. I would that all did the same; I am grieved that any should neglect the ordinance of family prayer. But yet, if you think that the reading of a form of prayer in your household, or even the use of extempore prayer, is a thing to be relied upon for salvation, you do greatly err. “He that believeth in him hath everlasting life”, but he that believes not in the Lord Jesus Christ does but offer unbelieving prayer to God; and what is that but a vain sacrifice which he cannot accept? Oh, do not rely upon the habit of outward worship, or you will lean on a bulrush!

“But I regularly read a chapter,” says one. I am extremely glad you do, and God bless that chapter to you! I would that all were in the habit of reading right thought the Bible regularly, and endeavoring to understand it; but, if you trust in your Bible-readings as a ground of salvation, you are resting upon a mere soap-bubble which will burst under your weight. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, producing in the soul a change of heart, a new birth unto God, this is what is wanted; and, apart from that, all the Bible reading you ever practice can do you no good whatsoever. “Ye must be born again. Ye must be born again”; and if they be not this inward change, then vain is all outward observance. You may wash a corpse, you may clothe that corpse in the purest white shroud that was ever woven, but when all is done it does not live; and what are all the outward devotions of a carnal man but dead things which bring no life with them to men dead in sin?

Some are foolish enough to put their confidence in ministers. It would seem to me to be the maddest thing in all the world for anybody to have confidence in me as to helping him in his salvation; and I trust that nobody is such a fool. I cannot even save myself; what can I do for others? Do not come to me with “Give us of your oil,” for I have not enough for myself, except as I keep on begging a supply. When I look at the priests in whom some trust, especially such as I have seen abroad, they may be very fine fellows, but I would not trust some of them with a half-crown, let alone my soul. The very look of most priests makes me wonder how they manage to secure power over people’s minds. They may know a great deal, but they do not look as if they were overdone with wit. I would as soon trust my soul in the hands of a gipsy with a red cloak as I would



with the best-ordained priest or bishop that ever lived. There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, and he who sets up another is an enemy of souls. There is but one who can be trusted with our soul affairs, even the Lord Jesus Christ; and woe to us if we put our confidence in men! Ordained or unordained, shaven or unshorn, they cannot help us. Yet I know that people do trust in ministers most foolishly. I remember years ago being at three o'clock in the morning in a house now pulled down, which stood not far from the London Bridge railway-station. A gentleman of considerable means had spent the Sunday at Brighton, had come home, and had been taken with cholera on a sudden, and nothing would do him, when he was in the pangs of death, but he must send for me. I went, not knowing what was required of me. But when I got there what could I do? There was a little consciousness left to the man, and I spoke to him of Jesus. I asked if he had a Bible. The people of the house searched high and low, but there was no such thing to be found. The mind was soon too beclouded for further comprehension, and as I came away I asked, "Has he ever gone to a place of worship?" No, never — never cared for such a thing; but as soon as he was ill, then, "Oh, send for Mr. Spurgeon!" He must come, and nobody else: and there I stood, and what could I do? There died in the City of London, not long ago, a tradesman of much wealth; and when he came to die, though I had never seen the man in my life before, he importunately asked for me. I could not go. My brother went to see him, and, after setting before him the way of salvation, he enquired, "What made you wish to see my brother?" "Well," he said, "you know whenever I have a doctor I always like to get the best; and when I employ a lawyer I like a man who is high in the profession. Money is no object. I want the best possible help." Ah me! I shuddered at being so regarded. The best help he could get! That best is nothing — less than nothing, and vanity. What can we do for you, dear hearts, if you will not have our Savior? We can stand and weep over you, and break our hearts to think that you reject him; but what can we do? Oh, if we could let you into heaven, if we could renew your hearts, how joyfully would we perform the miracle; but we claim no such power, no such influence! Go you to Christ, and lay hold upon the true altar-horn; but do not be so foolish as to put confidence in us or in any other ministers.

“Ah, well,” says one, “I am free of that. I am a professor of religion, and have been a member of a church now these twenty years.” You may be a member of a church fifty years, but you will be damned at last unless you are a member of Christ. It matters not though you are a church-officer, a deacon, an elder, a pastor, a bishop, or even Archbishop of Canterbury, or an apostle, you will perish as surely as Judas, who betrayed his Master with a kiss, unless your heart is right with God. I pray you, put no confidence in your profession. Unless you have Christ in your heart, a profession is but a painted pageantry for a soul to go to hell in. As a corpse is drawn to the grave by horses adorned with nodding plumes, so may you find in an outward profession a pompous way of being lost. God save us from that!

“No,” says one, “but I do not trust in mere profession. I have great reliance upon orthodoxy. I will have sound doctrine.” That is right, friend, I would have all men value the truth. “My confidence is in my sound doctrine.” That is not mine, friend, and I hope that it will not be yours long, for many lost souls have firmly believed orthodox doctrine. In fact, I question whether any one is more orthodox than the devil, for the devils believe and tremble. Satan is no skeptic; he has too much knowledge for that. Devils believe and tremble, and yet they are devils still. Put no confidence in the mere fact that you hold to an orthodox faith, for a dead orthodoxy soon corrupts. You must have faith in Christ, or else this altar-horn of a correct creed, on which you lay your hand, will bring you no salvation.

I will not enlarge upon this topic. Whatever you depend upon apart from the blood and righteousness of Christ, away with it! Away with it! If you are even depending upon your own repentance, and your faith, away with them! If you are looking to your own prayers or alms, I can only cry again, — Away with them! Nothing but the blood of Jesus; nothing but the atoning sacrifice; but, if you come and lay your hand upon that, blessed shall you be.

**II.** That assurance is the second part of our discourse, on which I will speak briefly. COMING TO THE SPIRITUAL ALTAR, AND LAYING OUR HAND UPON IT, WILL SAVE US.

Now, notice first, the act itself. Joab came within the tabernacle. So, poor soul, come and hide yourself in Christ. Joab took hold of the horns, the projecting corners of the altar, and he would not let go. Come, trembling sinners, and take hold on Christ Jesus.

*“My faith doth lay her hand  
On that dear head of thine;  
While like a penitent I stand,  
And there confess my sin.”*

Lean with your hand of faith upon your Lord, and say, “This Christ is mine. I accept it as the gift of God to me, unworthy though I be.”

When that is done, a fierce demand may be made upon you. The enemy will probably cry, “Come forth! Come forth!” The self-righteous will say, “What right has a sinner as you to trust Christ? Come forth!” Mind you say to them, “Nay, but I will die here.” Your sins and your guilty conscience will cry to you, “Come forth! Come forth! You must not lay hold of Christ. See what you have been, and what you are, and what you are likely to be.” Answer to these voices, “Nay, but I will die here. I will never give up my hold of Christ.” Satan will come, and he will howl out, “Come forth! What right have you with the Lord Jesus Christ? You cannot think that he came to save such a lost one as you are.” Do not listen to him. As often as he howls at you, only say to yourself, “Nay, but I will die here.” I pray God that every sinner here may be brought to this desperate resolve, “If I perish, I will perish trusting in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. If I must die, I will die here.” For certain, we shall die anywhere else. If we trust in any but Jesus, we must perish. “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid.” “Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.” “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not,” — whatever else he trusts to, — “is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.” Make, then, this desperate resolve —

*If I must die, here will I die,  
Here at the cross I bide;  
To whom or whither should I fly?  
Where else can I confide?*

Say to all those who call you away, “Nay, but I will die here”; for nobody ever did perish trusting in Jesus. There has not been through all these

centuries a single instance of a soul being cast away that came all guilty and hell-deserving, and took Christ to be its salvation. If you perish, you will then be the first that perished with his hand laid upon Christ. His love and power can never fail a sinner's confidence. Wherefore, may God the Holy Spirit lead you to resolve, "If I must die, I will die here." Listen to me, soul, whoever thou mayest be out of the crowd, man or women, whatever thy life may have been, even though it should have been that of a harlot or a thief, a drunkard or a profligate, if thou wilt now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt be saved; for, if not, then God himself will have missed his greatest design. What did he give Jesus for but to save sinners? What did he lay sin upon Jesus for, but that he might take it off the sinner, and let him go free, and be pardoned? If, then, Christ fails, God's grandest expedient has broken down. That method by which the Lord resolved to show what his almighty grace can do has proved to be a failure if a believing sinner is not saved. Dost thou think that such a thing can ever be? It is blasphemy to think that Jehovah can be defeated. He that believes in Christ shall be saved; nay, he is saved.

If thou art not saved believing in Christ, then Christ himself is dishonored. Oh, let them once know, down in the dark abode of fallen spirits, that a man has trusted in Christ and yet has not been saved, I tell you that they will make such exultation over Christ as Philistia made over Samson when his eyes were put out. They would feel that they had defeated the Prince of Glory. They would trample on his blood, and ridicule his claim to be the Savor of men. If any soul can truly say hereafter, "I went to Christ, and he refused me," then Christ does not speak the truth when he says, "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out." Then he has changed his nature, foregone his word, and foresworn himself. But that also can never be. Wherefore, dear heart, cling to Jesus, and say still, "If I die, I will die here."

Moreover, if thou canst perish trusting in Christ thou wilt discourage all the saints of God; for if Christ can break his promise to one, then why not to another? If one promise fails, why not all the promises? If the blood has lost its power, how can any of us ever hope to enter heaven? I say it will breed great discouragement in the hearts of all people if this be true; for what a wet blanket would throne over all thy fellow-sinners! If they are coming to Christ, they will start back, and say, "What is the good of it?"

Here is one that came to Jesus, and he did not save him. He trusted in the precious blood, and yet his sin was laid to his charge." If one fails, why not the rest? I must give up preaching the gospel when once I hear of a man trusting Jesus and not being saved; for I should be afraid to speak with boldness, as I now do.

If one poor soul that puts his trust in Christ should be cast away it would spoil heaven itself. What security is there for glorified spirits that their splendours shall endure except the promise of a faithful, covenant-keeping God? If, then, looking down from their celestial seats, they behold the great Father breaking his promise, and the Son of God unable to save those for whom he died, then will they say, "We will lay our harps aside, and put our palms away, for we, too, after all, may perish." See, then, O man, heaven and earth, ay, God and his Christ, as to their credit and their glory, do stand and fall with the salvation of every believing sinner. If I were in your stead tonight, I think that I should bless God to have this matter put so plainly to me. I know that years ago, when I was under a sense of sin, if I had heard even such a poor sermon as this I should have jumped for joy at it, and would have ventured upon Christ at once. Come, poor soul; come at once. You have heard the gospel long enough; now obey it. You have heard about Christ long enough; now trust in him. You have been invited and entreated, and pleaded with; now yield to his grace. Yield to joy and peace by trusting in him who will give you both of these as soon as you have rested in him.

Look! sinner, look! A look out of thyself will save thee. Look away from all thy works, and prayers, and tears, and feelings, and church-goings, and chapel-goings, and sacraments, and ministers. Look alone to Jesus. Look at once to him who on the bloody tree made expiation, and who bids thee look, and thou shalt live.

God make this present hour to be the period of thy new birth. I pray it, and so do his people. The Lord hearken to our intercessions, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~Psalm~~ Psalms 61 and 62.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 560, 589, 514.

## LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

DEAR FRIENDS AND BRETHREN, — As I am expected to report myself weekly, and have only this corner left to do it in, the bulletin shall be brief. Weather unsettled; progress fair, but not rapid. I find myself too readily depressed with small matters, and I have a sense of unfitness for my future work. This shows that while rest has done much, there is more to be done. Three weeks have worked such marvels that I hope in due time to return in full vigor.

My heart is with the Special Services at the Tabernacle; for which I beg every reader to pray daily.

*C. H. Spurgeon*

*Mentone, February 21st, 1885.*

# THE MAN CHRIST JESUS

## SERMON NO. 1835

DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, APRIL 12TH, 1885,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“Now consider how great this man was.” — ~~SYN~~ Hebrews 7:4.*

CONSIDER how great Melchizedek was. There is something majestic about every movement of that dimly-revealed figure. His one and only appearance is thus fitly described in the Book of Genesis, —

“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.”

We see but little of him, yet we see nothing little in him. He is here and gone, as far as the historic page is concerned, yet is he “a priest for ever,” and “it is witnessed that he liveth.” Everything about him is on a scale majestic and sublime.

“Consider how great this man was” in the combination of his offices. He was duly appointed both priest and king: king of righteousness and peace, and at the same time priest of the Most High God. It may be said of him that he sat as a priest upon his throne. He exercised the double office to the great blessedness of those who were with him; for his one act towards Abraham would seem to be typical of his whole life; he blessed him in the name of the Most High God. “Consider how great this man was” that he not only ruled his people with righteousness and brought them peace, but he was their representative towards God and God’s representative to them; and in each character distributed divine blessings.

“Consider how great this man was” in the power of his benedictions. Abraham had already been greatly blessed so much so that he is described as “he that received the promises.” Yet a receiver of promises so great, a man with whom God had entered into solemn covenant, was yet blessed by Melchizedek, and without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. This great man yet further blessed the blessed Abraham, and the father of the faithful was glad to receive benediction at his hands. No small man this: no priest of second rank; but one who overtops the sons of men by more than head and shoulders, and acts a superior’s part among the greatest of them.

“Consider how great this man was” in supremacy over all around him. He met Abraham when he was returning as a conqueror from the overthrow of the robber kings; and the victorious patriarch bowed before him and gave him tithes of the best of the spoil. Without a moment’s hesitation the man of God recognized the priest of God, and paid to him the tribute of a subject to the officer of a great king. In Abraham’s bowing all the line of Aaronic priesthood did homage unto Melchizedek; for as the apostle saith, “Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham, for he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.” So that all kings in Abraham, and all priests in Abraham, did homage unto this man, who, as king and priest, was owned to be supreme. “Consider how great this man was” when Paul had once proved that Melchizedek was greater than all other, at least to the Hebrews; for the seed of Abraham can recognize none greater than Abraham; and since Abraham by paying tithes acknowledges his subordination to Melchizedek, it is clear that the priest of the Most High God was the greatest of men.

“Consider how great this man was” as to the singularity of his person, “without father, without mother, without descent”: that is to say, we know nothing as to his birth, his origin, or his history. Even this explanation hardly answers to the words, especially when it is added, “Having neither beginning of days, nor end of life.” So mysterious is Melchizedek that many deeply-taught expositors think that he was veritably an appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are inclined to believe that he was not a king of some city in Canaan, as the most of us suppose, but that he was a manifestation of the Son of God, such as were the angels that appeared to Abraham on the plains of Mamre, and that



divine being who appeared to Joshua by Jericho, and to the three holy ones in the furnace. At any rate, you may well consider how great this man was when you observe how veiled in cloud is everything about his coming and going — veiled because intended to impress us with the depth of the sacred meanings which were shadowed forth in him. How much more shall this be said of him of whom we ask —

*“Thy generation who can tell,  
Or count the number of thy years?”*

“Consider how great this man was” in the specialty of his office. He had no predecessor in his priesthood, and he had no successor. He was not one who took a holy office and then laid it down; but as far as the historic page of Scripture is concerned we have no note of his quitting this mortal scene; he disappears, but we read nothing of his death any more than of his birth. His office was perpetual, and passed not from sire to son; for he was the type of “One who is made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.”

“Consider how great this man was” in his being altogether unique. There is another “after the order of Melchizedek,” the glorious Antitype in whom Melchizedek himself is absorbed; but apart from him Melchizedek is unique. Who can equal this strange, mysterious priest, prophet, king, sent of the Most High God to bless the father of the faithful? He is altogether alone: he receives no commission from the hands of men, nor from God by men; and he does not transmit to a successor what he had not received from a predecessor. Melchizedek stands alone: one mighty crag, rising out of the plain; a long Alp, whose brow is swathed in cloud sublime. “Consider how great this man was” but think not to measure that greatness.

I shall leave you to that consideration; for my business this morning is not with Melchizedek, but with a greater than he. I shall take my text in its connection, but lift it up to a higher application. Beloved friends, if Melchizedek was so great, how much greater is that man whom Melchizedek represents! If the type is so wonderful what must the Antitype be! I invite you to consider “how great” is he of whom it is written, “The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” I will not say “Consider how great this

man was”, for there is no verb: the “was” is inserted in italics by the translators. We are to consider “how great this man.” Say “was” if you will, but read also “is,” and “shall be.” Consider how great this man was and is, and is to be, even the Man Christ Jesus.

And first, this morning, let me exhort you to consider how great this man is: then let me assist you to consider how great this man is: and then let us practically improve our consideration of how great this man is, trying to turn it to holy account as the Holy Ghost may enable us.

**I.** First, then, LET ME EXHORT YOU TO CONSIDER HOW GREAT THIS MAN, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, is.

This subject claims your consideration. I do not think it should be a matter of option with you whether you will now consider the greatness of your Lord or not; it is his due and right that you should consider his greatness. For he of whom we speak, — “this man,” is one well known among us. If you be true to your profession he is one most dear to you, to whom you owe all things, aye, owe your very selves. He is one between whom and you there is a troth plighted: you are espoused unto him, your hearts are his, even as his heart is yours. If you do not consider him, who will? He has loved you, and given himself for you. Strangers may listen to our teaching at this time, and in vain we may cry,

*“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?  
Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?”*

But you are no stranger, you are not even a guest in his house, but you are a child living at home with him. He is your brother, and much more; for he is bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. All your interests are wrapped up in him. You are one with him: by an endless union, one. I claim, therefore, and I am sure you assent at once to the claim, that you should often consider your Lord, and the greatness of his nature, person, office, and work. His greatness should be your perpetual theme. I would urge that all other thoughts should now be banished, for this is your Lord’s own day, and therefore to him it should be dedicated with glad consent. If you are in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, you will, like John in Patmos, give all your thoughts to the Son of Man who walketh among the golden candlesticks. I urge it on you that you do now consider with your

whole heart and mind, how great this man is. Do you not consent to the claim?

Certainly the subject needs consideration; for, dear friends, we shall never gain an idea of how great he is unless we do consider, and consider much. Here is a great deep, and it cannot be fathomed by the thoughtless. You think you know Christ, and, blessed be his name, you do know him in a sense; but do you know the thousandth part of him? When the apostle Paul had known Christ for many years he wrote to the Philippians, and he then expressed himself as desiring to know Christ; for though he knew him to his own personal salvation, yet he felt that he did not know him to the full. He owned that he knew the love of Christ, but he added, "it passeth knowledge." Well may each of us who has been for years a student at the Master's feet exclaim, "I find myself a learner yet." I suppose the saints who have been in heaven now for thousands of years, and have been evermore adoring him, are still students of him. This is the philosophy which the most cultured mind shall never fully compass, — "God manifest in the flesh." "Consider how great this man is!" This is a matter worthy of continual research, and calling for profound thought. You must weigh this subject, and turn it over, and meditate upon it the livelong day. You must let it lie both day and night upon your hearts as a bundle of camphor, perfuming the bosom in which it lies. You must look, and look, and look, and look again: still looking unto Jesus. The angels standing on the golden mercy-seat have ever their eyes bent downward, desiring to look within; and that must be your posture. Oh, you servants of the Lord, by looking to Jesus you began to live, by looking to him you shall continue to live, and your life shall find strength and growth. This sacred subject shall ever need more and more consideration from you. Oh the depths of the love, and wisdom, and glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ!

I go a little further, and say that not only does my subject claim your consideration and need your consideration, but it solemnly commands it. The text is not a mere piece of advice; it is by inspiration that the apostle bids you today out of this sacred page, "Consider how great this man was." He charges you to think of Melchizedek but much more would he have you remember Melchizedek's Antitype. Oh, do not, my brethren, do not need to be pressed to this divine study: love it, never cease from it.

Count every minute wasted in which you are not learning more about Jesus. Reckon all other knowledge to be as mere chaff and dog's meat as compared with the knowledge of Christ crucified. In these days of science, falsely so called, determine with the apostle to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified. It is imperative upon you that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind; and that God in Christ Jesus should call into exercise every faculty of your inner man, while, with blended intellect and emotion, you consider how great he was.

Follow out this meditation, I pray you, because there is an exceeding great reward for any man who will "consider how great this man was." I find for myself that the only possibility of my living is living in Christ and unto Christ. Look you about and try to live by the wisdom of man. Unstable as water and fickle as the wind is the product of human wisdom. The history of philosophy, from the beginning until now, is the history of fools; and never was folly so self-evident as in the philosophy which is now dominant. I believe that within a century it will be found impossible to make men believe that educated men were ever so degraded as to accept the philosophy of the present hour; it will seem to be so altogether absurd and contrary to all reason and common sense, that it will be rejected with scorn as a popular delusion of a dark age. Even today this generation is kicking about like footballs the philosophies of preceding ages, and we may rest assured that future generations will do the same with the doting of today. I find, therefore, that I must come back to the revelation of God. Here is a rock beneath my feet — "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Certain great facts concerning God and his Christ have been made known to us by the Holy Ghost, and these are infallibly sure. God's revelation is true, whatever man's dreams may be. On the basis of revelation there is foothold. A personal knowledge of Christ revealed by the Spirit is also a sure matter. I get to Jesus, I speak to him, and meditate upon him, and he rises before me greater than ever, till in his presence all the learning of men condenses into folly. He is "God only wise." Ah, then I live when he is all in all! My heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth when I forget all else save Christ Jesus my Lord. Therefore, brethren, I say that you shall find a great

reward in full often coming near to your Lord, and considering again and again how great he is.

Consider his greatness, and I again remind you that the blessing comes only by consideration. I may speak to you this morning about the greatness of my Master, but I shall not succeed in fully declaring it. I am never more vexed with myself than when I have done my very best to extol his dear name! What is it but holding a candle to the sun? What are my lisplings compared with the loud acclamations which such an one as he is might well expect from those who love him? You must carefully consider, or you will miss the blessing. It will not be enough for you to hear, or read; you must do your own thinking, and consider your Lord for yourselves. You may even read the Bible itself without profit, if you do not consider as well as read. The wine is not made by gathering the clusters, but by treading the grapes in the wine-vat: under pressure the red juice leaps forth. Not the truth as you read it, but the truth as you meditate upon it, will be a blessing to you. “Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.” “Consider how great this man was.” Shut yourselves up with Jesus, if you would know him. “Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.” In Christ there is shelter, and the more you consider him the greater your peace will be. Come and lay your finger into the prints of the nails, and thrust your hand into his side. Commune with the personal Christ, who ever liveth; and evermore “consider how great this man was.”

Thus have I exhorted you to this duty; now let me try to help you in it. But what help will mine be unless the Divine Spirit be with me, that the word spoken may be with power?

## **II. LET ME NEXT ASSIST YOU TO CONSIDER HOW GREAT THIS MAN WAS.**

And first, lest the very use of the expression, “this man,” should leave anybody for a moment in doubt as to our faith in his Godhead, I bid you consider how great this man was in his relationship to God. For though he was man, he was not merely man. He was assuredly and truly man in all respects, “man of the substance of his mother,” bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; and yet he was indeed and of a truth very God. Do not think

of him as a divine man, or as a human God; he was neither the one nor the other. He was perfectly man, yet he was infinitely God. Think, then, into what a position of honor and dignity his manhood was uplifted by union with the Godhead in one person. Born, growing, gathering strength, coming to manhood, suffering, dying, in all this he was man; yet he was never at any time less divine. Our Lord's humanity is not to be thought of apart from his deity, for he is one and indivisible. I have sometimes heard objections made against certain expressions in Dr. Watt's hymns in which our Lord is spoken of as the God that bled and died, and so forth. I fear that the objection is frequently aimed less at the poet than at the truth of the deity of our Lord: the objector figures as a critic because he dares not avow himself a heretic. Take note that in the Scriptures you shall find frequent confusions of speech upon the person of our Lord, intentionally made, in order to show that although the natures were distinct, yet they were indissolubly united in the one person of Jesus. Of his one person might popularly be predicated that which in strict accuracy could only be true of his humanity, or only of his deity. To the one person of our Lord will be found to be ascribed what he did both as God and as man, and it is not needful for us to be wise or accurate above what is written by the Spirit of God. It is possible to be so true to the letter as to be false to the spirit. Cavillers have no monopoly of wisdom. My Lord Jesus is to me no less a man because he is God. Oh, how my heart loves him! He is to me fairest of the sons of men, chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. But he is to me because of his manhood none the less, but all the more, "God over all, blessed for ever." Into the dust my spirit bows before his majesty, and my soul adores him. I ask you, therefore, to consider the greatness of his manhood because it never was apart from his Godhead, and cannot be thought of except in connection therewith. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Inconceivable is the greatness of the man who is thus one with God.

You, my brethren, are not in doubt upon this vital matter; let me, therefore, ask you to consider "how great this man was" as to his relationship to men. Christ Jesus is the second man, the Lord from heaven. Adam, our first father, was the head of the race, and all men were in him as their representative: in him they stood in the garden; in him, alas, they fell

when he broke the divine command, and the Lord took up the quarrel of his covenant, and cast him out of Paradise. "Oh, what a fall was there, my brethren: then you and I and all of us fell down." We inherit because of Adam's failure a nature whose tendencies are towards evil. Adam was a very great personage in relation to the race: he was the summary of all the generations, the fountain of the stream of humanity. To him we might apply the language of the prophet, "Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God. . . . Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee." As Adam came forth from God he was as a covering cherub, under whose wings the race nestled down. But now comes in the Lord Jesus Christ as the greater man, the representative man, in whom none are made to fall, but multitudes arise. In this man the Lord is again well pleased with men. Time was when God looked on rebellious man, and it repented him that he had made him; but now that he turns his eye to this perfect man he feels no such repentance; but, on the contrary, we read that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." For the sake of the man Christ Jesus he deals with the innumerable race of sinners in a way of long-suffering and pity, and does not destroy them. Long ago had the flood-gates been pulled up again, and man been swept away by a deluge, not of water but of fire, if it had not been that the long-suffering Lord looks on the Well-Beloved Christ and therefore spares mankind. Yea, more; for his sake he sends the gospel of peace to men, and in the name of Jesus glad tidings are sent to every creature. It has sometimes happened that the illustrious deed of one man has served to elevate a class, or even a nation into honor. A grand, heroic deed has welded you not only to that one person but to all his kith and kin. Consider, then, how great this man was, that the divine mind which cannot look upon sin without indignation, nevertheless was so charmed to look upon the person and character of this glorious Man, that an amnesty was proclaimed to the race, and a message was sent to the sons of men bidding them repent and turn to him and live. "Consider," then, "how great this man was."

Come a little closer, and reach forward to that which will delight your hearts far more; consider the relationship of Christ to his own people. Now we get on sure ground, and feel a rock beneath our feet. Long before the heavens and the earth were made, God with prescient eye beheld the

person of his Son as God in human nature, and he saw all his elect lying in him. The church is his body, “the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” God the Father saw in the divine decree the mystical Christ, and he was well pleased with all his redeemed for Christ Jesus’ sake. How wondrous was that transaction when in the council-chamber of eternity the covenant was made, and the Lord Jesus Christ became the surety of that covenant. He entered into covenant with the eternal God on the behalf of his chosen that he would make atonement for their sin, and would perfect the righteousness which should cover every one of them, and make them to be accepted in the Beloved. No actual sacrifice was offered for thousands of years; but see how great this man was, since on the strength of his bare promise the Lord continued to save men for thousands of years, admitting them to his infinite glory before the Mediator had appeared, or the Redeemer had put a hand to the work. Consider that you and I, and all of us who are in Christ, are this day beloved for his sake, accepted for his sake, justified for his sake. Still doth God embrace us in the arms of almighty love for his sake; for his sake heaven is being prepared for us; for his sake the treasures of the infinite are given to us; because we are the covenanted ones for whom he pledged his troth, and for whom in the fullness of time he poured out his heart’s blood, that he might redeem us unto God. “Consider how great this man was.” He is so great that all the saints are blessed in him. He is so great that we, as many as have believed, dwell evermore in the clefts of this great Rock, and find in him our castle and high tower. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. “Consider how great this man was.”

Let me help you a little further, dear friends, to “consider how great this man was,” by reminding you of the surroundings of his first advent. Thousands of years before his birth holy men had been speaking of him. Prophets and seers all pointed to him as The Coming One. “How great this man was,” since the wisest and best of mankind all looked forward to his day with gladness. Think of that wonderful system of types, and emblems, and symbols which God ordained by his servant Moses; for the whole of this system was meant to set forth the Messiah, who would yet appear in the fullness of time. To him witnessed each bleeding sacrifice, each censer of sweet incense, each golden vessel, each curtain and wall of



tabernacle or temple: all spoke concerning him. Ay, and more than that, all the histories of all the empires were all but concentric rings of which he was the center; for the Lord Jesus is the center of history, the sum total of all God's doings and manifestations among the sons of men. That was an august Person towards whom all the past had been laboring, and for whom all the present was agonizing. "How great this man was," that when he came the saints were watching for him: Simeon and Anna could not depart till he appeared. Angels stood on tip-toe ready to descend and sing, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Humble shepherds, as they watched their flocks, did but wait for the signal to hasten to adore him; and wise men from the east forgot the fatigues of a long journey that they might lay their gold and incense at his feet. How great this man was, when being born and laid in a manger, the whole earth was moved by his appearing.

Consider too, "how great this man was," not only as to the outward circumstances of his coming, but as to the secret mystery of his birth. For this man was not "born in sin," as we are; neither was he "shapen in iniquity." This is a thing to be thought of and considered in our privacy, but it cannot be omitted here. Thus said the angel to the blessed Virgin, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." "Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," he was truly a man, but not fallen man. The method by which the pure human nature of the man Christ Jesus was produced is a great mystery, but it serves to make us see "how great this man was." I will say no more than this, that we have here the fulfillment of the promise, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Think of that word of old: "When he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Let us, therefore worship. Reverently forbearing all idle intrusion into the deep things of God, let us go to Bethlehem, and "consider how great this man was."

Now, let us look at his life. After he emerged from the obscurity of his childhood, what a life was that of our Lord! His greatest adversaries, unless they have been mad, have never dared to speak against his character. If the Christian religion were supposed to be an invention, the

existence of the narrative of the life of Jesus would be more wonderful than the facts themselves. The conception of a perfect character requires a perfect mind, and a perfect mind would never have prepared a fiction and imposed it upon men as a veritable history. If the life of Jesus be a fable, then a perfect being has deceived us; and this it is not possible for us to imagine. The life of Jesus Christ is great throughout. It is so tender and so gentle that it is never little and mean: it is so unselfish that it never ceases to be majestic; it is so condescending that it is pre-eminently sublime. Above all, it is full of truth, transparent, artless, natural. No one ever thought of Jesus as acting a part yet; he is reality itself. He is so simple, so unaffected, so truly the holy child Jesus, that in this he is great above all. Never was a man so wholly seen as the Christ; and yet never was man so little understood. You have read memoirs of departed worthies, and you have felt, The biographer did well to say no more upon this point; but you never felt that anything need be reserved as to the character of Jesus. If his chronicles had kept on writing till the world itself had been made a library of the lives of Christ they would never have recorded an unworthy act or a regrettable word. It is not only that his pursuits were majestic, for he came to save men; that his motives were divine, for he revealed the Father; but it is himself that is so great — I mean his soul, his spirit, the man himself. Look at Alexander, he is a great conqueror, but what a pitiful creature he appears when the drunkard's bowl has maddened him. What a poor thing is Napoleon as seen in privacy! In his captivity he was as petulant as a spoiled child. Consider the Lord Jesus, and it does not matter where you view him: in the wilderness he is grandly victorious over temptation, in the crowd he is greatly wise in answering those who would entrap him. Behold him in his agony in the Garden; was there ever such an Agoniser? Behold him as the crucified; did ever cross hold such a sufferer? When Jesus is least he is greatest, and when he is in the direst darkness his brightness is best revealed. In death he destroys death; in the grave he bursts the sepulcher. "Consider how great this man was": the field of his life is ample; do not be slow to investigate it.

Beloved, I cannot speak as I would of him. The blaze of this Sun blinds me! Yet consider how great this man was in his death; for then he appeared as the great Sin-offering, putting away the sin of his people. The Lord had made to meet in him the iniquity of us all. What a weight was on

him, yet he sustained it! The wrath of God on account of sin fell upon him who had never sinned, and he bore it all. A penalty which must have made a hell for us for ever was exacted of our Lord upon the cross, and he discharged it. He drank the whole of our bitter cup. He bore in himself all that was necessary to vindicate the divine justice until he could truly say, "It is finished." "Lama Sabachthani" is the most terrible word that ever came from human lips; and therefore "It is finished" is the greatest utterance that tongue ever gave forth. The work was colossal; what if I say it was infinite; and therefore our Lord Jesus when he cried "It is finished," had reached the summit of greatness. "Consider how great this man was."

Now, beloved, consider for a minute "how great this man was" when he rose again; for he could not be holden with the bonds of death, and his body could not see corruption. It was a great thing in itself for Christ to rise, but what I want you to remember is, that we all rose in him. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive;" and especially his covenanted people were raised up together with him. There was for his redeemed a death in his death and a rising again in his rising again; for we have been made partakers of his resurrection, and we live in newness of life by his rising from the dead. This is his cry as he rises from the tomb, "Because I live ye shall live also." "Consider how great this man was" whose life imparts life to all who are in him.

But he has gone up on high, and has led captivity captive. Think of the gifts which were showered down from heaven in consequence of this man's ascent into the highest. For the Holy Spirit descended never to return till the close of this dispensation, and now all the gifts that rest in the church of God, and all the works of regeneration, illumination, sanctification, and the like, which are wrought by the blessed Paraclete, are the effects of the entrance of this man into the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High. Every soul regenerated, every heart comforted, every mind quickened, every eye illuminated, every creature spiritually blessed, reflects glory upon this man. How great is he!

Beloved, I would we had time this morning to introduce you to this man as he now sits at the right hand of God, even the Father. There is no need for me to depict him; if there were it were impossible to me. What said the man who loved him best, and knew him best? "When I saw him I fell at his

feet as dead.” “Consider how great this man is” now, when every angel pays him homage, and at the name of Jesus every knee doth bow, of things in heaven; as by-and-by every knee shall bow of things on earth, and things that are under the earth, for Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. “Consider how great this man is,” and then remember that he shall shortly come to be our Judge! Possibly, while I am yet speaking to you, he may appear; no man knoweth the day nor the hour; but “how great this man is” will be clearly seen when, in flaming fire, he shall take vengeance upon those that will not obey him. How “great” will he be when in the manifestation of his glory all believers shall be glorified. I think I hear, even now, sounding out of my theme, shouts of “hallelujah, hallelujah,” from assembled worlds. Yes, the music peals forth loud and long, “King of kings, and Lord of lords. HALLELUJAH. For he shall reign for ever and ever. HALLELUJAH!” Break forth with your loud hosannas, oh, ye waiting spirits of believing men, for the time is at hand when he shall be admired in all them that believe! Consider how great this man is. I have but reached the fringe of my subject. We see but the skirts of our Lord’s garments; his actual glory is unspeakable, unsearchable. Oh, the depths! Oh, the depths!

**III.** This in a few words is THE PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT of the whole subject, with which we must wind up. Consider how great this man was, and as you consider, believe in his infinite power to bless men. He is full of blessing as the sun is full of light, that he may shine upon his needy creatures. Christ is full of blessing that he may bless poor, needy, empty sinners. Dost thou say, poor sinner, “I am so great a sinner that he cannot save me”? Consider what this man did when he was here on earth; he went about and laid his hands on the diseased, and they were cured; he looked at devils, and they fled; he spoke to fevers and they disappeared. And he in heaven is, and if I may so say, greater than when he was here below, for here on earth he was veiled in humiliation, but now he is enthroned in infinite majesty, “able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Believe in the infinite blessedness treasured up in Christ for every believing soul, and come and take your share of it this morning. All that you want, and all that wish — come and receive freely, for he doth graciously dispense it, and it

is a part of his glory that he delights to enrich the children of men. Let faith in Jesus be one lesson — may God write it on each heart.

And then let us ascribe to our Lord Jesus Christ all the honor that our thoughts can compass. Let us give to him this day our very selves over again. Consider how great this man was, and go away feeling how greatly you are indebted to him, what great things you ought to do for him, and how little your greatest thing is when you have done it as compared with the greatness of his deservings.

*“Let him be crowned with majesty  
That bowed his head to death;  
And be his honor sounded high  
By all things that have breath.”*

*Do not you feel that question pressing upon your heart?  
“Oh what shall I do  
My Savior to praise!”*

Do something; and having done it do more, and yet more. Give up your whole being to the showing forth of how great this Man is!

Once more, considering how great this Man is do not be afraid, nor troubled, nor tumbled up and down in your thoughts about anything that is happening, or is yet to happen. “Consider how great this man was.” Our wise men are going to do away with the old faith; modern culture means to stamp out old-fashioned orthodoxy. Christianity itself is getting to be effete, and something better is to supersede it. Listen! “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed. He that sitteth in the heaven shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” One said to me the other day, “The current of thought does not seem to run in the direction of evangelical religion.” Well, I said I should not believe in evangelical religion an atom the more if the current of thought did run that way. We do not believe according to the counting of heads. The currents of men’s thoughts are so uncertain that you can better tell the flight of birds, or the changing of English weather. The gospel is perhaps the surer to be true because there are so few who believe it. It is according to our expectation that God’s revealed truth should be abhorred and hated by the wise men of every generation. I shall not believe the

gospel any the less if I am left alone, nor shall I believe it any the more if the whole world shall cry it up. Let God be true and every man a liar. He whose faith stands upon the consensus of popular opinion has placed his feet upon the sand, but he who has read his Bible and has been taught of the Spirit of God what truth is, will hold to it come what may. When you consider how great this man is, it seems to me that to be a fool for his sake is the highest wisdom, and that to cling to what he says is the best philosophy, and to believe him, and none beside is not alone a duty but a necessity of every Christian spirit. Be of good cheer, dear friends! Let no man's heart fail him because of modern doubt. Let no man be troubled because of the fierceness of the fight. I can hear already the sounding of the trumpets of the Lord's coming. He is not far away; even if thousands of years intervene before his feet touch the Mount of Olivet the victory will never be doubtful. All is done that is required for winning the battle, his blood has been shed, his life has been accepted as a ransom. The eternal decree has settled it, nothing can change it! "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 2:1-10;  
~~Hebrews~~ Hebrews 7:1-10, 17, 21, 22.

HYMNS FROM OUR OWN HYMN BOOK — 72, 392, 60.

A pamphlet is being widely advertised as prefaced by "Mr. Spurgeon." I have written no such preface. My views on all subjects are as they were. It is disgraceful that an attempt should be made to propagate doctrines which I loathe, by leading the public to suppose that I have espoused them.

*C. H. Spurgeon*  
*April 15, 1885.*

# A QUESTION FOR A QUESTIONER

SERMON NO. 1843

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY MORNING,  
MAY 31ST, 1885,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” — ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 77:9*

ASAPH was very grievously troubled in spirit. The deep waters were not only around his barque, but they had come in even unto his soul. When the spirit of a man is wounded, then is he wounded indeed; and such was the case with this man of God. In the time of his trouble he was attacked with doubts and fears; so that he was made to question the very foundations of things. Had he not taken to continual prayer he had perished in his affliction; but he cried unto God with his voice, and the Lord gave ear unto him. Nor did he only pray, but he used the fittest means for escaping from his despondency. Very wisely this good man argued with himself, and sought to cure his unbelief. He treated himself homoeopathically, meeting like with like. As he was attacked by the disease of questioning, he gave himself questions as a medicine. Observe how he kills one question with another, as men fight fire with fire. Here we have six questions, one after another, each one striking at the very heart of unbelief. “Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” If questions are raised at all let us go through with them; and as the Savior answered one question of his opponents by another, so may we also silence the questions of unbelief by further questions which shall strip our doubt of all disguises.

The question which makes our text is meant to end other questions. You may carry truth as far as ever you like, and it will always be truth. Truth is like those crystals which, when split up into the smallest possible fragments, still retain their natural form. You may break truth in pieces, you may do what you like with it, and it is truth throughout; but error is diverse within itself, and evermore bears its own death within itself. You can see its falsehood even in its own light. Bring it forward, strip it of its disguises, behold it in its naked form, and its deformity at once appears. Carry unbelief to its proper consequences, and you will revolt from it, and be driven by the grace of God to faith. Sometimes our doubts assume appearances which are not their own, and so are hard to deal with; but if we make them take their own natural shapes, we shall easily destroy them. The question before us is what the logician would call a *reductio ad absurdum*; it reduces doubt to an absurdity; it puts into plain and truthful words the thought of an unbelieving mind, and at once it is seen to be a horrible notion. "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?" One might smile while reading a suggestion so absurd, and yet there is grave cause for trembling in the profanity of such a question. "Hath God forgotten?" We stumble at the first word. How can God forget? "Hath God forgotten to be?" We snap the question at that point, and it is blasphemous. It is no better when we give it as a whole, — "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" The bare idea is both ridiculous and blasphemous. Again, I say, it is wise when we are vexed with evil questioning to put down the questions in black and white, and expose them to the daylight. Drive the wretched things out of their holes; hunt them in the open; and they will soon be destroyed. Let the light of God into the dark cellar of your despondency, and you will soon quit the den in sheer disgust at your own folly. Make a thought appear to be absurd and you have gone a long way towards conquering it.

The question now before us is one of very wide application. I shall not attempt to suggest all the ways in which it may be employed, but I am going to turn it to three uses this morning. The first is for the man of God in distress. Let him take this question, and put it to his own reason and common sense, and especially to his own faith, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" When we have handled the question in that way, we will pass it over to the seeking sinner who is despondent, and we will ask him whether he really believes that God hath forgotten to be gracious. When this is



done, we may have a moment or two left for the Christian worker who is dispirited, who cannot do his work as he would wish to do, and who mourns over the little result coming from it. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Will you be allowed to go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, and will you never come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you? We shall have quite enough matter to fill up our time, and many fragments remaining when the feast is over. May God the Holy Spirit bless the word!

**I.** TO THE MAN OF GOD IN DISTRESS, this question is commended, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

What kind of distress is that which suggests such a question? Where had Asaph been? In what darkness had he wandered? In what tangled wood had he lost himself? How came he to get such a thought into his mind?

I answer, first, this good man had been troubled by unanswered prayers. "In the day of my trouble," he says, — "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord"; and he seems to say that though he sought the Lord his griefs were not removed. He was burdened, and he cried unto God beneath the burden, but the burden was not lightened. He was in darkness, and he craved for light, but not a star shone forth. Nothing is more grievous to the sincere pleader than to feel that his petitions are not heeded by his God. It is a sad business to have gone up, like Elijah's servant, seven times, and yet to have seen no cloud upon the sky in answer to your importunity. It tries a man to spend all night in wrestling, and to have won no blessing from the covenant angel. To ask, and not to receive; to seek, and not to find; to knock, and to see no open door, — these are serious trials to the heart, and tend to extort the question, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Unanswered prayer is very staggering even to strong faith; but the weak faith of a tried believer is hard put to it by long delays and threatened denials. When the mercy-seat itself ceases to yield us aid, what can we do? You will not wonder, then, considering your own tendency to doubt, that this man of God, when his prayers did not bring him deliverance, cried out, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Besides that, he was enduring continued suffering. Our text says, "My sore ran in the night." His wound was bleeding ever: there was no

cessation to his pain. At night he woke up and wished it were morning, and when the daylight came he wished for night again, if, perchance, he might obtain relief; but none came. Pain of body, when it is continuous and severe, is exceedingly trying to our feeble spirits; but agony of soul is worse still. Give me the rack sooner than despair. Do you know what it is to have a keen thought working like an auger into your brain? Has Satan seemed to pierce and gimlet your mind with a sharp, cutting thought that would not be put aside? It is torment indeed to have a worm gnawing at your heart, a fire consuming your spirit: yet a true child of God may be thus tormented. When Asaph had prayed for relief, and the relief did not come, the temptation came to him to ask, “Am I always to suffer? Will the Lord never relieve me? It is written, ‘He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds’; has he ceased from that sacred surgery? ‘Hath God forgotten to be gracious?’”

In addition to this, the man of God was in a state of mind in which his depression had become inveterate. He says, “My soul refused to be comforted.” Many plasters were at hand, but he could not lay them upon the wound; many cordials offered themselves, but he could not receive them — his throat seemed closed. The meadows were green, but the gate was nailed up, and the sheep could not get in; the brooks flowed softly, but he could not reach their margin to lie down and drink. Asaph was lying at the pool of Bethesda, and he saw others step in to be healed, but he had no man to put him into the pool when the waters were troubled. His mind had become confirmed in its despondency, and his soul refused to be comforted.

More than that, there seemed to be a failure of the means of grace for him. “I remembered God, and was troubled.” Some of God’s people go up to the house of the Lord where they were accustomed to unite in worship with delight, but they have no delight now; they even go to the communion-table, and eat the bread and drink the wine, but they do not receive the body and blood of Christ to the joy of their faith. Anon they get them to their chambers, and open their Bibles, and bow their knees, and remember God; but every verse seems to condemn them; their prayers accuse them, and God himself seems turned to be their enemy; and then it is little wonder that unbelief exclaims, “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?”

At the back of all this there was another trouble for Asaph, namely, that he could not sleep. He says, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking." It seemed as if the Lord himself held up his eyelids, and would not let them close in sleep. Others on their beds were refreshed with "kind nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep"; but when Asaph sought his couch he was more unrestful there than when he was engaged in the business of the day. We may speak of sleeplessness very lightly, but among afflictions it is one of the worst that can happen to men. When the chamber of repose becomes a furnace of anguish it goes hard with a man. When the Psalmist could not find even a transient respite in sleep, his weakness and misery drove him to say, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Moreover, there was one thing more: he lost the faculty of telling out his grief: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak." There are some people to whom we would not tell our trouble, for we know they would not understand it, for they have never been in deep waters themselves; there are others to whom we could not tell our trouble, though they might help us, because we feel ashamed to do so. To be compelled to silence is a terrible increase to anguish: the torrent is swollen when its free course is prevented. A dumb sorrow is sorrow indeed. The grief that can talk will soon pass away; that misery which is wordless is endless. The brook that ripples and prattles as it flows is shallow; but deep waters are silent in their flow. When a man falls under the power of a dumb spirit it needs Christ himself to come and cast the devil out of him, for he is brought into a very grievous captivity. We who know what a poor thing human nature is when it is brought into affliction, are not surprised that the man of God said in such a case, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Having thus, you see, put the doubt in the most apologetic style, and mentioned the excuses which mitigate the sin of the question, I am now going to expose its unreasonableness and sinfulness, by considering what answers we may give to such a question? I shall endeavour to answer it by making it answer itself —

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Answer: Hath God forgotten anything? If he could forget, could he be God? Is it not absurd to speak of him as short of memory, of whose understanding there is no searching? Shall we speak of him as forgetting, when to his mind all things are

present, and the past and the future are ever before him as in a map which lies open before the beholder's eye? Oh child of God, why doest thou talk thus? Oh troubled heart, wilt thou insult thy God, wilt thou narrow the infinity of his mind? Can God forget? Thou art forgetful. Perhaps thou canst scarce remember from hour to hour thine own words and thine own promises; but is the Lord such an one as thou art? Not even the least thing is passed over by him. He hath not forgotten the young ravens in their nests, but he heareth when they cry. He hath not forgotten a single blade of grass, but giveth to each its own drop of dew. He hath not forgotten the sea monsters down deep in the caverns of ocean. He hath not forgotten a worm that hides itself away beneath the sod; therefore banish the thought once for all, that thy God hath forgotten anything, much less that he hath forgotten to be gracious.

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Then hath he forgotten an old, long, ancient, aye, eternal habit of his heart. Hast thou not heard that his mercy endureth for ever? Did he not light up the lamps of heaven because of his mercy? Do we not sing, "To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever. The sun to rule by day, and the moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever"? Since the creation hath he not in providence always been gracious? Is it not his rule to open his hand, and supply the want of every living thing? Did he not give his Son to redeem mankind? Hath he not sent his Spirit to turn men from darkness to light? After having been gracious all these myriads of ages, after having manifested his love and his grace at such a costly rate, hath he forgotten it? Thou, O man, takest up a practice, and thou layest it down; thou doest a thing now and then, and then thou ceasest from thy way, but shall the eternal God who has always been gracious forget to be gracious? Oh, Lord, forgive the thought.

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Why, then, he must have forgotten his purpose! Hath thou not heard that or ever the earth was he purposed to redeem unto himself a people who should be his own chosen, his children, his peculiar treasure, a people near unto him? Before he made the heavens and the earth, had he not planned in his own mind that he would manifest the fulness of his grace toward his people in Christ Jesus, and dost thou think that he has turned from his eternal purpose, and rent up his divine decrees, and burned the book of life, and changed the whole

course of his operations among the sons of men? Dost thou know what thou art at to talk so? Doth he not say, “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed”? Hath he said, and will he not do it? Hath he purposed, and shall it not come to pass? Banish, then, the thought of his forgetting to be gracious.

“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Then he must have forgotten his own covenant; for what was the purport of his covenant with Jesus Christ, the second Adam, on the behalf of his people? Is it not called a covenant of grace? Is not grace the spirit and tenor and object of it? Of old he said, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy”; and in his covenant he ordains to show this grace to as many as are in Christ Jesus. Now, if a man’s covenant be confirmed it stands fast. Nothing that occurs after a covenant has been made can alter it; and God having once made a covenant turneth not from his promise and his oath. The law which was four hundred and thirty years after the covenant made with Abraham could not change the promises which the Lord had made to the believing seed, neither can any accident or unforeseen circumstance make the covenant of grace null and void; indeed, there are no accidents with God, nor any unforeseen circumstances with him. He hath lifted his hand to heaven and hath sworn; he hath declared, “If my covenant be not with day and night, then will I cast away the seed of Jacob.” The Lord hath not forgotten his covenant with day and night, neither will he cast off his believing people. He cannot, therefore, forget to be gracious.

More than that, when thou sayest, “Has God forgotten to be gracious?” dost thou not forget that in such a case he must have forgotten his own glory? for the main of his glory lies in his grace. In that which he does out of free favor and love to undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving men, he displays the meridian splendour of his glory. His power, his wisdom, and his immutability praise him; but in the forefront of all shines out his grace. This is his darling attribute; by this he is illustrious on earth and in heaven above. Hath God forgotten his own glory? Doth a man forget his honor? Doth a man turn aside from his own name and fame? He may do so in a moment of madness; but the thrice holy God hath not forgotten the glory of his name, nor forgotten to be gracious.

Listen, and let unbelief stand rebuked. If God hath forgotten to be gracious, then he must have forgotten his own Son, he must have forgotten Calvary and the expiatory sacrifice offered there; he must have forgotten him that is ever with him at his right hand, making intercession for transgressors; he must have forgotten his pledge to him that he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Canst thou conceive that? It is verging upon blasphemy to suppose such a thing; yet it must be that he has forgotten his own Son if he hath forgotten to be gracious.

Once more; if this were the case, the Lord must have forgotten his own self; for grace is of the essence of his nature, since God is love. We forget ourselves and disgrace ourselves, but God cannot do so. Oh beloved, it is part and parcel of God's own nature that he should show mercy to the guilty and be gracious to those who trust in him. Hast thou forgotten as a father thy children? Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? These things are barely possible, but it is utterly impossible that the great Father should forget himself by forgetting his children; that the great Lord who hath taken us to be his peculiar heritage and his jewels should cease to value us and forget to be gracious to us.

I think I hear some one say, "I do not think God hath forgotten to be gracious except to me." Doth God make any exceptions? Doth he not speak universally when he addresses his children? Remember, if God forgot to be gracious to one of his believing people he might forget to be gracious to them all. If there were one instance found in which his love failed, then the foundations would be removed, and what could the righteous do? The Good Shepherd doth not preserve some of his sheep, but all of them; and it is not concerning the strong ones of his flock that he saith, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish;" but he has said it of all the sheep, aye, and of the smallest lamb of all the flock, of the most scabbed and wounded, of all that he has purchased with his blood. The Lord hath not forgotten himself in any one instance; but he is faithful to all believers.

Now, let us attend to the amendment of the question. Shall I tell thee, friend, thou who hast put this question, what the true question is which thou oughtest to ask thyself? It is not, "Hath God forgotten to be

gracious?" but "Hast thou forgotten to be grateful?" Why, thou enjoyest many mercies even now. It is grace which allows thee to live after having asked such a vile question. Grace is all around thee, if thou wilt but open thine eyes, or thine ears. Thou hadst not been spared after so much sin if God had forgotten to be gracious.

Listen: Hast thou not forgotten to be believing? God's word is true, why dost thou doubt it? Is he a liar? Has he ever played thee false? Which promise of his has failed? Time was when thou didst trust him; then thou knewest he was gracious; but thou art doubting now without just cause; thou art permitting an evil heart of unbelief to draw thee aside from the living God. Know this, and repent of it, and trust thy best Friend.

Hast thou not also forgotten to be reverent? Else how couldst thou ask such a question? Should a man say of God that he has forgotten to be gracious? Should he imagine such a thing? Should the keenest grief drive to such profanity? Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Shall anyone of us begin to doubt that grace, which has kept us out of the bottomless pit, and spared us to this hour? Oh, heir of glory, favored as thou hast been to bathe thy forehead in the sunlight of heaven full often, and then to lean thy head on the Savior's bosom, — is it out of thy mouth that this question comes, — "Hath God forgotten to be gracious"? Call it back and bow thine head unto the dust, and say, "My Lord, have mercy upon thy servant, that he hath even thought thus for an instant."

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Why, surely thou hast forgotten thyself, or thou wouldest not talk so: thou hast forgotten that thou owest everything to thy Lord, and art indebted to him even for the breath in thy nostrils. Thou hast forgotten the precious blood of Jesus; thou hast forgotten the mercy-seat; thou hast forgotten providence; thou hast forgotten the Holy Spirit; thou hast forgotten all that the Lord has done for thee: surely, thou hast forgotten all good things, or thou wouldest not speak thus. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and leave the dunghill of thy despair, and sing, "His mercy endureth for ever." Say in thy soul, — "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Thus much to the child of God. May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, apply it to every troubled heart.

**II.** Furthermore, I desire to talk a little with THE SEEKING SINNER IN DESPONDENCY. You have not yet found joy and peace through believing, and therefore I will first describe your case, and what it is that has made you say, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

You labour under a sense of guilt; you know that you have transgressed against God, and you feel that this is a terrible thing, involving wrath to the uttermost. The arrows of God are sticking in your soul, and rankling there. You cannot trifle with sin as you once did; it burns like a fiery poison in your veins! You have been praying to get rid of that sense of sin, but it deepens. The case I am stating is very clear to every child of God; but it is not at all clear to the man who is enduring it. He cries, "The more I pray, the more I go to hear the word, the more I read the Bible, the blacker sinner I seem to be. 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious?'"

Moreover, a sense of weakness is increasing upon you. You thought that you could pray; but now you cannot pray. You thought it the easiest thing in the world to believe; but now the grappling-irons will not lay hold upon the promise, and you find no rest. You cannot now perform those holy acts which you once thought to be so easy. Your power is dried up, your glory is withered. Now you groan out, "I would but I can't repent, then all would easy be. Alas, I have no hope, no strength; I am reduced to utter weakness." We understand all this, but you do not; and we do not wonder at your crying, — "Hath God forgotten to be gracious." "Oh, but sir, I have been crying to God that he would be pleased to deliver me from sin, and the more I try to be holy the more I am tempted; I never knew such horrible thoughts before, nor discovered such filthiness in my nature before. When I get up in the morning I resolve that I will go straight all the day, and before long I am more crooked than ever. I feel worse rather than better. The world tempts me, the devil tempts me, the flesh tempts me, everything goes wrong with me. 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious'? I have prayed the Lord to give me peace, and he promises to give rest; but I am more uneasy than ever, and cannot rest where I used to do. I used to be very happy when I was at chapel on Sunday; I thought I was doing well to be at public worship; but now I fear that I only go as a formalist, and therefore I mock God, and make matters worse. I rested once in being a teetotaller, in being a hard-working, honest, sober man; but now I see that I must be born again. I used to rest once in the idea that I was becoming



quite religious; but now it seems to me that my betterness is a hollow sham, and all my old nests are pulled down.

My friend, I perfectly understand your case, and think well of it; for the like has happened to many of us. You must be divorced from self before you can be married to Christ; and that divorce must be made most clear and plain, or Jesus will never make a match with you. You must come clear away from self-righteousness, self-trust, self-hope, or else one of these days, when Jesus has saved you, there might be a doubt as to whether he is to have all the glory, or to go halves with self. He makes you nothing that he may be all in all to you. He grinds you to the dust that he may lift you out of it for ever. Meanwhile, I do not wonder that the question crosses your mind, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Let me show how wrong the question is. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" If he has, he has forgotten what he used to know right well. David was foul with his adultery — remember that fifty-first Psalm — but how sweet was the prophet's message to the penitent king: "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die!" "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow," was a prayer most graciously answered in that royal sinner's case. Remember Jonah, and how he went down to the bottom of the mountains in the whale's belly, and was brought even to hell's door; yet he lived to sing "Salvation is of the Lord," and was brought out of the depths of the sea. Remember Manasseh, who shed innocent blood very much, and yet the grace of God brought him among thorns, and made him a humble servant of the Lord. Remember Peter, how he denied his Master, but his Master forgave him, and bade him feed his sheep. Forget not the dying thief, and how in the extremity of death, filled with all the agonies of crucifixion, he looked to the Lord, and the Lord looked on him, and that day he was with the King in paradise. Think also of Saul of Tarsus, that chief of sinners, who breathed out threatenings against the people of God, and yet was struck down, and, before long was in mercy raised up again, and ordained to be a chosen vessel to bear the gospel among the heathen. If God has forgotten to be gracious, he has forgotten a line of things in which he has wrought great wonders, and in which his heart delighted from of old. It cannot be that he will turn away from that which is so dear to him.

“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Then why are all the old arrangements for grace still standing? There is the mercy-seat; surely that would have been taken away if God had forgotten to be gracious. The gospel is preached to you, and this is its assurance, “Whosoever believeth in him is not condemned.” If the Lord had forgotten to be gracious he would not have mocked you with empty words.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself is still living, and still stands as a priest to make intercession for transgressors. Would that be the case if God had forgotten to be gracious? The Holy Spirit is still at work convincing and converting; would that be so if God had forgotten to be gracious? Oh brothers, while Calvary is still a fact, and the Christ has gone into the glory bearing his wounds with him, there is a fountain still filled with blood wherein the guilty may wash. While there is an atoning sacrifice there must be grace for sinners. I cannot enlarge on these points, for time flies so rapidly; but the continuance of the divine arrangements, the continuance of the Son of God as living and pleading, and the mission of the Holy Spirit as striving, regenerating, comforting — all this proves that God hath not forgotten to be gracious.

Remember that God himself must according to nature be ever gracious so long as men will put their trust in the great sacrifice. He has promised to be gracious to all who confess their sins and forsake them and look to Christ; and he cannot forget that word without a change which we dare not impute to him. God might sooner forget to be than forget to be gracious to those to whom he has promised his grace. He has promised to every poor, guilty, confessing soul that will come and put his trust in Christ that he will be gracious in pardoning sin, and so it must be.

I shall come to close quarters with you. I know your despair has driven you to the question, “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” and I would silence it by putting other questions to you. Is it not you that have forgotten to believe in Christ? “I have been praying,” says one. That is all very well, but the gospel is, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” not “he that prays.” “I have been trying to come to Christ.” I know that, but I read nothing about this trying in Holy Scripture, and I fear your trying is that which keeps you from Jesus. You are told to believe in Christ, not to try to believe. A minister in America, some time

ago, was going up the aisle of his church during a revival, when a young man earnestly cried to him, "Sir, can you tell me the way to Christ?" "No," was the answer, very deliberately given; "I cannot tell you the way to Christ." The young man answered, "I beg pardon; I thought you were a minister of the gospel." "So I am," was the reply. "How is it that you cannot tell me the way to Christ?" "My friend," said the minister, "there is no way to Christ. He is himself the way. All that believe in him are justified from all things. There is no way to Christ; Christ is here." O! my hearer, Christ himself is the way of salvation, and that way comes right down to your foot, and then leads right up to heaven. You have not to make a way to the Way, but at once to run in the way which lies before you. The way begins where you now are; enter it. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ now, and you are saved; and then you will no more ask the question, "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?"

"Oh," says one, "but I have been looking to reform myself and grow better, and I have done a good deal in that way." That is not the gospel; it is all very right and proper, but the gospel is, "He that believeth in him is not condemned." The other day I saw my bees swarming; they hung on a branch of a tree in a living mass; the difficulty was to get them into a hive. My man went with his veil over his face and began to put them into the skep; and I noticed that he was particularly anxious to get the queen bee into it; for if he once had her in the hive the rest would be sure to follow, and remain with her. Now, faith is the queen bee. You may get temperance, love, hope, and all those other bees into the hive; but the main thing is to get simple faith in Christ, and all the rest will come afterwards. Get the queen bee of faith, and all the other virtues will attend her.

"Alas!" cries one, "I have been listening to the gospel for years." That is quite right, for "faith cometh by hearing"; but recollect, we are not saved by mere listening, nor even by knowing, unless we advance to believing. The letter of the word is not life; it is the spirit of it which saves. When tea was first introduced into this country a person favored a friend with a pound of it. It was exceedingly expensive, and when he met his friend next, he enquired, "Have you tried the tea?" "Yes, but I did not like it at all." "How was that? Everybody else is enraptured with it." "Why," said the other, "we boiled it in a saucepan, threw away the water, and brought the leaves to table; but they were very hard, and nobody cared for them."

Thus many people keep the leaves of form, and throw away the spiritual meaning. They listen to our doctrines, but fail to come to Christ. They throw away the true essence of the gospel, which is faith in Jesus. I pray you, do not act thus with what I preach. Do not bury yourself in my words, or even in the words of Scripture; but pass onward to the life and soul of their meaning, which is Christ Jesus, the sinner's hope. All the aroma of the gospel is in Christ; all the essence of the gospel is in Christ, and you have only to trust him to enjoy eternal life. You guilty, worthless sinner, you at the gates of hell, you who have nothing to recommend you, you who have no good works or good feelings, simply trust the merits of Christ, and accept the atonement made by his death, and you shall be saved, your sin shall be forgiven, your nature shall be changed, you shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus, and you shall never say again, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

**III.** The time has gone; therefore THE DISAPPOINTED WORKER must be content with a few crumbs. You have been working for Christ, dear brother, and have fallen in to a very low state of heart, so that you cry, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" I know what state you are in. You say, "I do not feel as if I could preach; the matter does not flow. I do not feel as if I could teach; I search for instruction, and the more I pull the more I cannot get it." "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Can he not fill thine empty vessel again? Can he not give thee stores of thought, emotion, and language? He has used thee; can he not do so again? "Ah, but my friends have gone; I am in a village from which the people remove to London, and I lose my best helpers." Or, perhaps you say, "I work in a back street, and everybody is moving out into the suburbs." You have lost your friends, and they have forgotten you; but, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" You can succeed so long as the Lord is with you. Be of good courage; your best friend is left. He who made a speech in the Academy found that all his hearers had gone except Plato; but as Plato remained, the orator finished his address. They asked him how he could continue under the circumstances, and he replied that Plato was enough for an audience. So, if God be pleased with you, go on; the divine pleasure is more than sufficient. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Did not Wesley say when he was dying, "The best of all is, God is with us"? Therefore fear not the failure of friends.

“But, sir, the sinners I have to deal with are such tough ones: they reject my testimony; they grow worse instead of better; I do not think I can ever preach to them again.” “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” You cannot save them, but he can. “But I work in such a depraved neighbourhood, the people are sunk in poverty and drunkenness.” “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Does not he know the way to save drunkards? Does not he know how to rescue the harlot and the whoremonger, and make them clean and chaste?

“Ah, but the church in which I labour is in a wretched state; the members are worldly, lukewarm, and divided. I have no brethren around me to pray for me, as you have; they are always squabbling and finding fault with one another.” That is a horrible business, but “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Cannot God put you right, and your church right? If he begins with you by strengthening your faith, may you not be the means of healing all these divisions, and bringing these poor people into a better state of mind, and then converting the sinners round about you? “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?”

“Ah, well,” saith one, “I am ready to give it all up.” I hope you will not do so. If you have made up your mind to speak no more in the name of the Lord, I hope that word will be like fire in your bones; for if God has not forgotten to be gracious, provoked as he has been, how can you forget to be patient? Is it possible while God’s sun shines on you that you will refuse to shine on the fallen? If God continues to be gracious, you ought not to grow weary in well-doing.

Perhaps I speak to some dear brother who is very old and infirm; he can hardly hear, and scarcely see, so that he reads his Bible with difficulty. He gets to the service now, but he knows that soon he will be confined to his chamber, and then to his bed. His mind is sadly failing him; he is quite a wreck. Take this home with you, my aged brother, and keep it for your comfort if you never come out again: “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” Oh, no; the Lord hath said, “Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” Having loved his own which were in the world, the Lord Jesus loved them unto the end; and he will love you to the end. When the last scene comes, and you close your eyes in death, blessed be his

name, you shall know that he has not forgotten you. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," is the Lord's promise, and his people's sheet-anchor. Therefore, let us not fear when our frail tabernacles are taken down, but let us rejoice that God hath not forgotten to be gracious. Though our bodies will sink into the dust, they will ere long rise again, and we shall be in glory for ever with the Lord. Blessed be his name. Amen.


# ISRAEL AND BRITAIN

## A NOTE OF WARNING

SERMON NO. 1844

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, JUNE 7TH, 1885,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.” —  John 12:37-41.

THE BLINDNESS of Israel concerning our Lord was sadly remarkable. It was a blindness of the eyes, for they saw his many miracles, and yet believed not: their ears also seemed to be stopped, for they heard his words and did not understand them; and their hearts also were heavy, for they did not relent under the plaintive admonitions of a Savior's love. Their hearts were cruel towards the Messiah; they hated him without a cause. No door was open to the heart of Israel; they had hardened their heart, they had shut their eyes, they had stopped their ears, and even he that spake as never man spake gained no access to their souls. They went so far as to crucify him, and cried as they did so, “His blood be on us, and our children,” — words so sadly verified when Jerusalem was destroyed, and her children slaughtered, sold as slaves, or scattered to the four corners of the earth. It was indeed, a terrible blindness which happened unto Israel.

Her rejection of the Lord Jesus is the more amazing because Isaiah gave so clear an account of the Messiah, and so clearly pictured Jesus of Nazareth. Descriptions of him could not have been more explicit than were the prophecies of Isaiah. It would be very easy to construct an entire life of Christ out of the book of Isaiah, beginning with “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” and ending with “he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death.” Isaiah spake of John the Baptist as the “voice crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God,” and he foretold our Lord’s ministry by the way of the sea beyond Jordan in Galilee of the Gentiles, where the people who sat in darkness saw great light. The prophecy portrayed his Lord as “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Clearest of all is he upon his vicarious sufferings, concerning which he uses a variety of most definite expressions, such as, — “The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Isaiah saw so clearly the day of our Lord Jesus that he spake rather as an evangelist than as a prophet; as an eyewitness, rather than as one foretelling a far-off event. Yet all this clearness was lost upon the men of his generation, and upon those who followed after. The nation had so long been fickle towards God, and had trifled so long with God’s truth, that it was at length given up to a judicial hardness of heart, so that it could not understand or perceive. They refused the plainest messages of grace, and were so confirmed in unbelief that all their prophets cried with one plaintive voice, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

Nor was it alone grievous that Israel sinned against the light which shone in Isaiah’s testimony; but, alas, she closed her eyes against the meridian splendor of our Lord’s own life. Jesus bore his own witness in his person, teachings, works, and gifts. A sad wonder lies in the fact, that they did not know the Lord of glory although they saw his miracles, which were sure witnesses to his claims. He wrought among them works which none other man did. There is about our Lord a likeness to God: in all that he does the Godhead shines forth. He is so pure that he can say, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” How like to him who is saluted as “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts!” His teaching is so full of tenderness and gentleness that since God is love, we conclude that Christ is God. His



many miracles touch upon every point in the great circle of omnipotence. What is there that God can do which the Christ did not do? Was he not multiform and multitudinous in his works of power and grace? Herein lay the wonder, that though he did so many miracles before them, not in secret but actually before their eyes; though he fed them with bread which they could see, and handle, and eat; though he healed the sick and raised the dead, they yet believed not on him. How sadly far can men go in unbelief, prejudice, and hardness of heart! How dim can human eyes become when men refuse to see! How darkened the understanding when men are unwilling to comprehend! Let us tremble at this, lest ourselves by imitating the chosen people in their unbelief should fall into like bondage to prejudice and ignorance, lest we by tampering with truth should come at last to be incapable of perceiving it, lest we also by rejecting the testimony of God should be given up to our own willfulness, to believe a lie and refuse the truth. Such, then, as Isaiah had foreseen, was the state of Israel in our Lord's day: never clearer evidence, and never more obstinate refusal to see it; never truth more plain, and never rejection so determined. Woe to those who close their ears; for the day cometh when they shall no longer hear! Woe to those who shut their eyes to the light, for they shall ere long be made blind! Isaiah was informed that such would be the outcome of his ministry: the Lord bade him say to the people, "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." This must have been a very sad business for so generous and tender-hearted a man of God. It was painful to him to be so clear and yet to be so little understood. He was the Paul of the Old Testament; to him belonged fullness of knowledge, clearness of vision, plainness of speech, and faithfulness of spirit, and yet none of these things could make the people understand his message and receive it into their hearts. He was sublime in thought, attractive in word, and affectionate in spirit, and yet they did not believe his testimony; so that he must often have been astonished and heart-broken as he spake in vain to a people who were determined that they would not hear.

This morning I shall draw certain lessons for ourselves from the great evangelical prophet, his ministry, and the people to whom he ministered so vainly. Our first meditation shall be concerning Isaiah and his ministry: and our second shall be concerning the people to whom he spake. Alas! I fear that we who speak in the name of the Lord in these last days have

also to deal with hearts that are gross, ears that are heavy, and eyes that are dimmed. Upon this generation also there is falling a measure of judicial withdrawal of light and discernment; and we also have to cry, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

**I.** First, then, let me speak with you CONCERNING ISAIAH AND HIS MINISTRY. Oh, that the Spirit of God may speak with power through me. Our text says two things of Isaiah: first, that “he saw his glory,” and secondly, that “he spake of him.”

The first statement is that Isaiah saw. Isaiah was a great seer: his prophesy begins thus, —

“The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning  
Judah and Jerusalem.”

All prophets were more or less seers, and saw what they foretold; but Isaiah above others was endowed with the seeing and foreseeing faculty. He had the clearest sight, and for that reason he had the clearest speech. When a man speaks so that you cannot understand him, the usual reason is that he does not understand himself; and when a man speaks so as to be readily comprehended, it is because the thought in his own mind is well defined. He that would speak well must see well. Mark the two things in the text — “When Isaiah saw his glory, and spake of him.”

In what sense is Isaiah said to have seen that which he spake? Does it not mean that he realized his thoughts? that they stood out vividly, so as to make a deep impression upon his own mind? Things to come were already come in his apprehension: he beheld what he believed, he felt what he foretold. He was not a dreamy person, maundering about half-fashioned, undeveloped thoughts; but he was a person who knew, and perceived, and felt what he preached. He saw with his soul what he set forth with his lips.

But what did he see? It is a most important thing that in these days you and I should see the same, for the same work lies before us among a people who are a repetition of that disobedient and gainsaying nation. Read, then, with care the sixth chapter of Isaiah. Open your Bibles and refer to the passage verse by verse.

First, what Isaiah saw was the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. When the prophet went abroad among the people he heard them speaking against the Lord God; some contending for our deity and some for another; some leaning upon an arm of flesh, and others despising the promise of Jehovah the God of Israel. All this, I say, he saw out of doors, and he was troubled. But when he went into the sanctuary of God he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne : still reigning, still glorious, undisturbed by opposition. He must then have felt like David when he said, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." As David saw Christ upon the throne amid the stirrings of the people, so did Isaiah see the Lord Jesus, not only upon the lowly mercy-seat, but upon a throne high and lifted up. I pray you, brethren, settle this in your hearts: our Lord is highly exalted as Lord of all. When you see evil occurrence, do not imagine that it defeats the eternal purposes of Jehovah: when you hear blasphemy and your blood runs cold, do not think that Christ has lost his glory: when men riot in sin, do not dream that the reins of affairs are out of Jesus' hands; for still he is "God over all, blessed for ever." My heart exalts this day, as, by undoubting faith, I am assured that he who died on Calvary is now exalted on high, far above all principalities and powers. "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ!" To thee our spirits ascribe infinite honor, world without end. Though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, yet the Lord reigneth. He that died upon the tree is crowned with majesty, and all the angels of God worship him. "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Let us have no question about this; for if we have, we shall not be prepared to speak in the Lord's name with this evil generation. Amid the anarchy of the ages we see the glorious high throne of our redeeming Lord unmoved, unmovable: this is the rock of our refuge when the unsettled times rage about us like the waters of the troubled sea. We cannot be afraid, for Christ is on the throne.

Observe that in Isaiah's vision he not only saw the Lord "upon a throne high and lifted up," but he saw that "his train filled the temple." so that in that temple there was room for no one else. The robes of this great King

filled all the holy place; and neither priests nor offerers could there find standing room. It is a great thing to see how Jesus fills the heavenly places; in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead. Let it be acknowledged to be so in heaven, for the glory of our Redeemer fills every street of the upper city, every mansion of the Father's house. In the church below, which is also his temple, among his spiritual people, the glory of the Lord Jesus engages and occupies every heart. They feel that there is none other in whom they can trust, none other whose words they will receive, none other in whom they glory; the Lord Christ is all in all to us, and we know no other Master or Savior. His train fills the temple. I trust it is so among us. From Sabbath to Sabbath the one glory of this Tabernacle is the person and work of Jesus. What a glory hath God put upon the Only Begotten Son, whom he hath raised from the dead that he should be head over all things to his church, which he fills with his life, light, and love. Nor may we forget that all the things that exist are in a sense his temple, and the whole universe is filled with his train; for "he hath ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things." Glory be unto our ascended and reigning Lord.

In this vision Isaiah saw the flaming spirits that wait upon Christ of God. He calls them "seraphims." The best interpretation we can give is "burning ones;" they burn in the sense of consuming. They burn up that which ought to be consumed, namely, all kinds of evil. There are powers around our Lord which will destroy evil. You ask me to tell you something about these seraphim; how can I? They have covered their faces, and covered their feet. Since nothing is to be seen, what can I tell you? Neither would it be right for us to speak concerning them, for manifestly it is their desire to be hidden. Who will violate their wish to be concealed? They covered their faces, they covered their feet, and therein they did as good as they say, "Look not on us, but look on him who sits upon the throne, whose attendants we are." This much is all we know, — exalted intelligences are in waiting upon our Lord, and are able to fly swiftly at his bidding. Tremble not concerning this error, or that, it shall be burnt up by those agencies which are at the command of our exalted Lord. Spirits from God shall run to and fro, and smite, as with the fire of God, those powers of darkness which now oppress our race. God himself is a consuming fire: who can dwell with him but those that are like him? He maketh his

ministers a flame of fire. Around our Lord are the chariots of God, which are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. His power knows no limit. His word runneth very swiftly; he speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast. Glory be unto thee, O Christ! We will not fear nor be discouraged, since these thy servants are ready to flame forth at thy bidding. Truly thou art Jehovah of hosts.

This vision of the body-guard of the Prince of peace was enough to strengthen Isaiah: thus comforted, he would calmly confront that rebellious generation. If the prophet, when he opened the young man's eyes strengthened his heart by making him see horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha, shall not we be comforted as we behold legions of burning ones surrounding our King, and standing ready to fulfill his decrees?

Further, we find that Isaiah saw in that vision the perpetual adoration which is rendered unto Christ concerning his holiness. Those bright spirits had never tasted of his mercy, for they had never sinned: they understood nothing of his grace, for they had not been guilty; but being pure in heart they gazed on the Lord with opened eye and adored his holiness. Their whole souls were filled with the contemplation of that one all-embracing attribute; and in responsive song they said each one to his fellow, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." They emphasized their words by repeating them three times; and perhaps they alluded also to the Trinity in Unity as they cried, "Holy, holy, holy." This is the supreme glory of Christ, that in him is seen the holiness of God. Oh my friends, let us be like these seraphim, ravished with the holiness of the atonement, awe-struck with the justice of God in the great sacrifice. Reflect with reverence that God when he willed to save his elect would not commit a breach upon his laws; though he would redeem them from going down into the pit, yet he would not violate his word, nor change that most righteous penalty of death, which is the due desert of sin. Rather than stain his holiness he spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all. Consider the great love of holiness which must have been in the heart of the Father, that he would give up his Son to bleed sooner than his law should be dishonored; and think of the great holiness of Christ, that he would rather give his back to the smiters and his cheeks to them that pluck off the hair, yea, rather stretch out his hands to the nails and expire forsaken of his

God, than suffer sin to go unpunished. God would not even for mercy's sake issue an unjust pardon to the souls he loved.

As I stand here this morning I also have visions of God, and the cross seems to me transformed into a burning throne, whereon justice is high and lifted up to the uttermost, as I see God himself in Christ Jesus bowing his head to death, that he might be just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth. Around that cross I see troops of angels gathering, and I hear one crying unto another and saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah Jesus, the great sacrifice for sin." Do you not unite in their reverent homage? If you do you will go forth and tell of pardon bought with blood, and of the atonement finished once for all. With hallowed confidence you will tell it out among the people that the holy Lord reigneth from the tree, until all creatures fall down and worship him that was slain, because his holiness was thereby revealed in noonday splendor.

This was not all that was revealed to the prophet; for he heard the seraphim say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." Even when men rejected Christ, even when hearts were fat, and eyes were dim, and ears were heavy, even then the whole earth was full of the glory of Christ. When scientists tell us that they cannot see God, I am amazed. To me it is impossible not to see him. Though I cannot pry with the scalpel into the anatomy of the human frame, yet when I look upon the mere skin of the human countenance I see the handiwork of God. Though I cannot dig into the lower strata of the earth and disentomb the fossil and decipher its stone preserved memorial, yet to me rock, and clay, and sand, and relic of the past, bear the sure hieroglyph of God. Though I cannot inform you of all the interesting details of insect life, or descant upon the secrets of botany, yet to me bees bring honeyed thoughts of God, and flowers breathe the perfume of his love. Where is God? Say rather, Where is he not? Not with these grosser senses, but by higher faculties I see and hear my God; yea, he doth surround me, and my faith embraceth him. I am no fool for this; the best authority declares that he is the fool who saith in his heart "There is no God." Yes, the whole earth is full of the glory of Christ, and above the earth in every cloud it is seen, and above the cloud every star shines out concerning him. Alas, for the blind-eyes that cannot see that which is evidently set forth in every place. Alas for the ears which cannot hear when earth, and sea, and heaven,

and hell, are all echoing to the tread of the Omnipotent Christ of God. Oh brethren, have you ever seen this vision, have you ever seen God's glory filling the whole earth? If so, you are prepared for the times that are and are to be times of gloom, and darkness, and sin, and blasphemy — and yet your heart does not tremble for the ark of the Lord.

When all this was seen of the prophet, he noted that the posts of the doors moved. If I am rightly informed, there were two huge columns before the temple called Jachin and Boaz. These were made with singular skill, and were the wonder of the age. They were of brass, cast by Solomon; but in the course of ages they had no doubt mellowed into bronze, and there they stood, two tremendous erections, upbearing massive doors. We are told, I know not whether it be correct, that the gates that swung upon these columns required at least twenty men either to open or to shut them; but as the prophet saw that vision he noticed that these massive columns trembled, and thus did obeisance to the God who was within their gates. Our Revised Version reads it, "The foundations of the thresholds were moved." Even to its foundations the house trembled with solemn awe of the divine presence. Brethren, heaven, and earth, and hell, and all created things reflect the glory of the Lord, and thus adore him. Oh Lord Jesus, thou art worthy of all honor. "All the earth doth worship thee." If it was so with posts and doors, shall not our hearts rejoice with trembling? shall not our souls be moved in the presence of the Most High? and will we not fall down before the glorified Christ, as John did, who wrote, "When I saw him I fell at his feet as dead?" Everything is filled with awe in his majestic presence, save only man, the impious rebel who dares defy his God.

Then came the best part of the vision for Isaiah. At the glorious sight, he felt, "Woe is me, for I am undone, I am stricken dumb. I can never speak again, for my lips are unclean, and I dwell among an unclean people." Then, swift as lightning flew a seraph, bringing a coal more burning than himself from off the altar of sacrifice, wherewith he touched the prophet's lip. Beloved, this is what we need. We need to feel the atonement laid home to us, to feel the power of the great sacrifice of Christ, to hear a voice saying within our spirit, "Thine iniquity is put away, and thy sin is purged." Though that live coal must have blistered the lip which it covered, yet it made it eloquent. Common fire would destroy the organs of

speech, but the fire of sacrifice does not so, but it unlooses a grateful tongue, and helps a grateful heart to tell the love immense, unsearchable, which offered itself upon the altar of sacrifice, that holiness and love might save the sinner. Our peace comes from the Holy, Holy, Holy One, who is just, and yet forgives his people's sin. Brother, if you are to proclaim the glory of your Lord, you must feel the sacrificial coal applied to the place where your impurity is most seen, even to your lips; you must know that you are forgiven; for your conviction that you are clean before God will give you confidence in telling out to others the story of the cross. This is what Isaiah saw.

Listen for a minute to that further word that follows: — Isaiah when he saw his glory “spake of him.” He that hath seen this sight must speak.

He spake in deep humility. Never braver man than Isaiah, but never one who walked in lowlier reverence before his God. He never forgot to his dying day that “woe is me! for I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

Yet, observe that he spake with very willing obedience. “Here am I,” he said, “send me.” He offers himself to be God's mouth to the people, whatever the message may be. He seems to say, “Here am I in the entirety of my being, purchased to thee by thy great pardoning love; use me as thou wilt, and send me where thou wilt.” He continued to report his Lord's message under constant rebuffs, and despite the ceaseless obduracy of Israel. Though he cried, “Who hath believed our report?” yet he continued that report. That chapter which begins with his complaint, has in it not only a continuation of the report, but a fuller version of it than he had ever given before. He was sad but resolute, grieved yet persevering, broken in heart, but not broken down in constancy. Brethren, it needs great grace to go upon a fruitless errand. One had need see the glory of the Lord to be enabled to fight a losing battle. I am sometimes afraid that I have to do this myself; but if it be so, it is not ours to bargain for success, but to yield implicit obedience. It is ours to abide faithful to our commission, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. Brethren, be it ours to serve the Lord gladly, and testify to what we have seen, even though no man should receive our witness.

But then it is said of Isaiah that he “spake of him,” that is, of our Lord Jesus Christ. In all that Isaiah said he had an eye to Christ. It was all his



business among men to speak of the glories of the coming Son of God. May the Lord give us such a sight of Christ in his glory that from this day forth we shall be absorbed in glorifying him. May our life be a perpetual ministry concerning Christ. Remember that word concerning John the Baptist, "John did no miracle, but all things that John spake of this man were true." If we can do no miracle and achieve no success, let us at least cry without ceasing. "Behold the Lamb of God." Though we decrease, it matters not so long as he doth increase; we are glad to disappear, as the morning star is lost at the rising of the sun. It is our delight to imitate the seraphim, and with veiled face and covered feet to attend about the throne of Jehovah Jesus our Lord.

**II.** I now ask your kind attention to the second part of my subject, which is a very painful one, CONCERNING THE NATION TO WHICH ISAIAH SPAKE. Their terrible sin lay in this, that they were willingly blinded by the light which ought to have been to them a help to see Christ, and they were hardened by those very truths which ought to have melted them. They became more and more adverse to Christ through beholding in him such a character as ought to have won their hearts. To the prophet's teaching they were entirely dead. A specimen of this we find in the succeeding chapters of Isaiah. Israel and Syria attacked Ahaz, whose reign followed those of Uzziah and Jotham. The prophet came and said to Ahaz, "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands." Ahaz was assured that God would help him if he would but trust in him; but instead of doing so, the king determined to petition for the help of the great king of Assyria, with the result in the long run that "the king of Assyria came unto him and distressed him, but helped him not." Isaiah, to confirm his message, bade the king choose any sign either in the depth or in the height above; but the infidel king replied, "I will not ask, neither will I test Jehovah." He had so defiantly cast off allegiance to the true God that he would not even accept a sign, though it was left to his own choice. Thus Isaiah's message was rejected though put in the most winning form, for the hearts of the people were blinded and hardened so as to choose the way of destruction. Ultimately, as you know, the Assyrians carried the whole people away; for they had rejected God's message willfully, and wrath came upon them. What a grievous task to be called to preach to such a people!

They went on from bad to worse as a nation; they turned aside grievously, but not in heart, so that when Christ came they were unable to discern him, for had they known him they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. This blindness was in part a punishment for their long rebellion. If men willfully shut their eyes, do you wonder that they become blind? If men will not hear, do you wonder that they grow deaf? He that perverts truth shall soon be incapable of knowing the true from the false. If you persist in wearing glasses that distort, everything will be distorted to you.

*“Hear the just law, the judgment of the skies!  
He that hates truth shall be the dupe of lies.”*

But although this blindness was a punishment for former sin, it was itself a sin. They willfully rejected the testimony of God against themselves; they refused the self-evident Christ who would so greatly have blessed them. This wilful rejection was carried out so effectually that it became impossible to convert and heal them; they could not be instructed, or reformed, and therefore they were given over to destruction. Nothing remained but to allow the Romans to burn the temple and plough the site of the city. It was a dreadful thing that they should deliberately choose destruction, and obstinately involve themselves in the most tremendous of woes. Poor Israel, we pity thee! It was sad indeed to fall from so great a height! Yet we are bound to admit that God dealt with thee justly, for thou didst choose thine own delusions. The Lord cries, “Oh that my people had harkened unto me.” Our Savior weeps and cries, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”

What I have to say this morning is this — that I am growingly fearful lest our own country should furnish a parallel to all this. Read the story of England, beginning where you will, and see how gracious God has been to us. Note well our great deliverances, from the destruction of the Spanish Armada to the overthrow of Napoleon. Do not forget how often this little country has been made victorious in wars against great peoples, who thought to swallow her up. Then reflect how God sent the light to us; how the gospel spread all over England, and how it has in many ways been rejected. How often since the days of Cromwell Rome has been allowed to

dim the light of our Protestantism, and how it labors to do so still! See how this people have received the truth of heaven, but again and again have proved false to it, turning at one time to superstition and at another time to infidelity. At this moment we are rich, and despite depression in business, we are less tried by it than any other nation. And what comes of all this mercy but increased sin? Why, at this moment we have sin rampant among us almost beyond precedent. Think how the poor are oppressed and ground down with awful poverty in many parts of this great city. Shall not God avenge the cry of starving women? Worse still, if worse can be: those who dare walk our streets after sundown tell us that Sodom, in its most putrid days, could scarce exceed this metropolis for open vice. To our infinite disgust and horror, the names of certain of the greatest in the land are at this hour openly mentioned in connection with the filthiest debauchery. This is not the place for details, nor can I mention the matter, or even think of it without feeling my very soul on fire. Faithfulness requires plain speech; but it is a hideous evil that the dregs of vice should be the chosen luxury of certain of our hereditary legislators and rulers. Woe unto thee, Oh land, when thy great ones love the harlot's house! Deep is our shame when we know that our judges are not clear in this matter, but social purity has been put to the blush by magistrates of no mean degree; yea, it is said that the courts of justice have lent themselves to the covering and hushing up of the iniquities of the great. Shall not God be grieved by such a nation as this? He who has read a certain story, which is but too-well known, must have felt his ears tingle and his heart tremble. What is coming over us? What horrible clouds are darkening our skies? There were judges once who would not have suffered the laws to be trampled on by the great, but would have dealt out equal justice to rich and poor: I cannot persuade myself that it will be otherwise now, and yet I fear the worst. O God, have mercy upon the land whose judgment-seats and palaces are defiled with vice.

This is not all: a general indifference to all religion is creeping over the country; at least over this vast metropolis. Ask those who visit from door to door among our crowded populations, and they will tell you that never before in their life-time were there so few persons attendant upon the means of grace. Street after street of this city scarcely possesses more than one regular attendant upon the preaching of the word. The Sabbath is no

longer a day of worship with millions. What continual efforts are made to rob us of the Sabbath-day; to degrade it into a common work-day, and to make a slave of the working-man. To-day the revelation of God is treated with indifference, or talked of as if it deserved no reverence or credit. Unbelief has sapped the foundations of the social fabric. Worst of all, — I must not hold back the charge, many of the avowed ministers of Christ are no ministers of faith at all, but promoters of unbelief. The modern pulpit has taught men to be infidels. What truth is there which has not been doubted by divines, questioned by doctors of divinity, and at length been denounced by the priests of “modern thought?” Nothing remains upon which a certain school of preachers have not spit their scepticism. The experience of the unbelief of Germany is being repeated here. Among those who are ordained to be the preachers of the gospel of Christ, there are many who preach not faith but doubt, and hence they are servants of the devil rather than of the Lord. Think not that I am aiming at the Church of England. With all my objection to a state-church, I am not so unjust as to conceal my belief, that I see in the Episcopal Church at this time less of unbelief than among certain Dissenters: in fact, Nonconformity in certain quarters is eaten through and through with a covert Unitarianism, less tolerable than Unitarianism itself. So frequently are the fundamental doctrines of the gospel assailed, that it becomes needful, before you cross the threshold of many a chapel, to ask the question, “Shall I hear the gospel here to-day, or shall I come out hardly knowing whether the Bible is inspired or not? Shall I not be made to doubt the atonement, the work of the Holy Ghost, the immortality of the soul, the punishment of the wicked, or the deity of Christ?”

I know I shall stir a hornet’s nest by these honest rebukes but I cannot help it. I am burdened and distressed with the state of religion; a pest is in the air; no truth is safe from its withering infection. No signs can be more alarming than the growing infidelity and worldliness which I see among those who call themselves Christians. Does this nation really intend to cast off the fear of God and the doctrines of Holy Scripture to follow the vain imaginings of the sophists and the fashionable follies of the great? Are we to see again unbelief and luxurious sin walking hand in hand? If so, there be some of us who mean to take up our sorrowful parable, and speak as plainly as we can for truth and holiness, whether we offend or please.

Be it ours still to thunder out the law of God, and proclaim with trumpet clearness the gospel of Jesus, not bating one jot of firm belief in the revelation of God, nor winking at sin, nor toning down truth, even though we fear that the only result will be to make this people's hearts gross, and their ears heavy, and their eyes blind. If it must be so, my soul shall weep in secret; but still, Oh Lord, here am I, send me. Be of good courage, Oh my heart, for the faithful have not ceased from among men; other voices will cry aloud and spare not, if haply our land may be purged of its present defilement.

Hearken yet again while I press this subject personally home to you. Has not this word a personal bearing upon some of you? Certain of you have heard the gospel preached plainly and honestly, and yet you have never received it: is there not creeping over you a fatal indifference? Are not your hearts turning to stone? Possibly you are professors of religion, and yet you do not feel the power of it; what does this mean? If you are not a praying people, nor a holy people, and yet you are a professing people, what an awful doom awaits you! Shall my ministry be a savor of death unto you? It may be that my voice grows stale to you, and what I say seems common-place: but is this to be the reason for your refusing Christ and his salvation, refusing the power of his word, refusing holiness which we would work in you? Oh, shall it be so? Will you die? Dear hearers, I should not like to meet one of you at that day of judgment and have to feel that I preached you into a greater blindness than you might have known. Oh, be converted! Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die? May God in infinite mercy speak to you that you may believe in Jesus now, lest that should come upon you which is spoken of by the prophet, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!"

Ere I have done, hear the sweet whisper which closes the sixth of Isaiah. Notwithstanding all the terrible work that Isaiah had to do he was not left without comfort; the Lord said to him, "In it there shall be a tenth." You know how the prophet cried, "Except the Lord of hosts had left us a seed we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrah." The Lord has his sacred tithe and these he will not lose. The tree has lost its leaves, for it is winter time; but still it is alive, and the sap will flow again, for its substance is in it! The tree is leveled by the axe; but weep not despairing tears, for it shall sprout again, for life is still in it. Even so the Church must

live; truth must be victorious; purity must conquer, the Christ must reign. Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him. Reject Christ if you will to-day, Oh ye who think yourselves so exceeding wise, but there is a people who love him, a secret people who cling to him; and when he comes, as come he must ere long, they will welcome him and partake in his glory. As for you that refuse him this day, how will you stand when he appeareth? Whither will you flee? You shall ask the hills to cover you, but they will refuse. You shall bid the mountains hide you, but they will not yield a cavern for your shelter. Be wise now, therefore, and no more resist your Lord. "Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way while his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him!" May you and I and all of us be of that blessed number. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  John 12:37-50.


HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 93, 12, 518.

# COMING JUDGMENT OF THE SECRETS OF MEN

SERMON NO. 1849

DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, JULY 12TH, 1885,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“The day when God shall judge the secrets of men  
by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” —  Romans 2:16.*

IT IS impossible for any of us to tell what it cost the apostle Paul to write the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans. It is a shame even to speak of the things which are done of the vicious in secret places; but Paul felt it was necessary to break through his shame, and to speak out concerning the hideous vices of the heathen. He has left on record an exposure of the sins of his day which crimson the cheek of the modest when they read it, and makes both the ears of him that heareth it to tingle. Paul knew that this chapter would be read, not in his age alone, but in all ages, and that it would go into the households of the most pure and godly as long as the world should stand; and yet he deliberately wrote it, and wrote it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He knew that it must be written to put to shame the abominations of an age which was almost past shame. Monsters that revel in darkness must be dragged into the open, that they may be withered up by the light. After Paul has thus written in anguish he bethought himself of his chief comfort. While his pen was black with the words he had written in the first chapter, he was driven to write of his great delight. He clings to the gospel with a greater tenacity than ever. As in the verse before us he needed to mention the gospel, he did not speak of it as “the gospel,” but as “my gospel.” “God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” He felt he could not live in the midst of so depraved a people without holding the gospel with both hands, and grasping it as his very own. “My gospel,” saith he. Not that

Paul was the author of it, not that Paul had an exclusive monopoly of its blessings, but that he had so received it from Christ himself, and regarded himself as so responsibly put in trust with it, that he could not disown it even for a instant. So fully had he taken it into himself that he could not do less than call it “my gospel.” In another place he speaks of “our gospel;” thus using a possessive pronoun, to show how believers identify themselves with the truth which they preach. He had a gospel, a definite form of truth, and he believed in it beyond all doubt; and therefore he spoke of it as “my gospel.” Herein we hear the voice of faith, which seems to say, “Though others reject it, I am sure of it, and allow no shade of mistrust to darken my mind. To me it is glad tidings of great joy: I hail it as ‘my gospel.’ If I be called a fool for holding it, I am content to be a fool, and to find all my wisdom in my Lord.”

“Should all the forms that men devise Assault my faith with treacherous art, I’d call them vanity and lies, And bind the gospel to my heart.”

Is not this word “my gospel” the voice of love? Does he not by this word embrace the gospel as the only love of his soul — for the sake of which he had suffered the loss of all things, and did count them but dung — for the sake of which he was willing to stand before Nero, and proclaim, even in Caesar’s palace, the message from heaven? Though each word should cost him a life, he was willing to die a thousand deaths for the holy cause. “My gospel,” saith he, with a rapture of delight, as he presses to his bosom the sacred deposit of truth.

“My gospel.” Does not this show his courage? As much as to say, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” He says, “my gospel,” as a soldier speaks of “my colors,” or of “my king.” He resolves to bear this banner to victory, and to serve this royal truth even to the death.

“My gospel.” There is a touch of discrimination about the expression. Paul perceives that there are other gospels, and he makes short work with them, for he saith, “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let me be accused.” The apostle was of a gentle spirit; he prayed heartily for the Jews who persecuted him, and yielded his life for the conversion of the Gentiles who maltreated him; but he had no tolerance for false gossellers.



He exhibited great breadth of mind, and to save souls he became all things to all men; but when he contemplated any alteration or adulteration of the gospel of Christ, he thundered and lightnined without measure. When he feared that something else might spring up among the philosophers, or among the Judaizers, that should hide a single beam of the glorious Sun of Righteousness, he used no measured language; but cried concerning the author of such a darkening influence, "Let him be accursed." Every heart that would see men blessed whispers an "Amen" to the apostolic malediction. No greater curse can come upon mankind than the obscuration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul saith of himself and his true brethren, "We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God;" and he cries to those who turned aside from the one and only gospel, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" Of all new doctrines he speaks as of "another gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you."

As for myself, looking at the matter afresh, amidst all the filthiness which I see in the world at this day, I lay hold upon the pure and blessed Word of God, and call it all the more earnestly, my gospel, — mine in life and mine in death, mine against all comers, mine for ever, God helping me: with emphasis — "my gospel."

Now let us notice what it was that brought up this expression, "My gospel." What was Paul preaching about? Certainly not upon any of the gentle and tender themes, which we are told nowadays ought to occupy all our time; but he is speaking of the terrors of the law, and in that connection he speaks of "my gospel."

Let us come at once to our text. It will need no dividing, for it divides itself. First, let us consider that on a certain day God shall judge mankind; secondly, on that day God will judge the secrets of men; thirdly, when he judges the secrets of men, it will be by Jesus Christ; and fourthly, this is according to gospel.

**I.** We begin with the solemn truth, that ON A CERTAIN DAY GOD WILL JUDGE MEN. A judgment is going on daily. God is continually holding court, and considering the doings of the sons of men. Every evil deed that they do is recorded in the register of doom, and each good action is

remembered and laid up in store by God. That judgment is reflected in a measure in the consciences of men. Those who know the gospel, and those who know it not, alike, have a certain measure of light, by which they know right from wrong; their consciences all the while accusing or else excusing them. This session of the heavenly court continues from day to day, like that of our local magistrates; but this does not prevent but rather necessitates the holding of an ultimate great assize.

As each man passes into another world, there is an immediate judgment passed upon him; but this is only the foreshadowing of that which will take place in the end of the world.

There is a judgment also passing upon nations, for as nations will not exist as nations in another world, they have to be judged and punished in this present state. The thoughtful reader of history will not fail to observe, how sternly this justice had dealt with empire after empire, when they have become corrupt. Colossal dominions have withered to the ground, when sentenced by the King of kings. Go ye and ask to-day, "Where is the empire of Assyria? Where are the mighty cities of Babylon? Where are the glories of the Medes and Persians? What has become of the Macedonian power? Where are the Caesars and their palaces?" These empires were forces established by cruelty, and used for oppression; they fostered luxury and licentiousness, and when they were no longer tolerable, the earth was purged from their polluting existence. Ah me! what horrors of war, bloodshed, and devastation, have come upon men as the result of their iniquities! The world is full of the monuments, both of the mercy and the justice of God: in fact the monuments of his justice, if rightly viewed, are proofs of his goodness; for it is mercy on the part of God to put an end to evil systems when, like a nightmare, they weigh heavily upon the bosom of mankind. The omnipotent, Judge has not ceased from his sovereign rule over kingdoms, and our own country may yet have to feel his chastisements. We have often laughed among ourselves at the idea of the New Zealander sitting on the broken arch of London Bridge amid the ruins of this metropolis. But is it quite so ridiculous as it looks? It is more than possible it will be realized if our iniquities continue to abound. What is there about London that it should be more enduring than Rome? Why should the palaces of our monarches be eternal if the palaces of Koyunjik have fallen? The almost boundless power of the Pharaohs has passed

away, and Egypt has become the meanest of nations; why should not England come under like condemnation? What are we? What is there about our boastful race, whether on this side of the Atlantic or the other, that we should monopolize the favor of God? If we rebel, and sin against him, he will not hold us guiltless, but will deal out impartial justice to an ungrateful race.

Still, though such judgments proceed every day, yet there is to be a day, a period of time, in which, in a more distinct, formal, public, and final manner, God will judge the sons of men. We might have guessed this by the light of nature and of reason. Even heathen peoples have had a dim notion of a day of doom; but we are not left to guess it, we are solemnly assured of it in the Holy Scripture. Accepting this Book as the revelation of God, we know beyond all doubt that a day is appointed in which the Lord will judge the secrets of men.

By judging is here meant all that concerns the proceedings of trial and award. God will judge the race of men; that is to say, first, there will be a session of majesty, and the appearing of a great white throne, surrounded with pomp of angels and glorified beings. Then a summons will be issued, bidding all men come to judgment, to give in their final account. The heralds will fly through the realms of death, and summon those who sleep in the dust: for the quick and the dead shall all appear before that judgment-seat. John says, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God;" and he adds, "The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them." Those that have been so long buried that their dust is mingled with the soil, and has undergone a thousand transmutations, shall nevertheless be made to put in a personal appearance before the judgment-seat of Christ. What an issue will that be! You and I and all the myriad myriads of our race shall be gathered before the throne of the Son of God. Then, when all are gathered, the indictment will be read, and each one will be examined concerning things done in the body, according to that he hath done. Then the books shall be opened, and everything recorded there shall be read before the face of heaven. Every sinner shall then hear the story of his life published to his everlasting shame. The good shall ask no concealment, and the evil shall find none. Angels and men shall then see the truth of things, and the saints shall judge the world. Then the great Judge himself shall give the decision: he shall

pronounce sentence upon the wicked, and execute their punishment. No partiality shall there be seen; there shall be no private conferences to secure immunity for nobles, no hushing up of matters, that great men may escape contempt for their crimes. All men shall stand before the one great judgment-bar; evidence shall be given concerning them all, and a righteous sentence shall go forth from his mouth who knows not how to flatter the great.

This will be so, and it ought to be so: God should judge the world, because he is the universal ruler and sovereign. There has been a day for sinning, there ought to be a day for punishing; a long age of rebellion has been endured, and there must be a time when justice shall assert her supremacy. We have seen an age in which reformation has been commanded, in which mercy has been presented, in which expostulation and entreaty have been used, and there ought at last to come a day in which God shall judge both the quick and the dead, and measure out to each the final result of life. It ought to be so for the sake of the righteous. They have been slandered; they have been despised and ridiculed; worse than that, they have been imprisoned and beaten, and put to death times without number: the best have had the worst of it, and there ought to be a judgment to set these things right. Besides the festering iniquities of each age cry out to God that he should deal with them. Shall such sin go unpunished? To what end is there a moral government at all, and how is its continuance to be secured, if there be not rewards and punishments and a day of account? For the display of his holiness, for the overwhelming of his adversaries, for the rewarding of those who have faithfully served him, there must be and shall be a day in which God will judge the world.

Why doth it not come at once? And when will it come? The precise day we cannot tell. Man nor angel knoweth that day, and it is idle and profane to guess at it, since even the Son of man, as such, knoweth not the time. It is sufficient for us that the Judgment Day will surely come; sufficient also to believe that it is postponed on purpose to give breathing time for mercy, and space for repentance. Why should the ungodly want to know when that day will come? What is that day to you? To you it should be darkness, and not light. It shall be your day of consuming as stubble fully dry: therefore bless the Lord that he delayeth his coming, and reckon that his longsuffering is for your salvation.

Moreover, the Lord keeps the scaffold standing till he hath built up the fabric of his church. Not yet are the elect all called out from among the guilty sons of men; not yet are all the redeemed with blood redeemed with power and brought forth out of the corruption of the age into the holiness in which they walk with God. Therefore the Lord waiteth for a while. But do not deceive yourselves. The great day of his wrath cometh on apace, and your days of reprieve are numbered. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Ye shall die, perhaps, before the appearing of the Son of man: but ye shall see his judgment-seat for all that, for ye shall rise again as surely as he rose. When the apostle addressed the Grecian sages at Athens he said, "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." See ye not, O ye impenitent ones, that a risen Savior is the sign of your doom. As God hath raised Jesus from the dead, so shall he raise your bodies, that in these you may come to judgment. Before the judgment-seat shall every man and woman in this house give an account of the things done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil. Thus saith the Lord.

**II.** Now I call your attention to the fact that "GOD WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN." This will happen to all men, of every nation, of every age, of every rank, and of every character. The Judge will, of course, judge their outward acts, but these may be said to have gone before them to judgment: their secret acts are specially mentioned, because these will make judgment to be the more searching.

By "secrets of men," the Scripture means those secret crimes which hide themselves away by their own infamy, which are too vile to be spoken of, which cause a shudder to go through a nation if they be but dragged, as they ought to be, into the daylight. Secret offenses shall be brought into judgment; the deeds of the night and of the closed room, the acts which require the finger to be laid upon the lip, and a conspiracy of silence to be sworn. Revolting and shameless sins which must never be mentioned lest the man who committed them should be excluded from his fellows as an outcast, abhorred even of other sinners — all those shall be revealed. All that you have done, any of you, or are doing, if you are bearing the

Christian name and yet practising secret sin, shall be laid bare before the universal gaze. If you sit here amongst the people of God, and yet where no eye sees you, if you are living in dishonesty, untruthfulness, or uncleanness, it shall all be known, and shame and confusion of face shall eternally cover you. Contempt shall be the inheritance to which you shall awake, when hypocrisy shall be no more possible. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; but he will bring the secrets of men into judgment.

Specially our text refers to the hidden motives of every action; for a man may do that which is right from a wrong motive, and so the deed may be evil in the sight of God, though it seem right in the sight of men. Oh, think what it will be to have your motives all brought to light, to have it proven that you were godly for the sake of gain, that you were generous out of ostentation, or zealous for love of praise, that you were careful in public to maintain a religious reputation, but that all the while everything was done for self, and self only! What a strong light will that be which God shall turn upon our lives, when the darkest chambers of human desire and motive shall be as manifest as public acts! What a revelation will that be which makes manifest all thoughts, and imaginings, and lustings, and desires! All angers, and envies, and prides, and rebellions of the heart — what a disclosure will these make!

All the sensual desires and imaginings of even the best-regulated, what a foulness will these appear! What a day it will be, when the secrets of men shall be set in the full blaze of noon!

God will also reveal secrets, that were secrets even to the sinners themselves, for there is sin in us which we have never seen, and iniquity in us which we have never yet discovered.

We have managed for our own comfort's sake to blind our eyes somewhat, and we take care to avert our gaze from things which it is inconvenient to see; but we shall be compelled to see all these evils in that day, when the Lord shall judge the secrets of men. I do not wonder that when a certain Rabbi read in the book of Ecclesiastes that God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil, he wept. It is enough to make the best men tremble. Were it not for thee, O Jesus, whose precious blood hath cleansed us from all sin, where should we be! Were it not for thy righteousness, which shall cover those

who believe in thee, who among us could endure the thought of that tremendous day? In thee, O Jesus, we are made righteous, and therefore we fear not the trial-hour; but were it not for thee our hearts would fail us for fear!

Now if you ask me why God should judge, especially the secrets of men — since this is not done in human courts, and cannot be, for secret things of this kind come not under cognizance of our short-sighted tribunals — I answer it is because there is really nothing secret from God. We make a difference between secret and public sins, but he doth not; for all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. All deeds are done in the immediate presence of God, who is personally present everywhere. He knows and sees all things as one upon the spot, and every secret sin is but conceived to be secret through the deluded fantasy of our ignorance. God sees more of a secret sin than a man can see of that which is done before his face. “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord.”

The secrets of men will be judged because often the greatest of moral acts are done in secret. The brightest deeds that God delights in are those that are done by his servants when they have shut the door and are alone with him; when they have no motive but to please him; when they studiously avoid publicity, lest they should be turned aside by the praise of men; when the right hand knoweth not what the left hand doeth, and the loving, generous heart deviseth liberal things, and doeth it behind the screen, so that it should never be discovered how the deed was done. It were a pity that such deeds should be left out at the great audit. Thus, too, secret vices are also of the very blackest kind, and to exempt them were to let the worst of sinners go unpunished. Shall it be that these polluted things shall escape because they have purchased silence with their wealth? I say solemnly “God forbid.” He does forbid it: what they have done in secret, shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops.

Besides, the secret things of men enter into the very essence of their actions. An action is, after all, good or bad very much according to its motive. It may seem good, but the motive may taint it; and so, if God did not judge the secret part of the action he would not judge righteously. He

will weigh our actions, and detect the design which led to them, and the spirit which prompted them.

Is it not certainly true that the secret thing is the best evidence of the man's condition? Many a man will not do in public that which would bring him shame; not because he is black-hearted enough for it, but because he is too much of a coward. That which a man does when he thinks that he is entirely by himself is the best revelation of the man. That which thou wilt not do because it would be told of thee if thou didst ill, is a poor index of thy real character. That which thou wilt do because thou wilt be praised for doing well, is an equally faint test of thy heart. Such virtue is mere self-seeking, or mean-spirited subservience to thy fellow-man; but that which thou doest out of respect to no authority but thine own conscience and thy God; that which thou doest unobserved, without regard to what man will say concerning it — that it is which reveals thee, and discovers thy real soul. Hence God lays a special stress and emphasis upon the fact that he will in that day judge “the secrets” of men by Jesus Christ.

Oh, friends, if it does not make you tremble to think of these things, it ought to do so. I feel the deep responsibility of preaching upon such matters, and I pray God of his infinite mercy to apply these truths to our hearts, that they may be forceful upon our lives. These truths ought to startle us, but I am afraid we hear them with small result; we have grown familiar with them, and they do not penetrate us as they should. We have to deal, brethren, with an omniscient God; with One who once knowing never forgets; with One to whom all things are always present; with One who will conceal nothing out of fear, or favor of any man's person; with One who will shortly bring the splendor of his omniscience and the impartiality of his justice to bear upon all human lives. God help us, where'er we rove and where'er we rest, to remember that each thought, word, and act of each moment lies in that fierce light which beats upon all things from the throne of God.

**III.** Another solemn revelation of our text lies in this fact, that “GOD WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN BY JESUS CHRIST.” He that will sit upon the throne as the Vice-regent of God, and as a Judge, acting for God, will be Jesus Christ. What a name for a Judge! The Savior-Anointed —



Jesus Christ: he is to be the judge of all mankind. Our Redeemer will be the Umpire of our destiny.

This will be, I doubt not, first for the display of his glory. What a difference there will be then between the babe of Bethlehem's manger, hunted by Herod, carried down by night into Egypt for shelter, and the King of kings and Lord of lords, before whom every knee must bow! What a difference between the weary man and full of woes, and he that shall then be girt with glory, sitting on a throne encircled with a rainbow! From the derision of men to the throne of universal judgment, what an ascent! I am unable to convey to you my own heart's sense of the contrast between the "despised and rejected of men," and the universally-acknowledged Lord, before whom Caesars and pontiffs shall bow into the dust. He who was judged at Pilate's bar, shall summon all to his bar. What a change from the shame and spitting, from the nails and the wounds, the mockery and the thirst, and the dying anguish, to the glory in which he shall come whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and out of whose mouth there goeth a two-edged sword! He shall judge the nations, even he whom the nations abhorred. He shall break them in pieces like a potter's vessel, even those who cast him out as unworthy to live among them. Oh, how we ought to bow before him now as he reveals himself in his tender sympathy, and in his generous humiliation! Let us kiss the Son lest he be angry; let us yield to his grace, that we may not be crushed by his wrath. Ye sinners, bow before those pierced feet, which else will tread you like clusters in the wine-press. Look ye up to him with weeping, and confess your forgetfulness of him, and put your trust in him; lest he look down on you in indignation. Oh, remember that he will one day say, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." The holding of the judgment by the Lord Jesus will greatly enhance his glory. It will finally settle one controversy which is still upheld by certain erroneous spirits: there will be no doubt about our Lord's deity in that day: there will be no question that this same Jesus who was crucified is both Lord and God. God himself shall judge, but he shall perform the judgment in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, truly man, but nevertheless most truly God. Being God he is divinely qualified to judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth.

If you ask again, Why is the Son of God chosen to be the final Judge? I could give as a further answer that he receives this high office not only as a reward for all his pains, and as a manifestation of his glory, but also because men have been under his mediatorial sway, and he is their Governor and King. At the present moment we are all under the sway of the Prince Immanuel, God with us: we have been placed by an act of divine clemency, not under the immediate government of an offended God, but under the reconciling rule of the Prince of Peace. "All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth." "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." We are commanded to preach unto the people, and

"to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge  
of quick and dead." (Acts 10:42)

Jesus is our Lord and King, and it is meet that he should conclude his mediatorial sovereignty by rewarding his subjects to their deeds.

But I have somewhat to say unto you which ought to reach your hearts, even if other thoughts have not done so. I think that God hath chosen Christ, the man Christ Jesus, to judge the world that there may never be a cavil raised concerning that judgment. Men shall not be able to say — We were judged by a superior being who did not know our weaknesses and temptations, and therefore he judged us harshly, and without a generous consideration of our condition. No, God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. He is our brother, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, partaker of our humanity, and therefore understands and knows what is in men. He has shown himself to be skillful in all the surgery of mercy throughout the ages, and at last he will be found equally skillful in dissecting motives and revealing the thoughts and intents of the heart. Nobody shall ever be able to look back on that august tribunal and say that he who sat upon it was too stern, because he knew nothing of human weakness. It will be the loving Christ, whose tears, and bloody sweat, and gaping wounds, attest his brotherhood with mankind; and it will be clear to all intelligences that however dread his sentences, he could not be unmerciful. God shall judge us by Jesus Christ, that the judgment may be indisputable.

But harken well — for I speak with a great weight upon my soul — this judgment by Jesus Christ, puts beyond possibility all hope of any after-interposition. If the Savior condemns, and such a Savior, who can plead for us? The owner of the vineyard was about to cut down the barren tree, when the dresser of the vineyard pleaded, “Let it alone this year also;” but what can come of that tree when that vinedresser himself shall say to the master, “It must fall; I myself must cut it down!” If your Savior shall become your judge you will be judged indeed. If he shall say, “Depart, ye cursed,” who can call you back? If he that bled to save men at last comes to this conclusion, that there is no more to be done, but they must be driven from his presence, then farewell hope. To the guilty the judgment will indeed be a

*“Great day of dread, decision, and despair.”*

An infinite horror shall seize upon their spirits as the words of the loving Christ shall freeze their very marrow, and fix them in the ice of eternal despair. There is, to my mind, a climax of solemnity in the fact that God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

Does not this also show how certain the sentence will be? for this Christ of God is too much in earnest to play with men. If he says, “Come, ye blessed,” he will not fail to bring them to their inheritance. If he be driven to say, “Depart, ye cursed,” he will see it done, and into the everlasting punishment they must go. Even when it cost him his life he did not draw back from doing the will of his Father, nor will he shrink in that day when he shall pronounce the sentence of doom. Oh, how evil must sin be since it constrains the tender Savior to pronounce sentence of eternal woe! I am sure that many of us have been driven of late to an increased hatred of sin; our souls have recoiled within us because of the wickedness among which we dwell; it has made us feel as if we would fain borrow the Almighty’s thunderbolts with which to smite iniquity. Such haste on our part may not be seemly, since it implies a complaint against divine long-suffering; but Christ’s dealing with evil will be calm and dispassionate, and all the more crushing. Jesus, with his pierced hand, that bears the attestation of his supreme love to men, shall wave the impenitent away; and those lips which bade the weary rest in him shall solemnly say to the wicked, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his

angels.” To be trampled beneath the foot which was nailed to the cross will be to be crushed indeed: yet so it is, God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

It seems to me as if God in this intended to give a display of the unity of all his perfections. In this same man, Christ Jesus, the Son of God, you behold justice and love, mercy and righteousness, combined in equal measure. He turns to the right, and says, “Come, ye blessed,” with infinite suavity; and with the same lip, as he glances to the left, he says, “Depart, ye cursed.” Men will then see at one glance how love and righteousness are one, and how they meet in equal splendor in the person of the Well-beloved, whom God has therefore chosen to be Judge of quick and dead.

**IV.** I have done when you have borne with me a minute or two upon my next point, which is this: and ALL THIS IS ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL. That is to say, there is nothing in the gospel contrary to the solemn teaching. Men gather to us, to hear us preach of infinite mercy, and tell of the love that blots out sin; and our task is joyful when we are called to deliver such a message; but oh, sirs, remember that nothing in our message makes light of sin. The gospel offers you no opportunity of going on in sin, and escaping without punishment. Its own cry is, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Jesus has not come into the world to make sin less terrible. Nothing in the gospel excuses sin; nothing in it affords toleration for lust or anger, or dishonesty, or falsehood. The gospel is as truly a two-edged sword against sin, as ever the law can be. There is grace for the man who quits his sin, but there is tribulation and wrath upon every man that doeth evil. “If ye turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready.” The gospel is all tenderness to the repenting, but all terror to the obstinate offender. It has pardon for the very chief of sinners, and mercy for the vilest of the vile, if they will forsake their sins; but it is according to our gospel that he that goeth on in his iniquity, shall be cast into hell, and he that believeth not shall be damned. With deep love to the souls of men, I bear witness to the truth that he who turns not with repentance and faith to Christ, shall go away into punishment as everlasting as the life of the righteous. This is according to our gospel: indeed, we had not needed such a gospel, if there had not been such a judgment. The background of the cross is the judgment-seat of Christ. We had not needed so great an atonement, so vast

a sacrifice, if there had not been an exceeding sinfulness in sin, an exceeding justice in the judgment, and an exceeding terror in the sure rewards of transgression.

“According to my gospel,” saith Paul; and he meant that the judgment is an essential part of the gospel creed. If I had to sum up the gospel I should have to tell you certain facts: Jesus, the Son of God, became man; he was born of the virgin Mary; lived a perfect life; was falsely accused of men; was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God; from whence he shall also come to judge the quick and the dead. This is one of the elementary truths of our gospel; we believe in the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the life everlasting.

The judgment is according to our gospel, and in times of righteous indignation its terrible significance seemeth a very gospel to the pure in heart. I mean this. I have read this and that concerning oppression, slavery, the treading down of the poor, and the shedding of blood, and I have rejoiced that there is a righteous Judge. I have read of secret wickednesses among the rich men of this city, and I have said within myself, “Thank God, there will be a judgment day.” Thousands of men have been hanged for much less crimes than those which now disgrace gentlemen whose names are on the lips of rank and beauty. Ah me, how heavy is our heart as we think of it! It has come like a gospel to us that the Lord will be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:8) The secret wickedness of London cannot go on for ever. Even they that love men best, and most desire salvation for them, cannot but cry to God, “How long! How long! Great God, wilt thou for ever endure this?” God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world, and we sigh and cry until it shall end the reign of wickedness, and give rest to the oppressed. Brethren, we must preach the coming of the Lord, and preach it somewhat more than we have done; because it is the driving power of the gospel. Too many have kept back these truths, and thus the bone has been taken out of the arm of the gospel. Its point has been broken; its edge has been blunted. The doctrine of judgment to come is the power by which men are to be aroused. There is another life; the Lord will come a second time; judgment will arrive; the wrath of God will be revealed. Where this is not preached, I

am bold to say the gospel is not preached. It is absolutely necessary to the preaching of the gospel of Christ that men be warned as to what will happen if they continue in their sins. Ho, ho, sir surgeon, you are too delicate to tell the man that he is ill! You hope to heal the sick without their knowing it. You therefore flatter them; and what happens? They laugh at you; they dance upon their own graves. At last they die! Your delicacy is cruelty; your flatteries are poisons; you are a murderer. Shall we keep men in a fool's paradise? Shall we lull them into soft slumbers from which they will awake in hell? Are we to become helpers of their damnation by our smooth speeches? In the name of God we will not. It becomes every true minister of Christ to cry aloud and spare not, for God hath set a day in which he will "judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." As surely as Paul's gospel was true the judgment will come. Wherefore flee to Jesus this day, O sinners. O ye saints, come hide yourselves again beneath the crimson canopy of the atoning sacrifice, that you may be now ready to welcome your descending Lord and escort him to his judgment-seat. O my hearers, may God bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  John 12:37-50.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 93, 12, 518.

# IMMEASURABLE LOVE

## SERMON NO. 1850

*Intended for reading on Lord's-Day, July 26th, 1885,*

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,**

**ON THE EVENING OF JUNE 7TH, 1885**

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

— ~~John~~ **John 3:16**

I WAS very greatly surprised the other day, in looking over the list of texts from which I have preached, to find that I have no record of ever having spoken from this verse. This is all the more singular, because I can truly say that it might be put in the forefront of all my volumes of discourses as the sole topic of my life's ministry. It has been my one and only business to set forth the love of God to men in Christ Jesus. I heard lately of an aged minister of whom it was said, “Whatever his text, he never failed to set forth God as love, and Christ as the atonement for sin.” I wish that much the same may be said of me. My heart's desire has been to sound forth as with a trumpet the good news that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

We are about to meet around the communion table, and I cannot preach from this text anything but a simple gospel sermon. Can you desire a better preparation for communion? We have fellowship with God and with one another upon the basis of the infinite love which is displayed in Jesus Christ our Lord. The gospel is the fair white linen cloth which covers the table on which the Communion Feast is set. The higher truths, those truths which belong to a more enlightened experience, those richer truths which tell of the fellowship of the higher life — all these are helpful to holy fellowship; but I am sure not more so than those elementary and

foundation truths which were the means of our first entrance into the kingdom of God. Babes in Christ and men in Christ here feed upon one common food. Come, ye aged saints, be children again; and you that have long known your Lord, take up your first spelling-book, and go over your A B C again, by learning that God so loved the world, that he gave his Son to die, that man might live through him. I do not call you to an elementary lesson because you have forgotten your letters, but because it is a good thing to refresh the memory, and a blessed thing to feel young again. What the old folks used to call the Christ-cross Row contained nothing but the letters; and yet all the books in the language are made out of that line: therefore do I call you back to the cross, and to him who bled thereon. It is a good thing for us all to return at times to our starting place, and make sure that we are in the way everlasting. The love of our espousals is most likely to continue if we again and again begin where God began with us, and where we first began with God. It is wise to come to him afresh, as we came in that first day when, helpless, needy, heavy-laden, we stood weeping at the cross, and left our burden at the pierced feet. There we learned to look, and live, and love; and there would we repeat the lesson till we rehearse it perfectly in glory.

To-night, we have to talk about the love of God: "God so loved the world." That love of God is a very wonderful thing, especially when we see it set upon a lost, ruined, guilty world. What was there in the world that God should love it? There was nothing lovable in it. No fragrant flower grew in that arid desert. Enmity to him, hatred to his truth, disregard of his law, rebellion against his commandments; those were the thorns and briars which covered the waste land; but no desirable thing blossomed there. Yet, "God loved the world," says the text; "so" loved it, that even the writer of the book of John could not tell us how much; but so greatly, so divinely, did he love it that he gave his Son, his only Son, to redeem the world from perishing, and to gather out of it a people to his praise.

Whence came that love? Not from anything outside of God himself. God's love springs from himself. He loves because it is his nature to do so. "God is love." As I have said already, nothing upon the face of the earth could have merited his love, though there was much to merit his displeasure. This stream of love flows from its own secret source in the eternal Deity,



and it owes nothing to any earth-born rain or rivulet; it springs from beneath the everlasting throne, and fills itself full from the springs of the infinite. God loved because he would love. When we enquire why the Lord loved this man or that, we have to come back to our Savior's answer to the question, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." God has such love in his nature that he must needs let it flow forth to a world perishing by its own wilful sin; and when it flowed forth it was so deep, so wide, so strong, that even inspiration could not compute its measure, and therefore the Holy Spirit gave us that great little word SO, and left us to attempt the measurement, according as we perceive more and more of love divine.

Now, there happened to be an occasion upon which the great God could display his immeasurable love. The world had sadly gone astray; the world had lost itself; the world was tried and condemned; the world was given over to perish, because of its offenses; and there was need for help. The fall of Adam and the destruction of mankind made ample room and verge enough for love almighty. Amid the ruins of humanity there was space for showing how much Jehovah loved the sons of men; for the compass of his love was no less than the world, the object of it no less than to deliver men from going down to the pit, and the result of it no less than the finding of a ransom for them. The far-reaching purpose of that love was both negative and positive; that, believing in Jesus, men might not perish, but have eternal life. The desperate disease of man gave occasion for the introduction of that divine remedy which God alone could have devised and supplied. By the plan of mercy, and the great gift which was needed for carrying it out, the Lord found means to display his boundless love to guilty men. Had there been no fall, and no perishing, God might have shown his love to us as he does to the pure and perfect spirits that surround his throne; but he never could have commended his love to us to such an extent as he now does. In the gift of his only-begotten Son, God commended his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. The black background of sin makes the bright line of love shine out the more clearly. When the lightning writes the name of the Lord with flaming finger across the black brow of the tempest, we are compelled to see it; so when love inscribes the cross upon the jet tablet of our sin, even blind eyes must see that "herein is love."

I might handle my text in a thousand different ways to-night; but for simplicity's sake, and to keep to the one point of setting forth the love of God, I want to make you see how great that love is by five different particulars.

**I.** The first is the GIFT: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." Consider, then, what this gift was that God gave. I should have to labor for expression if I were to attempt to set forth to the full this priceless boon; and I will not court a failure by attempting the impossible. I will only invite you to think of the sacred Person whom the Great Father gave in order that he might prove his love to men. It was his only-begotten Son — his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased. None of us had ever such a son to give. Ours are the sons of men; his was the Son of God. The Father gave his other self, one with himself. When the great God gave his Son he gave God himself, for Jesus is not in his eternal nature less than God. When God gave God for us he gave himself. What more could he give? God gave his all: he gave himself. Who can measure this love?

Judge, ye fathers, how ye love your sons: could ye give them to die for your enemy? Judge, ye that have an only son, how your hearts are entwined about your first-born, your only-begotten. There was no higher proof of Abraham's love to God than when he did not withhold from God his son, his only son, his Isaac whom he loved; and there can certainly be no greater display of love than for the Eternal Father to give his only-begotten Son to die for us. No living thing will readily lose its offspring; man has peculiar grief when his son is taken; has not God yet more? A story has often been told of the fondness of parents for their children how in a famine in the East a father and mother were reduced to absolute starvation, and the only possibility of preserving the life of the family was to sell one of the children into slavery. So they considered it. The pinch of hunger became unbearable, and their children pleading for bread tugged so painfully at their heart-strings, that they must entertain the idea of selling one to save the lives of the rest. They had four sons. Who of these should be sold? It must not be the first: how could they spare their first-born? The second was so strangely like his father that he seemed a reproduction of him, and the mother said that she would never part with him. The third was so singularly like the mother that the father said he would sooner die than that this dear boy should go into bondage; and as for the fourth, he

was their Benjamin, their last, their darling, and they could not part with him. They concluded that it were better for them all to die together than willingly to part with any one of their children. Do you not sympathize with them? I see you do. Yet God so loved us that, to put it very strongly, he seemed to love us better than his only Son, and did not spare him that he might spare us. He permitted his Son to perish from among men “that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.”

If you desire to see the love of God in this great procedure you must consider how he gave his Son. He did not give his Son, as you might do, to some profession in the pursuit of which you might still enjoy his company; but he gave his Son to exile among men. He sent him down to yonder manger, united with a perfect manhood, which at the first was in an infant’s form. There he slept, where horned oxen fed! The Lord God sent the heir of all things to toil in a carpenter’s shop: to drive the nail, and push the plane, and use the saw. He sent him down amongst scribes and Pharisees, whose cunning eyes watched him, and whose cruel tongues scourged him with base slanders. He sent him down to hunger, and thirst, amid poverty so dire that he had not where to lay his head. He sent him down to the scourging and the crowning with thorns, to the giving of his back to the smiters and his cheeks to those that plucked off the hair. At length he gave him up to death — a felon’s death, the death of the crucified. Behold that cross and see the anguish of him that dies upon it, and mark how the Father has so given him, that he hides his face from him, and seems as if he would not own him! “Lama sabachthani” tells us how fully God gave his Son to ransom the souls of the sinful. He gave him to be made a curse for us; gave him that he might die “the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.”

Dear sirs, I can understand your giving up your children to go to India on her Majesty’s service, or to go out to the Cameroons or the Congo upon the errands of our Lord Jesus. I can well comprehend your yielding them up even with the fear of a pestilential climate before you, for if they die they will die honorably in a glorious cause; but could you think of parting with them to die a felon’s death, upon a gibbet, execrated by those whom they sought to bless, stripped naked in body and deserted in mind? Would not that be too much? Would you not cry, “I cannot part with my son for such wretches as these. Why should he be put to a cruel death for such

abominable beings, who even wash their hands in the blood of their best friend"? Remember that our Lord Jesus died what his countrymen considered to be an accursed death. To the Romans it was the death of a condemned slave, a death which had all the elements of pain, disgrace, and scorn mingled in it to the uttermost. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Oh, wondrous stretch of love, that Jesus Christ should die!

Yet, I cannot leave this point till I have you notice when God gave his Son, for there is love in the time. "God so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son." But when did he do that? In his eternal purpose he did this from before the foundation of the world. The words here used, "He gave his Only Begotten Son," cannot relate exclusively to the death of Christ, for Christ was not dead at the time of the utterance of this third chapter of John. Our Lord had just been speaking with Nicodemus, and that conversation took place at the beginning of his ministry. The fact is that Jesus was always the gift of God. The promise of Jesus was made in the garden of Eden almost as soon as Adam fell. On the spot where our ruin was accomplished, a Deliverer was bestowed whose heel should be bruised, but who should break the serpent's head beneath his foot.

Throughout the ages the great Father stood to his gift. He looked upon his Only Begotten as man's hope, the inheritance of the chosen seed, who in him would possess all things. Every sacrifice was God's renewal of his gift of grace, a reassurance that he had bestowed the gift, and would never draw back therefrom. The whole system of types under the law betokened that in the fullness of time the Lord would in very deed give up his Son, to be born of a woman, to bear the iniquities of his people, and to die the death in their behalf. I greatly admire this pertinacity of love; for many a man in a moment of generous excitement can perform a supreme act of benevolence, and yet could not bear to look at it calmly, and consider it from year to year; the slow fire of anticipation would have been unbearable. If the Lord should take away yonder dear boy from his mother, she would bear the blow with some measure of patience, heavy as it would be to her tender heart; but suppose that she were credibly informed that on such a day her boy must die, and thus had from year to year to look upon him as one dead, would it not cast a cloud over every hour of her future life? Suppose also that she knew that he would be

hanged upon a tree to die, as one condemned; would it not embitter her existence? If she could withdraw from such a trial, would she not? Assuredly she would. Yet the Lord God spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, doing it in his heart from age, to age. Herein is love: love which many waters could not quench: love eternal, inconceivable, infinite!

Now, as this gift refers not only to our Lord's death, but to the ages before it, so it includes also all the ages afterwards. God "so loved the world that he gave" — and still gives — "his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." The Lord is giving Christ away to-night. Oh, that thousands of you may gladly accept the gift unspeakable! Will anyone refuse? This good gift, this perfect gift, — can you decline it? Oh, that you may have faith to lay hold on Jesus, for thus he will be yours. He is God's free gift to all free receivers; a full Christ for empty sinners. If you can but hold out your empty willing hand, the Lord will give Christ to you at this moment. Nothing is freer than a gift. Nothing is more worth having than a gift which comes fresh from the hand of God, as full of effectual power as ever it was. The fountain is eternal, but the stream from it is as fresh as when first the fountain was opened. There is no exhausting this gift.

*"Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood  
Shall never lose it power  
Till all the ransomed church of God  
Be saved to sin no more."*

See, then, what is the love of God, that he gave his Son from of old, and has never revoked the gift. He stands to his gift, and continues still to give his dear Son to all who are willing to accept him. Out of the riches of his grace he has given, is giving, and will give the Lord Jesus Christ, and all the priceless gifts which are contained in him, to all needy sinners who will simply trust him.

I call upon you from this first point to admire the love of God, because of the transcendent greatness of his gift to the world, even the gift of his only begotten Son.

**II.** Now notice secondly, and, I think I may say, with equal admiration, the love of God in THE PLAN OF SALVATION. He has put it thus: "that

whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The way of salvation is extremely simple to understand, and exceedingly easy to practice, when once the heart is made willing and obedient. The method of the covenant of grace differs as much from that of the covenant of works as light from darkness. It is not said that God has given his Son to all who will keep his law, for that we could not do, and therefore the gift would have been available to none of us. Nor is it said that he has given his Son to all that experience terrible despair and bitter remorse, for that is not felt by many who nevertheless are the Lord’s own people. But the great God has given his own Son, that “whosoever believeth in him” should not perish. Faith, however slender, saves the soul. Trust in Christ is the certain way of eternal happiness.

Now, what is it to believe in Jesus? It is just this: it is to trust yourself with him. If your hearts are ready, though you have never believed in Jesus before, I trust you will believe in him now. O Holy Spirit graciously make it so.

What is it to believe in Jesus?

It is, first, to give your firm and cordial assent to the truth, that God did send his Son, born of a woman, to stand in the room and stead of guilty men, and that God did cause to meet on him the iniquities of us all, so that he bore the punishment due to our transgressions, being made a curse for us. We must heartily believe the Scripture which saith, — “the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes ye are healed.” I ask for your assent to the grand doctrine of substitution, which is the marrow of the gospel. Oh, may God the Holy Spirit lead you to give a cordial assent to it at once; for wonderful as it is, it is a fact that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Oh that you may rejoice that this is true, and be thankful that such a blessed fact is revealed by God himself. Believe that the substitution of the Son of God is certain; cavil not at the plan, nor question its validity, or efficacy, as many do. Alas! they kick at God’s great sacrifice, and count it a sorry invention. As for me, since God has ordained to save man by a substitutionary sacrifice, I joyfully agree to his method, and see no reason to do anything else but admire it and adore the Author of it. I joy and rejoice that such a plan should have been thought

of, whereby the justice of God is vindicated, and his mercy is set free to do all that he desires. Sin is punished in the person of the Christ, yet mercy is extended to the guilty. In Christ mercy is sustained by justice, and justice satisfied by an act of mercy. The worldly wise say hard things about this device of infinite wisdom; but as for me, I love the very name of the cross, and count it to be the center of wisdom, the focus of love, the heart of righteousness. This is a main point of faith — to give a hearty assent to the giving of Jesus to suffer in our place and stead, to agree with all our soul and mind to this way of salvation.

The second thing is that you do accept this for yourself. In Adam's sin, you did not sin personally, for you were not then in existence; yet you fell; neither can you now complain thereof, for you have willingly endorsed and adopted Adam's sin by committing personal transgressions. You have laid your hand, as it were, upon Adam's sin, and made it your own, by committing personal and actual sin. Thus you perished by the sin of another, which you adopted and endorsed; and in like manner must you be saved by the righteousness of another, which you are to accept and appropriate. Jesus has offered an atonement, and that atonement becomes yours when you accept it by putting your trust in him. I want you now to say,

*“My faith doth lay her hand  
On that dear head of thine,  
While, like a penitent, I stand,  
And here confess my sin.”*

Surely this is no very difficult matter. To say that Christ who hung upon the cross shall be my Christ, my surety, needs neither stretch of intellect, nor splendor of character; and yet it is the act which brings salvation to the soul.

One thing more is needful; and that is personal trust. First comes assent to the truth, then acceptance of that truth for yourself, and then a simple trusting of yourself wholly to Christ, as a substitute. The essence of faith is trust, reliance, dependence. Fling away every other confidence of every sort, save confidence in Jesus. Do not allow a ghost of a shade of a shadow of a confidence in anything that you can do, or in anything that you can be; but look alone to him whom God has set forth to be the propitiation

for sin. This I do at this very moment; will you not do the same? Oh, may the sweet Spirit of God lead you now to trust in Jesus!

See, then, the love of God in putting it in so plain, so easy a way. Oh, thou broken, crushed and despairing sinner, thou canst not work, but canst thou not believe that which is true? Thou canst not sigh; thou canst not cry; thou canst not melt thy stony heart; but canst thou not believe that Jesus died for thee, and that he can change that heart of thine and make thee a new creature? If thou canst believe this, then trust in Jesus to do so, and thou art saved; for he that believes in him is justified. "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." He is a saved man. His sins are forgiven him. Let him go his way in peace, and sin no more.

I admire, first, the love of God in the great gift, and then in the great plan by which that gift becomes available to guilty men.

**III.** Thirdly, the love of God shines forth with transcendent brightness in a third point, namely, in THE PERSONS FOR WHOM THIS PLAN IS AVAILABLE, and for whom this gift is given. They are described in these words — "Whosoever believeth in him." There is in the text a word which has no limit — "God so loved the world"; but then comes in the descriptive limit, which I beg you to notice with care: "He gave his Only Begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him might not perish." God did not so love the world that any man who does not believe in Christ shall be saved; neither did God so give his Son that any man shall be saved who refuses to believe in him. See how it is put — "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish." Here is the compass of the love: while every unbeliever is excluded, every believer is included. "Whosoever believeth in him."

Suppose there be a man who has been guilty of all the lusts of the flesh to an infamous degree, suppose that he is so detestable that he is only fit to be treated like a moral leper, and shut up in a separate house for fear he should contaminate those who hear or see him; yet if that man shall believe in Jesus Christ, he shall at once be made clean from his defilement, and shall not perish because of his sin. And suppose there be another man who, in the pursuit of his selfish motives, has ground down the poor, has robbed his fellow-traders, and has even gone so far as to commit actual crime of which the law has taken cognisance, yet if he believes in the Lord



Jesus Christ he shall be led to make restitution, and his sins shall be forgiven him. I once heard of a preacher addressing a company of men in chains, condemned to die for murder and other crimes. They were such a drove of beasts to all outward appearances that it seemed hopeless to preach to them; yet were I set to be chaplain to such a wretched company I should not hesitate to tell them that “God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” O man, if thou wilt believe in Jesus as the Christ, however horrible thy past sins have been they shall be blotted out; thou shalt be saved from the power of thine evil habits; and thou shalt begin again like a child newborn, with a new and true life, which God shall give thee. “Whosoever believeth in him,” — that takes you in, my aged friend, now lingering within a few tottering steps of the grave. O grey-headed sinner, if you believe in him, you shall not perish. The text also includes you, dear boy, who have scarcely entered your teens as yet: if you believe in him, you shall not perish. That takes you in, fair maiden, and gives you hope and joy while yet young. That comprehends all of us, provided we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither can all the devils in hell find out any reason why the man that believes in Christ shall be lost, for it is written, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Do they say, “Lord, he has been so long in coming”? The Lord replies, — “Has he come? Then I will not cast him out for all his delays.” But, Lord, he went back after making a profession. “Has he at length come? Then I will not cast him out for all his backsliding.” But, Lord, he was a foul-mouthed blasphemer. “Has he come to me? Then I will not cast him out for all his blasphemies.” But, says one, “I take exception to the salvation of this wicked wretch. He has behaved so abominably that in all justice he ought to be sent to hell.” Just so. But if he repents of his sin and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, whoever he may be, he shall not be sent there. He shall be changed in character, so that he shall never perish, but have eternal life.

Now, observe, that this “whosoever” makes a grand sweep; for it encircles all degrees of faith. “Whosoever believeth in him.” It may be that he has no full assurance; it may be that he has no assurance at all; but if he has faith, true and childlike, by it he shall be saved. Though his faith be so little that I must needs put on my spectacles to see it, yet Christ will see it and

reward it. His faith is such a tiny grain of mustard seed that I look and look again but hardly discern it, and yet it brings him eternal life, and it is itself a living thing. The Lord can see within that mustard seed a tree among whose branches the birds of the air shall make their nests.

*“My faith is feeble, I confess,  
I faintly trust thy word;  
But wilt thou pity me the less?  
Be that far from thee, Lord!”*

O Lord Jesus, if I cannot take thee up in my arms as Simeon did, I will at least touch thy garment's hem as the poor diseased woman did to whom thy healing virtue flowed. It is written, “God so loveth the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” That means me. I cannot preach at length to you to-night; but I would preach with strength. Oh that this truth may soak into your souls. Oh you that feel yourselves guilty; and you that feel guilty because you do not feel guilty; you that are broken in heart because your heart will not break; you that feel that you cannot feel; it is to you that I would preach salvation in Christ by faith. You groan because you cannot groan; but whoever you may be, you are still within the range of this mighty word, that “whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

Thus have I commended God's love to you in those three points — the divine gift, the divine method of saving, and the divine choice of the persons to whom salvation comes.

**IV.** Now fourthly, another beam of divine love is to be seen in the negative blessing here stated, namely, in THE DELIVERANCE implied in the words, “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish.”

I understand that word to mean that whosoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish, though he is ready to perish. His sins would cause him to perish, but he shall never perish. At first he has a little hope in Christ, but its existence is feeble. It will soon die out, will it not? No, his faith shall not perish, for this promise covers it — “Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish.” The penitent has believed in Jesus, and therefore he has begun to be a Christian; “Oh,” cries an enemy, “let him alone: he will soon be back among us; he will soon be as careless as ever.” Listen.

“Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish,” and therefore he will not return to his former state. This proves the final perseverance of the saints; for if the believer ceased to be a believer he would perish; and as he cannot perish, it is clear that he will continue a believer. If thou believest in Jesus, thou shalt never leave off believing in him; for that would be to perish. If thou believest in him, thou shalt never delight in thine old sins; for that would be to perish. If thou believest in him, thou shalt never lose spiritual life. How canst thou lose that which is everlasting? If thou wert to lose it, it would prove that it was not everlasting, and thou wouldst perish; and thus thou wouldst make this word to be of no effect. Whosoever with his heart believeth in Christ is a saved man, not for to-night only, but for all the nights that ever shall be, and for that dread night of death, and for that solemn eternity which draws so near. “Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish;” but he shall have a life that cannot die, a justification that cannot be disputed, an acceptance which shall never cease.

What is it to perish? It is to lose all hope in Christ, all trust in God, all light in life, all peace in death, all joy, all bliss, all union with God. This shall never happen to thee if thou believest in Christ. If thou believest, thou shalt be chastened when thou dost wrong, for every child of God comes under discipline; and what son is there whom the Father chasteneth not? If thou believest, thou mayest doubt and fear as to thy state, as a man on board a ship may be tossed about; but thou hast gotten on board a ship that never can be wrecked. He that hath union with Christ has union with perfection, omnipotence and glory. He that believeth is a member of Christ: will Christ lose his members? How should Christ be perfect if he lost even his little finger? Are Christ’s members to rot off, or to be cut off? Impossible. If thou hast faith in Christ thou are a partaker of Christ’s life, and thou canst not perish. If men were trying to drown me, they could not drown my foot as long as I had my head above water; and as long as our Head is above water, up yonder in the eternal sunshine, the least limb of his body can never be destroyed. He that believeth in Jesus is united to him, and he must live because Jesus lives. Oh what a word is this, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them to me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”

I feel that I have a grand gospel to preach to you when I read that whosoever believeth in Jesus shall not perish. I would not give two pins for that trumpety, temporary salvation which some proclaim, which floats the soul for a time and then ebbs away to apostasy. I do not believe that the man who is once in Christ may live in sin and delight in it, and yet be saved. That is abominable teaching, and none of mine. But I believe that the man who is in Christ will not live in sin, for he is saved from it; nor will he return to his old sins and abide in them, for the grace of God will continue to save him from his sins. Such a change is wrought by regeneration that the newborn man cannot abide in sin, nor find comfort in it, but he loves holiness and makes progress in it. The Ethiopian may change his skin, and the leopard his spots, but only grace divine can work the change; and when divine grace has done the deed the blackamore will remain white, and the leopard's spots will never return. It would be as great a miracle to undo the work of God as to do it; and to destroy the new creation would require as great a power as to make it. As only God can create, so only God can destroy; and he will never destroy the work of his own hands. Will God begin to build and not finish? Will he commence a warfare and end it before he has won the victory? What would the devil say if Christ were to begin to save a soul and fail in the attempt? If there should come to be souls in hell that were believers in Christ, and yet did perish, it would cast a cloud upon the diadem of our exalted Lord. It cannot, shall not, be. Such is the love of God, that whosoever believeth in his dear Son shall not perish: in this assurance we greatly rejoice.

**V.** The last commendation of his love lies in the positive — IN THE POSSESSION. I shall have to go in a measure over the same ground again, let me therefore be the shorter. God gives to every man that believes in Christ everlasting life. The moment thou believest there trembles into thy bosom a vital spark of heavenly flame which never shall be quenched. In that same moment when thou dost cast thyself on Christ, Christ comes to thee in the living and incorruptible word which liveth and abideth for ever. Though there should drop into thy heart but one drop of the heavenly water of life, remember this, — he hath said it who cannot lie, — “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” When I first received everlasting life I had no idea what a treasure had come to me. I knew that I had obtained something very

extraordinary, but of its superlative value I was not aware. I did but look to Christ in the little chapel, and I received eternal life. I looked to Jesus, and he looked on me; and we were one for ever. That moment my joy surpassed all bounds, just as my sorrow had aforetime driven me to an extreme of grief. I was perfectly at rest in Christ, satisfied with him, and my heart was glad; but I did not know that this grace was everlasting life till I began to read in the Scriptures, and to know more fully the value of the jewel which God had given me. The next Sunday I sent to the same chapel, as it was very natural that I should. But I never went afterwards, for this reason, that during my first week the new life that was in me had been compelled to fight for its existence, and a conflict with the old nature had been vigorously carried on. This I knew to be a special token of the indwelling of grace in my soul; but in that same chapel I heard a sermon upon “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” And the preacher declared that Paul was not a Christian when he had that experience. Babe as I was, I knew better than to believe so absurd a statement. What but divine grace could produce such a sighing and crying after deliverance from indwelling sin? I felt that a person who could talk such nonsense knew little of the life of a true believer. I said to myself, “What! am I not alive because I feel a conflict within me? I never felt this fight when I was an unbeliever. When I was not a Christian I never groaned to be set free from sin. This conflict is one of the surest evidences of my new birth, and yet this man cannot see it; he may be a good exhorter to sinners, but he cannot feed believers.” I resolved to go into that pasture no more, for I could not feed therein. I find that the struggle becomes more and more intense; each victory over sin reveals another army of evil tendencies, and I am never able to sheathe my sword, nor cease from prayer and watchfulness.

I cannot advance an inch without praying my way, nor keep the inch I gain without watching and standing fast. Grace alone can preserve and perfect me. The old nature will kill the new nature if it can; and to this moment the only reason why my new nature is not dead is this — because it cannot die. If it could have died, it would have been slain long ago; but Jesus said, “I give unto my sheep eternal life”; “he that believeth on me hath everlasting life”; and therefore the believer cannot die. The only religion which will save you is one that you cannot leave, because it possesses

you, and will not leave you. If you hold a doctrine which you can give up, give it up; but if the doctrines are burnt into you so that as long as you live you must hold them, and so that if you were burnt every ash would hold that same truth in it, because you are impregnated with it, then you have found the right thing.

You are not a saved man unless Christ has saved you for ever. But that which has such a grip of you that its grasp is felt in the core of your being is the power of God. To have Christ living in you, and the truth ingrained in your very nature — O sirs, this is the thing that saves the soul, and nothing short of it. It is written in the text, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” What is this but a life that shall last through your three-score years and ten; a life that shall last you should you outlive a century; a life that will still flourish when you lie at the grave’s mouth; a life that will abide when you have quitted the body, and left it rotting in the tomb; a life that will continue when your body is raised again, and you shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; a life that will outshine those stars and yon sun and moon; a life that shall be co-eval with the life of the Eternal Father? As long as there is a God, the believer shall not only exist, but live. As long as there is a heaven, you shall enjoy it; as long as there is a Christ, you shall live in his love; and as long as there is an eternity, you shall continue to fill it with delight.

God bless you and help you to believe in Jesus. — Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  John 3.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 291, 538, 539.

# THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

## SERMON NO. 1910

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 18TH, 1886,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

—  2 Corinthians 5:20,21.

THE heart of the gospel is redemption, and the essence of redemption is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. They who preach this truth preach the gospel in whatever else they may be mistaken; but they who preach not the atonement, whatever else they declare, have missed the soul and substance of the divine message. In these days I feel bound to go over again the elementary truths of the Gospel. In peaceful times we may feel free to make excursions into interesting districts of truth which lie far afield; but now we must stay at home, and guard the hearths and homes of the church by defending the first principles of the faith. In this age there have risen up in the church itself men who speak perverse things. There be many that trouble us with their philosophies and novel interpretations, whereby they deny the doctrines they profess to teach, and undermine the faith they are pledged to maintain. It is well that some of us, who know what we believe, and have no secret meanings for our words, should just put our foot down and maintain our standing, holding forth the word of life, and plainly declaring the foundation truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a parable. In the days of Nero there was great shortness of food in the city of Rome, although there was abundance of corn to be purchased at Alexandria. A certain man who owned a vessel went down to

the sea coast, and there he noticed many hungry people straining their eyes toward the sea, watching for the vessels that were to come from Egypt with corn. When these vessels came to the shore, one by one, the poor people wrung their hands in bitter disappointment, for on board the galleys there was nothing but sand which the tyrant emperor had compelled them to bring for use in the arena. It was infamous cruelty, when men were dying of hunger to command trading vessels to go to and fro, and bring nothing else but sand for gladiatorial shows, when wheat was so greatly needed. Then the merchant whose vessel was moored by the quay said to his shipmaster, "Take thou good heed that thou bring nothing back with thee from Alexandria but corn; and whereas, aforetime thou hast brought in the vessel a measure or two of sand, bring thou not so much as would lie upon a penny this time. Bring thou nothing else, I say, but wheat: for these people are dying, and now we must keep our vessels for this one business of bringing food for them." Alas! I have seen certain mighty galleys of late loaded with nothing but mere sand of philosophy and speculation, and I have said within myself, "Nay, but I will bear nothing in my ship but the revealed truth of God, the bread of life so greatly needed by the people." God grant us this day that our ship may have nothing on board it that may merely gratify the curiosity, or please the taste; but that there may be necessary truths for the salvation of souls. I would have each one of you say: "Well, it was just the old, old story of Jesus and his love, and nothing else." I have no desire to be famous for anything but preaching of the gospel. There are plenty who can fiddle to you the new music; it is for me to have no music at any time but that which is heard in heaven, — "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory for ever and ever!"

I intend, dear friends, to begin my discourse with the second part of my text, in which the doctrine of Substitution is set forth in these words — "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." This is the basis and power of those appeals which it is our duty to make to the consciences of men.

I have found, my brethen, by long experience, that nothing touches the heart like the cross of Christ; and when the heart is touched and wounded by the two-edged sword of the law, nothing heals its wounds like the balm which flows from the pierced heart of Jesus. The cross is life to the



spiritually dead. There is an old legend which can have no literal truth in it, but if it be regarded as a parable it is then most instructive. They say that when the Empress Helena was searching for the true cross they digged deep at Jerusalem and found the three crosses of Calvary buried in the soil. Which out of the three crosses was the veritable cross upon which Jesus died they could not tell, except by certain tests. So they brought a corpse and laid it on one of the crosses, but there was neither life nor motion. When the same dead body touched another of the crosses it lived; and then they said, "This is the true cross." When we see men quickened, converted, and sanctified by the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice, we may justly conclude that it is the true doctrine of atonement. I have not known men made to live unto God and holiness except by the doctrine of the death of Christ on man's behalf. Hearts of stone that never beat with life before have been turned to flesh through the Holy Spirit causing them to know this truth. A sacred tenderness the obstinate when they have heard of Jesus crucified for them. Those who have lain at hell's dark door, wrapped about with a sevenfold death-shade, even upon them hath a great light shined. The story of the great Lover of the souls of men who gave himself for their salvation is still in the hand of the Holy Ghost the greatest of all forces in the realm of mind.

So this morning I am going to handle, first, the great doctrine, and then afterwards, and secondly, as God shall help me, we shall come to the great argument which is contained in the 20th verse: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

**1.** First, then, with as much brevity as possible I will speak upon THE GREAT DOCTRINE. The great doctrine, the greatest of all, is this, that God, seeing men to be lost by reason of their sin, hath taken that sin of theirs and laid it upon his only begotten Son, making him to be sin for us, even him who knew no sin; and that in consequence of this transference of sin he that believeth in Christ Jesus is made just and righteous, ya, is made to be the righteousness of God in Christ. Christ was made sin that sinners might be made righteousness. That is the doctrine of the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ on the behalf of guilty men.

Now consider, first, who was made sin for us? The description of our great Surety here given is upon one point only, and it may more than suffice us for our present meditation. Our substitute was spotless, innocent, and pure. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Christ Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate, and was made flesh, and dwelt here among men; but though he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, he knew no sin. Though upon him sin was laid, yet not so as to make him guilty. He was not, he could not be, a sinner: he had no personal knowledge of sin. Throughout the whole of his life he never committed an offense against the great law of truth and right. The law was in his heart; it was his nature to be holy. He could say to all the world, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Even his vacillating judge enquired, "Why, what evil hath he done?" When all Jerusalem was challenged and bribed to bear witness against him, no witnesses could be found. It was necessary to misquote and wrest his words before a charge could be trumped up against him by his bitterest enemies. His life brought him in contact with both the tables of the law, but no single command had he transgressed. As the Jews examined the Paschal lamb before they slew it, so did scribes and Pharisees, and doctors of the law, and rulers and princes, examine the Lord Jesus, without finding no offense in him. He was the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot.

As there was no sin of commission, so was there about our Lord no fault of omission. Probably, dear brethen, we that are believers have been enabled by divine grace to escape most sins of commission; but I for one have to mourn daily over sins of omission. If we have spiritual graces, yet they do not reach the point required of us. If we do that which is right in itself, yet we usually mar our work upon the wheel, either in the motive, or in the manner of doing it, or by the self-satisfaction with which we view it when it is done. We come short of the glory of God in some respect or other. We forget to do what we ought to do, or, doing it, we are guilty of lukewarmness, self-reliance, unbelief, or some other grievous error. It was not so with our divine Redeemer. You cannot say that there was any feature deficient in his perfect beauty. He was complete in heart, in purpose, in thought, in word, in deed, in spirit. You could not add anything to the life of Christ without its being manifestly an excrescence. He was emphatically an all-round man, as we say in these days. His life is

a perfect circle, a complete epitome of virtue. No pearl has dropped from the silver string of his character. No one virtue has overshadowed and dwarfed the rest: all perfections combine in perfect harmony to make in him one surpassing perfection.

Neither did our Lord know a sin of thought. His mind never produced an evil wish or desire. There never was in the heart of our blessed Lord a wish for an evil pleasure, nor a desire to escape any suffering or shame which was involved in his service. When he said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," he never desired to escape the bitter potion at the expense of his perfect lifework. The "if it be possible," meant, "if it be consistent with full obedience to the Father, and the accomplishment of the divine purpose." We see the weakness of his nature shrinking, and the holiness of his nature resolving and conquering, as he adds, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." He took upon him the likeness of sinful flesh, but though that flesh often caused him weariness of body, it never produced in him the weakness of sin. He took our infirmities, but he never exhibited an infirmity which had the least of blameworthiness attached to it. Never fell there an evil glance from those blessed eyes; never did his lips let drop a hasty word; never did those feet go on an ill errand, nor those hands move towards a sinful deed; because his heart was filled with holiness and love. Within as well as without our Lord was unblemished. His desires were as perfect as his actions. Searched by the eyes of Omniscience, no shadow of fault could be found in him.

Yea, more, there were no tendencies about our Substitute towards evil in any form. In us there are always those tendencies; for the taint of original sin is upon us. We have to govern ourselves and hold ourselves under stern restraint, or we should rush headlong to destruction. Our carnal nature lusteth to evil, and needs to be held in as with bit and bridle. Happy is that man who can master himself. But with regard to our Lord, it was his nature to be pure, and right, and loving. All his sweet wills were towards goodness. His unconstrained life was holiness itself: he was "the holy child Jesus." The prince of this world found in him no fuel for the flame which he desired to kindle. Not only did no sin flow from him, but there was no sin in him, nor inclination, nor tendency in that direction. Watch him in secret, and you find him in prayer; look unto his soul, and you find him eager to do and suffer the Father's will. Oh, the blessed character of

Christ! If I had the tongues of men and of angels I could not worthily set forth his absolute perfection Justly may the Father be well pleased with him! Well may heaven adore him!

Beloved, it was absolutely necessary that any one who should be able to suffer in our stead should himself be spotless. A sinner obnoxious to punishment by reason of his own offenses, what can he do but bear the wrath which is due to his own sin? Our Lord Jesus Christ as man was made under the law: but he owed nothing to that law, for he perfectly fulfilled it in all respects. He was capable of standing in the room, place, and stead of others, because he was under no obligations of his own. He was only under obligations towards God because he had voluntarily undertaken to be the surety and sacrifice for those whom the Father gave him. He was clear himself, or else he could not have entered into bonds for guilty men.

Oh, how I admire him, that being such as he was, spotless and thrice holy, so that even the heavens were not pure in his sight, and he charged his angels with folly, yet he condescended to be made sin for us! How could he endure to be numbered with the transgressors and bear the sin of many? It may be no misery for a sinful man to live with sinful men; but it would be a heavy sorrow for the pure-minded to dwell with a company of abandoned and licentious wretches. What an overwhelming sorrow it must have been to the pure and perfect Christ to tabernacle among the hypocritical, the selfish, and the profane! How much worse that he himself should have to take upon himself the sins of those guilty men. His sensitive and delicate nature must have shrunk from even the shadow of sin, and yet read the words and be astonished: "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Our perfect Lord and Master bare our sins in his own body on the tree. He, before whom the sun itself is dim and the pure azure of heaven is defilement, was made sin. I need not put this in fine words: the fact is itself too grand to need any magnifying by human language. To gild refined gold, or paint the lily, were absurd; but much more absurd would it be to try to overlay with flowers of speech the matchless beauties of the cross. It suffices in simple rhyme to say —

*“Oh, hear that piercing cry!  
 What can its meaning be?  
 ‘My God! my God! oh! why hast thou  
 In wrath forsaken me?’  
 “Oh ‘twas because our sins  
 On him by God were laid;  
 He who himself had never sinn’d,  
 For sinners, sin was made.”*

This leads me on to the second point of the text, which is, what was done with him who knew no sin? He was “made sin.” It is a wonderful expression: the more you weigh it the more you will marvel at its singular strength. Only the Holy Ghost might originate such language. It was wise for the divine Teacher to use very strong expressions, for else the thought might not have entered human minds. Even now, despite the emphasis, clearness, and distinctness of the language used here and elsewhere in Scripture there are found men daring enough to deny that substitution is taught in Scripture. With such subtle wits it is useless to argue. It is clear that language has no meaning for them. To read the ~~25th~~ 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and to accept it as relating to the Messiah, and then to deny his substitutionary sacrifice is simply wickedness. It would be vain to reason with such beings; they are so blind that if they were transported to the sun they could not see. In the church and out of the church there is a deadly animosity to this truth. Modern thought labors to get away from what is obviously the meaning of the Holy Spirit, that sin was lifted from the guilty and laid upon the innocent. It is written, “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” This is as plain language as can be used; but if any plainer was required, here it is, — “He hath made him to be sin for us.”

The Lord God laid upon Jesus, who voluntarily undertook it, all the weight of human sin. Instead of its resting on the sinner, who did commit it, it was made to rest upon Christ, who did not commit to it; while the righteousness which Jesus wrought out was placed to the account of the guilty, are treated as righteous. Those who by nature are guilty, are regarded as righteous, while he who by nature knew no sin whatever, was treated as guilty. I think I must have read in scores of books that such a transference is impossible; but the statement has had no effect upon my mind. I do not care whether it is impossible or not with learned unbelievers: it is evidently possible with God, for he has done it. But they

say it is contrary to reason. I do not care for that, either: it may be contrary to the reason of those unbelievers, but it is not contrary to mine; and if I am to be guided by reason, I prefer to follow my own. The atonement is a miracle, and miracles are rather to be accepted by faith than measured by calculation. A fact is the best of arguments. It is a fact that the Lord hath laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all. God's revelation proves the fact, and our faith defies human questioning! God saith it, and I believe it; and believing it, I find life and comfort in it. Shall I not preach it? Assuredly I will.

*“E’er since by faith I saw the stream  
His flowing wounds supply,  
Redeeming love has been my theme,  
And shall be till I die.”*

Christ was not guilty, and could not be made guilty; but he was treated as if he were guilty, because he willed to stand in the place of the guilty. Yea, he was not only treated as a sinner, but he was treated as if he had been sin itself in the abstract. This is an amazing utterance. The sinless one was made to sin.

Sin pressed our great Substitute very sorely. He felt the weight of it in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he “sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground.” The full pressure of it came upon him when he was nailed to the accursed tree. There in the hours of darkness he bore infinitely more than we can tell. We know that he bore condemnation from the mouth of a man, so that is written, “He was numbered with the transgressors.” We know that he bore shame for our sakes. Did not your hearts tremble last Sunday evening when our text was, “Then did they spit in his face?” It was a cruel scorn that exhausted itself upon his blessed person. This, I say, we know. We know that he bore pains innumerable of body and mind: he thirsted, he cried out in the agony of desertion, he bled, he died. We know that he poured out his soul unto death, and yielded up the ghost. But there was at the back, and beyond all this, an immeasurable abyss of sufferings”: probably to us they are unknowable sufferings. He was God as well as man, and the Godhead lent an omnipotent power to the manhood, so that there was compressed within his soul, and endured by it, an amount of anguish of which we can form no conception. I will say no more: it is wise to veil what it is impossible to depict. This text

both veils and discovers his sorrow, as it says, “He made him to be sin.” Look into the words. Perceive their meaning if you can. The angels desire to look into it. Gaze into this terrible crystal. Let your eyes search deep into this opal, within whose jewelled depth there are flames of fire. The Lord made the perfectly innocent one to be sin for us: that means more humiliation, darkness, agony, and death than you can conceive. It brought a kind of distraction and well-nigh a destruction to the tender and gentle spirit of our Lord. I do not say that our substitute endured a hell, that were unwarrantable. I will not say that he endured either the exact punishment for sin, or an equivalent for it; but I do say that what he endured rendered to the justice of God a vindication of his law more clear and more effectual than would have been rendered to it by the damnation of the sinners for whom he died. The cross is under many aspects a more full revelation of the wrath of God against human sin than even Tophet, and the smoke of torment which goeth up for ever and ever. Who would know God’s hate of sin must see the Only Begotten bleeding in body and bleeding in soul even unto death: he must, in fact, spell out each word of my text, and read its innermost meaning. There, my brethen, I am ashamed of the poverty of my explanation, and I will therefore only repeat the full and sublime language of the apostle — “He hath made him to be sin for us.” It is more than “He hath put him to grief”; it is more than “God hath forsaken him”; it is more than “The chastisement of our peace was upon him”; it is the most suggestive of all descriptions — “He hath made him sin for us.” Oh depth of terror, and yet height of love!

So I pass on to notice in the third place, who did it? The text saith, “He hath made him to be sin for us”; that is, God himself it was who appointed his dear Son to be made sin for guilty men. The wise ones tell us that this substitution cannot be just. Who made them judges of what is right and just. I ask them whether they believe that Jesus suffered and died at all? if they believe that he did, how do they account for the fact? Do they say that he died as an example? Then I ask, is it just for God to allow a sinless being to die as an example? The fact of our Lord’s death is sure, and it has to be accounted for.

In the appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ to be made sin for us, there was first of all a display of the Divine Sovereignty. God here did what none but he could have done. It would not have been possible for all of us

together to have laid sin upon Christ; but it was possible for the great Judge of all, who giveth no account of his matters, to determine that so it should be. He is the fountain of rectitude, and the exercise of his divine prerogative is always unquestionable righteousness. That the Lord Jesus, who offered himself as a willing surety and substitute, should be accepted as surety and substitute for guilty man was in the power of the great Supreme. In his Divine Sovereignty he accepted him, and before that sovereignty we bow. If any question it, our only answer is, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

The death of our Lord also displayed divine justice. It pleased God as the judge of all, that sin should not be forgiven without the exaction of the punishment which had been so righteously threatened to it, or such other display of justice as might vindicate the law. They say that this is not God of love. I answer, it is God of love, pre-eminently so. If you had upon the bench to-day a judge whose nature was kindness itself, it would behove him as a judge to execute justice, and if he did not, he would make his kindness ridiculous; indeed, his kindness to the criminal would be unkindness to society at large. Whatever the judge may be personally, he is officially compelled to do justice. And "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? " You speak of the Fatherhood of God. Enlarge as you please upon that theme, even till you make a heresy of it; but still God is the great moral Governor of the universe, and it behoves him to deal with sin in such a way that it is seen to be an evil and a bitter thing. God cannot wink at wickedness. I bless his holy name, and adore him that he is not unjust in order to be merciful, that he does not spare the guilty in order to indulge his gentleness. Every transgression and disobedience has its just recompense of reward. But through the sacrifice of Christ he is able justly to pardon. I bless his holy name that to vindicate his justice he determined that, while a free pardon should be provided for believers, it should be grounded upon an atonement which satisfied all requirements of the law.

Admire also in the substitutionary sacrifice the great grace of God. Never forget that he whom God made to be sin for us was his own Son; ay, I go further, it was in some sense his own self; for the Son is one with the Father. You may not confound the persons, but you cannot divide the Son of God from the Father as to forget that God was in him reconciling the world unto himself. It is the Father's other self who on the cross in human



form doth bleed and die. "Light of light, very God of very God": it is this Light that was eclipsed, that Godhead which purchased the church with his own blood. Herein is infinite love! You tell me that God might have pardoned without atonement. I answer, that finite and fallible love might have done so, and thus have wounded itself by killing justice; but the love which both required and provided the atonement is indeed infinite. God himself provided the atonement by freely and fully giving up himself in the person of his Son to suffer in consequence of human sin.

What I want you to notice here is this, if ever your mind should be troubled about the propriety or rightness of a substitutionary sacrifice, you may at once settle the matter by remembering that God himself "hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin." If God did it, it is well done. I am not careful to defend an act of God: let the man who dares accuse his Maker think what he is at. If God himself provided the sacrifice, be you sure that he has accepted it. There can be no question ever raised about it, since Jehovah made to meet on him our iniquities. He that made Christ to be sin for us, knew what he did, and it is not for us to begin to say, "Is this right, or is this not right?" "The thrice holy God hath done this, and it must be right. That which satisfies God may well satisfy us. If God is pleased with the sacrifice of Christ, shall not we be much more pleased? Shall we not be delighted, entranced, emparadised, to be saved by such a sacrifice as God himself appoints, provides, and accepts? "He hath made him to be sin for us."

The last point is, what happens to us in consequence? "That we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Oh this weighty text! No man living can exhaust it. No theologian lived, even in the palmiest day of theology, who could ever get to the bottom of this statement.

Every man that believes in Jesus is through Christ having taken his sin made to be righteousness before God. We are righteous through faith in Christ Jesus, "justified by faith." More than this, we are made not only to have the character of "righteous," but to become the substance called "righteousness." I cannot explain this, but it is no small matter. It means no inconsiderable thing when we are said to be "made righteousness." What is more, we are not only made righteousness, but we are made "the righteousness of God. "Herein is a great mystery. The righteousness

which Adam had in the garden was perfect, but it was the righteousness of man: ours is the righteousness of God. Human righteousness failed; but the believer has a divine righteousness which can never fail. He not only has it, but he is it: he is “made the righteousness of God in Christ.” We can now sing,

*“With my Savior’s vesture on,  
Holy as the Holy One.”*

How acceptable with God must those be who are made by God himself to be “the righteousness of God in him”! I cannot conceive of anything more complete.

As Christ was made sin, and yet never sinned, so are we made righteousness, though we cannot claim to have been righteous in and of ourselves. Sinners though we be, and forced to confess it with grief, yet the Lord doth cover us so completely with the righteousness of Christ, that only his righteousness is seen, and we are made the righteousness of God in him. This is true of all the saints, even of as many as believe on his name. Oh, the splendor of this doctrine! Canst thou see it, my friend? Sinner though thou be, and in thyself defiled, deformed, and debased, yet if thou wilt accept the great Substitute which God provide for in the person of his dear Son, thy sins are gone from thee, and righteousness has come to thee. Thy sins were laid on Jesus, the scapegoat: they are thine no longer, he has put them away. I may say that his righteousness is imputed unto thee; but I go further, and say with the text, “Thou art made the righteousness of God in him.” No doctrine can be more sweet than this to those who feel the weight of sin and the burden of its curse.

**II.** So now, gathering all up, I have to close with the second part of the text, which is not teaching, but the application of teaching, — A GREAT ARGUMENT. “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

Oh, that these lips had language, or that this heart could speak without them! Then would I plead with every unconverted, unbelieving soul within this place, and plead as for my life. Friend, you are at enmity with God, and God is angry with you; but on his part there is every readiness for

reconciliation. He has made a way by which you can become his friend — a very costly way to himself, but free to you. He could not give up his justice, and so destroy the honor of his own character; but he did give up his Son, his Only Begotten, and his Well-Beloved; and that Son of his had been made sin for us, though he knew no sin. See how God meets you ! See how willing, how anxious he is that there should be reconciliation between you and God to-day it is not from want of kindness on his part; it is from want of willingness on yours. The burden of your ruin must lie at your own door: your blood must be on your own skirts.

Now observe what we have to say to you to-day is this: we are anxious that you should be at peace with God, and therefore we act as ambassadors for Christ. I am not going to lay any stress upon the office of ambassador as honorable or authoritative, for I do not feel that this would have weight with you: but I lay all the stress upon the peace to which we would fain have you reconciled also. I once knew him not, neither did I care for him. I lived well enough without him, and sported with trifles of a day, so as to forget him. He brought me to seek his face, and seeking his face I found him. He has blotted out my sins and removed my enmity. I know that I am his servant, and that he is my friend, my Father, my All. And now I cannot help trying in my poor way to be an ambassador for him with you. I do not like that any of you should live at enmity with my Father who made you; and that you should be wantonly provoking him by preferring evil to good. Why should you not be at peace with one who so much wants to be at peace with you? Why should you not love the God of love, and delight in him who is so kind to you? What he hath done for me he is quite willing to do for you: he is a God ready to pardon. I have preached his gospel now for many years, but I never met with a sinner yet that Christ refused to cleanse when he came to him. I never knew a single case of a man who trusted Jesus, and asked to be forgiven, confessing his sin and forsaking it, who was cast out. I say I never met with one man whom he has restored to purity, and drunkards whom he has delivered from their evil habit, and with men guilty of foul sins who have become pure and chaste through the Lord Jesus. They have always told me the same story — “I sought the Lord, and he heard me; he hath washed me in his blood, and I am whiter than snow.” Why should you not be saved as well as these?

Dear friend, perhaps you have never thought of this matter, and this morning you did not come here with any idea of thinking of it; but why should you not begin? You came just to hear a well-known preacher; I pray you forget the preacher, and think only of yourself, your God and your Savior. It must be wrong for you to live without a thought of your Maker. To forget him is to despise him. It must be wrong for you to refuse the great atonement: you so refuse it if you do not accept it at once. It must be wrong for you to stand out against your God; and you do stand out against him if you will not be reconciled to him. Therefore I humbly play the part of an ambassador for Christ, and I beseech you believe in him and live.

Notice how the text puts it: “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us.” This thought staggers me. As I came along this morning I felt as if I could bury my head in my hands and weep as I thought of God beseeching anybody. He speaks, and it is done; myriads of angels count themselves happy to fly at his command; and yet man has so become God’s enemy that he will not be reconciled to him. God would make him his friend, and spends the blood of his dear Son to cement that friendship; but man will not have it. See the great God turns to beseeching his obstinate creature! his foolish creature! In this I feel a reverent compassion for God. Must he beseech a rebel to be forgiven? Do you hear it? Angels, do you hear it? He who is the King of kings veils his sovereignty, and stoops to beseeching his creature to be reconciled to him! I wonder not that some of my brethen start back from such an idea, and cannot believe that it could be so: it seems so derogatory to the glorious God. Yet my text saith it, and it must be true — “As though God did beseech you by us.” This makes it awful work to preach, does it not? I ought to beseech you as though God spoke to you through me, looking at you through these eyes, and stretching out his hands through these hands. He saith, “All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” He speaks softly, and tenderly, and with paternal affection through these poor lips of mine, “as though God did beseech you by us.

Furthermore notice that next line, which if possible has even more force in it: “We pray you in Christ’s stead.” Since Jesus died in our stead we, his redeemed ones, are to pray others in his stead; and as he poured out his

heart for sinners in their stead, we must in another way pour out our hearts for sinners in his stead. "We pray you in Christ's stead." Now if my Lord were here this morning how would he pray you to come to him? I wish, my Master, I were more fit to stand in thy place at this time. Forgive me that I am so incapable. Help me to break my heart, to think that it does not break as it ought to do, for these men and women who are determined to destroy themselves, and, therefore, pass thee by, my Lord, as though thou were but a common felon, hanging on a gibbet! O men, How can you think so little of the death of the Son of God? It is the wonder of time, the admiration of eternity. O souls, why will you refuse eternal life? Why will ye die? Why will ye despise him by whom alone you can live? There is one gate of life, that gate is the open side of Christ; why will ye not enter, and live? "Come unto me," saith he; "Come unto me." I think I hear him say it: "Come unto me all that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." I think I see him on that last day, the great day of the feast, standing and crying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." I hear him sweetly declare, "Him that cometh to me I will no wise cast out." I am not fit to pray you in Christ's stead, but I do pray you with all my heart. You that hear my voice from Sunday to Sunday, do come and accept the great sacrifice, and be reconciled to God. You that hear me but this once, I would like you to go away with this ringing in your ears, "Be ye reconciled to God." I have nothing pretty to say to you; I have only to declare that God has prepared a propitiation, and that now he entreats sinners to come to Jesus, that through him they may be reconciled to God.

We do not exhort you to some impossible effort. We do not bid you do some great thing; we do not ask you for money or price; neither do we demand of you years of miserable feeling; but only this — be ye reconciled. It is not so much reconcile yourselves as "be reconciled." Yield yourselves to him who round you now the bands of a man would cast, drawing you with cords of love because he was given for you. His spirit strives with you, yield to his striving. With Jacob you know there wrestled a man till the breaking of the day; let that man, that God-man, overcome you. Submit yourselves. Yield to grasp of those hands which were nailed to the cross for you. Will you not yield to your best friend?

He that doth embrace you now presses you to a heart that was pierced with the spear on your behalf. Oh, yield thee! Yield thee, man! Dost thou not feel some softness stealing over thee? Steel not thine heart against it. He saith, with a Tone most still and sweet. “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Believe and live! Quit the arch-enemy who has held thee in his grip. Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, stay not in all the plain, but flee where thou seest the open door of the great Father’s house. At the gate the bleeding Savior is waiting to receive thee, and to say, “I was made sin for thee, and thou art made the righteousness of God in me.” Father, draw them! Father, draw them! Eternal Spirit, draw them, for Jesus Christ thy Son’s sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  2 Corinthians 4, 5.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 917, 404, 284.

# THE ABIDING OF THE SPIRIT THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH

SERMON NO. 1918

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
SEPTEMBER 5TH, 1886,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.” — ~~3000~~ Haggai 2:4-5.

SATAN is always doing his utmost to stay the work of God. He hindered these Jews from building the temple; and to-day he endeavors to hinder the people of God from spreading the gospel. A spiritual temple is to be builded for the Most High, and if by any means the evil one can delay its uprising he will stick at nothing: if he can take us off from working with faith and courage for the glory of God he will be sure to do it. He is very cunning, and knows how to change his argument and yet keep to his design: little cares he how he works, so long as he can hurt the cause of God. In the case of the Jewish people on their return from captivity he sought to prevent the building of the temple by making them selfish and worldly, so that every man was eager to build his own house, and cared nothing for the house of the Lord. Each family pleaded its own urgent needs. In returning to a long-deserted and neglected land, much had to be done to make up for lost time; and to provide suitably for itself every family needed all its exertions. They carried this thrift and self-providing to a great extreme, and secured for themselves luxuries, while the foundations of the temple which had been laid years before remained as

they were, or became still more thickly covered up with rubbish. The people could not be made to bestir themselves to build a house of God, for they answered to every exhortation, “The time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.” A more convenient season was always looming in the future, but it never came. Just now it was too hot, further it was too cold; at one time the wet season was just setting in, and it was of no use to begin, and soon the fair weather required that they should be in their own fields. Like some in our day, they saw to themselves first, and God’s turn was very long in coming; hence the prophet cried, “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?”

By the mouth of His servant Haggai stern rebukes were uttered, and the whole people were aroused. We read in verse twelve of the first chapter, “Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.” All hands were put to the work; course after course of stone began to rise; and then another stumbling-block was thrown in the way of the workers. The older folks remarked that this was a very small affair compared with the temple of Solomon, of which their fathers had told them; in fact, their rising building was nothing at all, and not worthy to be called a temple. The prophet describes the feeling in the verse which precedes our text. “Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” Feeling that their work would be very poor and insignificant, the people had little heart to go on. Being discouraged by the humiliating contrast, they began to be slack; and as they were quite willing to accept any excuse, and here was an excuse ready made for them, they would soon have been at a standstill had not the prophet met the wiles of the arch-enemy with another word from the Lord. Nothing so confounds the evil one as the voice of the Eternal. Our Lord Himself defeated Satan by the word of the Lord; and the prophet Haggai did the same. The subtle craft of the enemy is defeated by the wisdom of the Most High, which reveals itself in plain words of honest statement. The Lord cuts the knots which bind His people, and sets them at liberty to do His will. He did this by assuring them that He was with them. Twice the voice was heard — “I am with you, saith the



Lord of hosts.” They were also assured that what they builded was accepted, and that the Lord meant to fill the new house with glory; yea, He meant to light it up with a glory greater than that which honored the temple of Solomon. They were not spending their strength for nought, but were laboring with divine help and favor. Thus they were encouraged to put their shoulders to the work: the walls rose in due order, and God was glorified in the building up of His Zion.

The present times are, in many respects, similar to those of Haggai. History certainly repeats itself within the church of God as well as outside of it; and therefore the messages of God need to be repeated also. The words of some almost-forgotten prophet may be re-delivered by the watchman of the Lord in these present days, and be a timely word for the present emergency. We are not free from the worldliness which puts self first and God nowhere, else our various enterprises would be more abundantly supplied with the silver and the gold which are the Lord’s, but which even professing Christians reserve for themselves. When this selfish greed is conquered, then comes in a timorous depression. Among those who have escaped from worldliness there is apt to be too much despondency, and men labor feebly as for a cause which is doomed to failure. This last evil must be cured. I pray that our text may this morning flame from the Lord’s own mouth with all the fire which once blazed about it. May faint hearts be encouraged and drowsy spirits be aroused, as we hear the Lord say, “My spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.”

I shall enter fully upon the subject, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, by calling your attention to discouragement forbidden. Then I shall speak of encouragement imparted; and, having done so, I shall linger with this blessed text, which overflows with comfort, and shall speak, in the third place, of encouragement further applied. Oh that our Lord, who knows how to speak a word in season to him that is weary, may cheer the hearts of seekers by what shall be spoken under this last head of discourse!

**I.** To begin with, here is DISCOURAGEMENT FORBIDDEN. Discouragement comes readily enough to us poor mortals who are occupied in the work of God, seeing it is a work of faith, a work of difficulty, a work above our capacity, and a work much opposed.

Discouragement is very natural: it is a native of the soil of manhood. To believe is supernatural, faith is the work of the Spirit of God; to doubt is natural to fallen men; for we have within us an evil heart of unbelief. It is abominably wicked, I grant you; but still it is natural, because of the downward tendency of our depraved hearts. Discouragement towards good things is a weed that grows without sowing. To be faint-hearted and downcast happens to some of us when we are half drowned in this heavy atmosphere, and it also visits us on the wings of the east wind. It takes little to make some hands hang down: a word or a look will do it. I do not, therefore, excuse it; but the rather condemn myself for having a nature prone to such evil.

Discouragement may come and does come to us, as it did to these people, from a consideration of the great things which God deserves at our hands, and the small things which we are able to render. When in Haggai's days the people thought of Jehovah, and of the temple for Him, and then looked upon the narrow space which had been enclosed, and the common stones which had been laid for foundations, they were ashamed. Where were those hewn stones and costly stones which, of old, Solomon brought from far? They said within themselves, "This house is unworthy of Jehovah: what do we by laboring thus?" Have you not felt the depressing weight of what is so surely true? Brethren, all that we do is little for our God; far too little for Him that loved us and gave Himself for us. For Him that poured out His soul unto death on our behalf the most splendid service, the most heroic self-denial, are all too little; and we feel it so. Alabaster boxes of precious ointment are too mean a gift. It does not occur to our fervent spirit to imagine that there can be any waste when our best boxes are broken and the perfume is poured out lavishly for Him. What we do fear is that our alabaster boxes are too few, and that our ointment is not precious enough. When we have done our utmost in declaring the glory of Jesus, we have felt that words are too poor and mean to set forth our adorable Lord. When we have prayed for His kingdom we have been disgusted with our own prayers; and all the efforts we have put forth in connection with any part of His service have seemed too few, too feeble for us to hope for acceptance. Thus have we been discouraged. The enemy has worked upon us by this means, yet he has made us argue very wrongly. Because we could not do much, we have half resolved to do nothing! Because what we

did was so poor, we were inclined to quit the work altogether! This is evidently absurd and wicked. The enemy can use humility for his purpose as well as pride. Whether he makes us think too much or too little of our work, it is all the same to him as long as he can get us off from it.

It is significant that the man with one talent went and hid his Lord's money in the earth. He knew that it was but one, and for that reason he was the less afraid to bury it. Perhaps he argued that the interest on one talent could never come to much, and would never be noticed side by side with the result of five or ten talents; and he might as well bring nothing at all to his Lord as bring so little. Perhaps he might not have wrapped it up if it had not been so small that a napkin could cover it. The smallness of our gifts may be a temptation to us. We are consciously so weak and so insignificant, compared with the great God and His great cause, that we are discouraged, and think it vain to attempt anything.

Moreover, the enemy contrasts our work with that of others, and with that of those who have gone before us. We are doing so little as compared with other people, therefore let us give up. We cannot build like Solomon, therefore let us not build at all. Yet, brethren, there is a falsehood in all this; for, in truth, nothing is worthy of God. The great works of others, and even the amazing productions of Solomon, all fell short of His glory. What house could man build for God? What are cedar, and marble, and gold as compared with the glory of the Most High? Though the house was "exceeding magnificent," yet the Lord God had of old dwelt within curtains, and never was His worship more glorious than within the tent of badger's skins; indeed, as soon as the great house was built, true religion declined. What of all human work can be worthy of the Lord? Our little labors do but share the insignificance of greater things, and therefore we ought not to withhold them: yet here is the temptation from which we must pray to be delivered.

The tendency to depreciate the present because of the glories of the past is also injurious. The old people looked back to the days of the former temple, even as we are apt to look upon the times of the great preachers of the past. What work was done in those past days? What Sabbaths were enjoyed then! What converts were added to the church! What days of refreshing were then vouchsafed! Everything has declined, decreased,

degenerated! As for the former days, they beheld a race of giants, who are now succeeded by pigmies. We look at one of these great men, and cry,

*“Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world  
Like a Colossus; and we petty men  
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about  
To find ourselves dishonorable graves.”*

But, brethren, we must not allow this sense of littleness to hamper us; for God can bless our littleness, and use it for His glory. I notice that the great men of the past thought of themselves even as we think of ourselves. Certainly they were not more self-confident than we are. I find in the story of the brave days of old the same confessions and the same lamentations which we utter now. It is true that in a spiritual strength we are not what our fathers were; I fear the Puritanic holiness and truthfulness of doctrine are dying out, while adherence to principle is far from common; but our fathers had also faults and follies to mourn over, and they did mourn over them most sincerely. Instead of being discouraged because what we do is unworthy of God, and insignificant compared with what was done by others, let us gather up our strength to reform our errors, and reach to higher attainments. Let us throw our heart and soul into the work of the Lord, and yet do something more nearly in accordance with our highest ideal of what our God deserves of us. Let us excel our ancestors. Let us aspire to be even more godly, more conscientious, and more sound in the faith than they were, for the Spirit of God remaineth with us.

Brethren, it is clear that discouragement can be produced by these reasons, and yet they are a mere sample of a host of arguments which work in the same direction: hence discouragement is very common. Haggai was sent to speak to Zerubbabel, the governor, and to Joshua, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people. The great man may become discouraged: he that leads the van has his fainting fits; even Elijah cries, “Let me die!” The consecrated servant of God whose life is a priesthood is apt to grow discouraged, too: standing at God’s altar, he sometimes trembles for the ark of the Lord. The multitude of the people are all too apt to suffer from panic, and to flee at the sight of the enemy. How many are they who say, “The old truth cannot exceed: the cause of orthodoxy is desperate; we had better yield to the modern spirit!” This faith-heartedness is so common that it has been the plague of Israel from her first day until now. They

were discouraged at the Red Sea, at the mere rattling of Pharaoh's chariots; they were discouraged when they found no water; they were discouraged when they had eaten up the bread which they brought out of Egypt; they were discouraged when they heard of the giants, and of the cities walled to heaven. I need not lengthen the wretched catalogue. What has not cowardice done? The fearful and unbelieving have brought terrible disasters upon our camps. Discouragement is the national epidemic of our Israel. "Being armed and carrying bows" we turn back in the day of battle. This is as common among Christians as consumption among the inhabitants of this foggy island. Oh that God would save us all from distrust, and cause us to quit ourselves like men!

Wherever discouragement comes in it is dreadfully weakening. I am sure it is weakening, because the prophet was bidden to say three times to the governor, high priest, and people, "Be strong." This proves that they had become weak. Being discouraged, their hands hung down, and their knees were feeble. Faith girds us with omnipotence, but unbelief makes everything hang loose and limp about us. Distrust, and thou wilt fail in everything; believe, and according to thy faith so shall it be unto thee. To lead a discouraged people to the Holy War is as difficult as for Xerxes' commanders to conduct the Persian troops to battle against the Greeks. The vassals of the great king were driven to the conflict by whips and sticks, for they were afraid to fight: do you wonder that they were defeated? A church that needs constant exhorting and compelling accomplishes nothing. The Greeks had no need of blows and threats, for each man was a lion, and courted the encounter, however great the odds against him. Each Spartan fought *con amore*; he was never more at home than when contending for the altars and the hearths of his country. We want Christian men of this same sort, who have faith in their principles, faith in the doctrines of grace, faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and who therefore contend earnestly for the faith in these days when piety is mocked at from the pulpit, and the gospel is sneered at by professional preachers. We need men who love the truth, to whom it is dear as their lives; men into whose hearts the old doctrine is burned by the hand of God's Spirit through a deep experience of its necessity and of its power. We need no more of those who will parrot what they are taught, but we want men who will speak what they know.

Oh, for a troop of men like John Knox, heroes of the martyr and covenanter stock! Then would Jehovah of hosts have a people to serve Him who would be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Discouragement not only weakens men, but it takes them off from the service of God. It is significant that the prophet said to them, "Be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work." They had ceased to build: they had begun to talk and argue, but they had laid down the trowel. They were extremely wise in their observations, and criticisms, and prophecies; but the walls did not rise. One person knew exactly how big the former temple was; another declared that their present architect was not up to the mark, and that the structure was not built in a scientific manner: one objected to this, and another to that; but everyone was wiser than all the rest, and sneered at old-fashioned ways. It is always so when we are discouraged: we cease from the work of the Lord, and waste time in talk and nonsensical refinements. May the Lord take away discouragement from any of you who now suffer from it! I suppose some of you do feel it, for at times it creeps over my heart and makes me go with heaviness to my work. I believe that God's truth will come to the front yet, but it hath many adversaries to-day. All sorts of unbeliefs are being hatched out from under the wings of "modern thought." The gospel seems to be regarded as a nose of wax, to be altered and shaped by every man who wishes to show his superior skill. Nor is it in doctrine alone, but in practice also, that the times are out of joint. Separateness from the world, and holy living, are to give place to gaiety and theater-going. To follow Christ fully has gone out of fashion with many of those from whom we once hoped better things. Yet are there some who waver not, some who are willing to be in the right with two or three. For my own part, even should I find none around me of the same mind, I shall not budge an inch from the old truth, nor sweat a hair of fear of its overthrow; but I shall abide confident that the eternal God, whose truth we know and hold, will vindicate Himself ere long, and turn the wisdom of the world into babble, and its boasting into confusion. Blessed is the man who shall be able to stand fast by his God in these evil days. Let us not in any wise be discouraged. "Be strong; be strong; be strong," sounds as a threefold voice from the Triune God. "Fear not" comes as a sweet cordial to the faint: therefore let no man's heart fail him. Thus much about the discouragement.

**II.** Secondly, here is THE ENCOURAGEMENT IMPARTED, which is the grand part of our text. “According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.” God remembers His covenant and stands to His ancient promises. When the people came out of Egypt, the Lord was with them by His Spirit; hence He spoke to them by Moses, and through Moses He guided, and judged, and taught them. He was with them also by His Spirit in inspiring Bezaleel and Aholiab, as to the works of art which adorned the tabernacle. God always finds the workmen for His work, and by His Spirit fits them for it. The Spirit of God rested upon the elders who were ordained to relieve Moses of his great burden. The Lord was also with His people in the fiery cloudy pillar which was conspicuous in the midst of the camp. His presence was their glory and their defense. This is a type of the presence of the Spirit with the church. At the present day, if we hold the truth of God, if we live in obedience to His holy commands, if we are spiritually-minded, if we cry unto God in believing prayer, if we have faith in His covenant and in His Son, the Holy Spirit abideth among us. The Holy Ghost descended upon the church at Pentecost, and He has never gone back again: there is no record of the Spirit’s return to heaven. He will abide with the true church evermore. This is our hope for the present struggle. The Spirit of God remaineth with us.

To what end, my brethren, is this Spirit with us? Let us think of this, that we may be encouraged at this time. The Spirit of God remaineth among you to aid and assist the ministry which He has already given. Oh, that the prayers of God’s people would always go up for God’s ministers, that they may speak with a divine power and influence which none shall be able to gainsay! We look too much for clever men; we seek out fluent and flowery speakers; we sigh for men cultured and trained in all the knowledge of the heathen: nay, but if we sought more for unction, for divine authority, and for the power which doth hedge about the man of God, how much wiser should we be! Oh, that all of us who profess to preach the gospel would learn to speak in entire dependence upon the direction of the Holy Spirit, not daring to utter our own words, but even trembling lest we should do so, and committing ourselves to that secret influence without which nothing will be powerful upon the conscience or converting to the heart. Know ye not the difference between the power

that cometh of human oratory, and that which cometh by the divine energy which speaks so to the heart that men cannot resist it? We have forgotten this too much. It were better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Ghost than to preach seventy years of sermons without the Spirit. He who rested on those who have gone to their reward in heaven can rest this day upon our ministers and bless our evangelists, if we will but seek it of Him. Let us cease to grieve the Spirit of God, and look to him for help to the faithful ministers who are yet spared to us.

This same Spirit who of old gave to His church eminent teachers can raise up other and more useful men. The other day, a brother from Wales told me of the great men he remembered: he said that he had never heard such a one as Christmas Evans, who surpasses all men when he was in the hwyl. I asked him if he knew another Welsh minister who preached like Christmas Evans. "No," he said, "we have no such man in Wales in our days." So in England we have neither Wesley nor Whitefield, nor any of their order; yet, as with God is the residue of the Spirit, He can fetch out from some chimney-corner another Christmas Evans, or find in our Sunday-school another George Whitefield, who shall declare the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Let us never fear for the future, or despair for the present, since the Spirit of God remaineth with us. What if the growing error of the age should have silenced the last tongue that speaks out the old gospel, let not faith be weakened. I hear the tramp of legions of soldiers of the cross. I hear the clarion voices of hosts of preachers. "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those that published it." Have faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ! When He ascended on high He led captivity captive, and received gifts for men. He then gave apostles, teachers, preachers, and evangelists, and He can do the like again. Let us fall back upon the eternal God, and never be discouraged for an instant.

Nor is this all. The Holy Spirit being with us, He can move the whole church to exercise its varied ministries. This is one of the things we want very much — that every member of the church should recognize that he is ordained to service. Everyone in Christ, man or woman, hath some testimony to bear, some warning to give, some deed to do in the name of the holy child Jesus; and if the Spirit of God be poured out upon our young men and our maidens, each one will be aroused to energetic service.



Both small and great will be in earnest, and the result upon the slumbering masses of our population will surprise us all. Sometimes we lament that the churches are so dull. There is an old proverb which says of So-and-so, that he was “as sound asleep as a church.” I suppose there is nothing that can sleep so soundly as a church. But yet the Spirit of God still remaineth, and therefore churches go to be awakened. I mean that not only in part but as a whole, a church may be quickened. The dullest professor, the most slovenly believer, the most captious and useless member of a church, may yet be turned to good account. I see them like a stack of faggots, piled up, dead and dry. Oh for the fire! We will have a blaze out of them yet.

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, brood over the dark, disordered church as once thou didst over chaos, and order shall come out of confusion, and the darkness shall fly before the light. Only let the Spirit be with us, and we have all that is wanted for victory. Give us His presence, and everything else will come in its due season for the profitable service of the entire church.

If the Spirit be with us, there will come multitudinous conversions. We cannot get at “the lapsed masses,” as they are pedantically called. We cannot stir the crass infidelity of the present age: no, we cannot, but He can. All things are possible with God. If you walk down to our bridges at a certain hour of the day you will see barges and vessels lying in the mud; and all the king’s horses and all the king’s men cannot stir them. Wait until the tide comes in, and they will walk the water like things of life. The living flood accomplishes at once what no mortals can do. And so to-day our churches cannot stir. What shall we do? Oh, that the Holy Spirit would come with a flood-tide of His benign influences, as He will if we will but believe in Him; as He must if we will but cry unto Him; as He shall if we will cease to grieve Him. Everything will be even as the saints desire when the Lord of saints is with us. The hope of the continuance and increase of the church lies in the remaining of the Spirit with us. The hope of the salvation of London lies in the wonder-working Spirit. Let us bow our heads and worship the omnipotent Spirit who deigns to work in us, by us, and with us.

Then, brethren, if this should happen — and I see not why it should not — then we may expect to see the church put on her beautiful garments;

then shall she begin to clear herself of the errors which now defile her; then shall she press to her bosom the truths which she now begins to forget; then will she go back to the pure fount of inspiration and drink from the Scriptures of truth; and then out of the midst of her shall flow no turbid streams, but rivers of living water. If the Holy Ghost will work among us we shall rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the name of our God.

When once the Spirit of God putteth forth His might all things else will be in accord with Him. Notice that in the rest of the chapter — which I shall read now, not as relating to that temple at all, but to the church of God — there is great comfort given to us. If the Holy Spirit be once given, then we may expect providence to co-operate with the church of God. Read verse 6:

“Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake heaven and the earth,  
and the sea, and the dry land. I will shake all nations.”

Great commotions will co-operate with the Holy Spirit. We may expect that God will work for His people in an extraordinary fashion if they will but be faithful to Him. Empires will collapse, and times will change, for the truth's sake. Expect the unexpected, reckon upon that which is unlikely, if it be necessary for the growth of the kingdom. Of old the earth helped the woman when the dragon opened his mouth to drown her with the floods that he cast forth: unexpected help shall come to us when affairs are at their worst.

Specially do I look for a shaking among the hosts of unbelief. How often did the Lord of old rout His enemies without Israel drawing sword! The watchword was, “Stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” The adversaries of old fell out among themselves; and they will do so again. When Cadmus slew the dragon with his javelin, he was bidden to sow its teeth in the earth. When he did so, according to the classic fable, he saw rising out of the ground nodding plumes, and crested helmets, and broad shoulders of armed men. Up from the earth there sprang a host of warriors; but Cadmus needed not to fly; for the moment they found their feet, these children of the dragon fell upon each other till scarcely one was left. Error, like Saturn, devours its own children. Those that fight against the Lord of hosts are not agreed among themselves; they shall sheathe their swords in each other's bosoms.

I saw in the night vision the sea, the deep and broad sea of truth, flashing with its silver waves. Lo, a black horse came out of the darkness and went down to the deep, threatening to drink it dry. I saw him stand there drinking, and swelling as he drank. In his pride he trusted that he could snuff up Jordan at a draught. I stood by and saw him drink, and then plunge further into the sea, to drink still more. Again he plunged in with fury, and soon he lost his footing, and I saw him no more, for the deep had swallowed him that boasted that he could swallow it. Rest assured that every black horse of error that comes forth to swallow up the sea of divine truth shall be drowned therein. Wherefore be of good courage. God, who maketh the earth and the heavens to shake, shall cause each error to fall like an untimely fig.

And next, the Lord in this chapter promises His people that they shall have all the supplies they need for His work. They feared that they could not build His house, because of their poverty; but, saith the Lord of hosts, "The silver and the gold are mine." When the church of God believes in God, and goes forward bravely, she need not trouble as to supplies. Her God will provide for her. He that gives the Holy Ghost will give gold and silver according as they are needed; therefore let us be of good courage. If God is with us, why need we fear? One of our English kings once threatened the great city of London that if its councilors talked so independently, he would — yes — he would, indeed he would — take his court away from the city. The Lord Mayor on that occasion replied, that if his majesty would graciously leave the river Thames behind him, the citizens would try to get on without his court. If any say, "If you hold to these old-fashioned doctrines you will lose the educated, the wealthy, the influential," we answer: But if we do not lose the godly and the presence of the Holy Ghost we are not in the least alarmed. If the Holy Ghost remaineth with us, there is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God. Brethren, my heart leaps within me as I cry, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

The best comfort of all remained: "The desire of all nations shall come." This was in a measure fulfilled when Jesus came into that latter house and caused all holy hearts to sing for gladness; but it was not wholly fulfilled

in that way; for if you notice, in the ninth verse it is written, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former; and in this place will I give peace," which the Lord did not fully do to the second temple, since that was destroyed by the Romans. But there is another advent, when "the desire of all nations shall come" in power and glory; and this is our highest hope. Though truth may be driven back, and error may prevail, Jesus comes, and He is the great Lord and patron of truth: He shall judge the world in righteousness, and the people in equity. Here is our last resource; here are God's reserves. He whom we serve liveth and reigneth for ever and ever; and He saith, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

**III.** I should have done if it had not been that this text seemed to me to overflow so much, that it might not only refresh God's people, but give drink to thirsty sinners who are seeking the Lord. For a moment or two I give myself to ENCOURAGEMENT FURTHER APPLIED.

It is at the beginning of every gracious purpose that men have most fear, even as these people had who had newly begun to build. When first the Holy Spirit begins to strive with a man to lead him to Jesus, he is apt to say — "I cannot; I dare not; it is impossible. How can I believe and live?" Now I want to speak to some of you here who are willing to find Christ, and to encourage you by the truth that the Spirit lives to help you. I would even like to speak to those who are not anxious to be saved. I remember that Dr. Payson, an exceedingly earnest and useful man of God, once did a singular thing. He had been holding inquiry meetings with all sorts of people, and great numbers had been saved. At last, one Sunday he gave out that he should have a meeting on Monday night of those persons who did not desire to be saved; and, strange to say, some twenty persons came who did not wish to repent or believe. He spoke to them and said, "I am sure that if a little film, thin as a web of the gossamer, were let down by God from heaven to each one of you, you would not push it away from you. Although it were almost invisible, you would value even the slightest connection between you and heaven. Now, your coming to meet me to-night is a little link with God. I want it to increase in strength till

you are joined to the Lord for ever.” He spoke to them most tenderly, and God blessed those people who did not desire to be saved, so that before the meeting was over they were of another mind. The film had become a thicker thread, and it grew and grew until the Lord Christ held them by it for ever. Dear friends, the fact of your being in the Tabernacle this morning is like that filmy thread: do not put it away. Here is your comfort, the Holy Ghost still works with the preaching of the word. Do I hear you say, “I cannot feel my need of Christ as I want to feel it”? The Spirit remaineth among us. He can make you feel more deeply the guilt of sin and your need of pardon. “But I have heard so much about conviction and repentance; I do not seem to have either of them.” Yet the Spirit remaineth with us, and that Spirit is able to work in you the deepest conviction and the truest repentance. “O sir, I do not feel as if I could do anything”: but the Spirit remaineth with us, and all things that are needful for godliness He can give. He can work in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure. “But I want to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Who made you want to do that? Who but the Holy Spirit? Therefore He is still at work with you; and though as yet you do not understand what believing is, or else I am persuaded you would believe at once, the Spirit of God can instruct you in it. You are blind, but He can give you sight; you are paralyzed, but He can give you strength — the Spirit of God remaineth.

“Oh, but that doctrine of regeneration staggers me: you know, we must be born again.” Yes, we are born again of the Spirit, and the Spirit remaineth still with us; He is still mighty to work that wondrous change, and to bring you out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. The Spirit remaineth with us, blessed be His name! “Ah, dear sir,” says one, “I want to conquer sin”! Who made you desire to conquer sin? Who, but the Spirit that remaineth with us? He will give you the sword of the Spirit and teach you how to use it, and He will give you both the will and the power to use it successfully. Through the Spirit’s might you can overcome every sin, even that which has dragged you down and disgraced you. The Spirit of God is still waiting to help you. When I think of the power of the Spirit of God, I look hopefully upon every sinner here this morning. I bless His name that He can work in you all that is pleasing in His sight. Some of you may be very careless, but He can make you thoughtful. Coming up to

London to see the Exhibition, I hope you may yourselves become an exhibition of divine grace. You think not about things, but He can make you feel at this moment a sweet softness stealing over you, until you long to be alone and to get home to the old arm-chair and there seek the Lord. You can thus be led to salvation.

I thought when I came in here that I should have a picked congregation; and so I have. You are one of them. Wherever you come from, I want you now to seek the Lord. He has brought you here, and He means to bless you. Yield yourselves to Him while His sweet Spirit pleads with you. While the heavenly wind softly blows upon you open wide every window. You have not felt that you wanted it; but that is the sure proof that you need it; for he that does not know his need of Christ, is most in need. Open wide your heart that the Spirit may teach you your need; above all, breathe the prayer that He would help you this morning to look to the Lord Jesus Christ, for “there is life in a look at the Crucified One — there is life at this moment for you.” “Oh,” you say, “if I were to begin I should not keep on.” No; if you began perhaps you would not; but if He begins with you He will keep on. The final perseverance of saints is the result of the final perseverance of the Holy Spirit; He perseveres to bless, and we persevere in receiving the blessing. If He begins, you have begun with a divine power that fainteth not neither is weary. I wish it might so happen that on this fifth day of the ninth month, not the prophet Haggai, but I, God’s servant, may have spoken to you such a word by the witness of the Holy Ghost, “From this day will I bless you”! Go away with that promise resting upon you. I would like to give a shake of the hand to every stranger here this morning, and say, “Brother, in the name of the Lord I wish you from this day a blessing.” Amen and amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~30th~~ Haggai 1; 2:1-9.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 956, 957, 451.

# LOVE'S COMPLAINING

## SERMON NO. 1926

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
OCTOBER 24TH, 1886,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” — (Revelation 2:4,5).

IT WAS the work of the priest to go into the holy place and to trim the seven-branched lamp of gold: see how our Great High Priest walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: his work is not occasional, but constant. Wearing robes which are at once royal and priestly, he is seen lighting the holy lamps, pouring in the sacred oil, and removing impurities which would dim the light.

Hence our Lord's fitness to deal with the churches, which are these golden lamp-stands, for no one knows so much about the lamps as the person whose constant work it is to watch them and trim them. No one knows the churches as Jesus does, for the care of all the churches daily comes upon him, he continually walks among them, and holds their ministers as stars in his right hand. His eyes are perpetually upon the churches, so that he knows their works, their sufferings, and their sins; and those eyes are as a flame of fire, so that he sees with a penetration, discernment, and accuracy to which no other can attain. We sometimes judge the condition of religion too leniently, or else we err on the other side, and judge too severely. Our eyes are dim with the word's smoke; but his eyes are as a flame of fire. He sees the churches through and through, and knows their true condition much better than they know themselves. The Lord Jesus

Christ is a most careful observer of churches and of individuals; nothing is hid from his observant eye.

As he is the most careful observer, so he is the most candid. He is ever “the faithful and true witness.” He loves much, and therefore he never judges harshly. He loves much, and therefore he always judges jealously. Jealousy is the sure attendant of such love as his. He will neither speak smooth words nor bitter words; but he will speak the truth — the truth in love, the truth as he himself perceives it, and as he would have us perceive it. Well may he say, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,” since his sayings are so true, so just, so weighty.

Certainly no observer can be so tender as the Son of God. Those lamps are very precious to him: it cost him his life to light them. “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.” Every church is to our Lord a more sublime thing than a constellation in the heavens; as he is precious to his saints, so are they precious to him. He careth little for empires, kingdoms, or republics; but his heart is set on the kingdom of righteousness, of which his cross is the royal standard. He must reign until his foes are vanquished, and this is the great thought of his mind at this present, “From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.” He ceases not to watch over his church: his sacrifice is ended, but not his service in caring for the golden lamps. He has completed the redemption of his bride, but he continues her preservation.

I therefore feel at this time that we may well join in a prayer to our Lord Jesus to come into our midst and put our light in order. Oh for a visit from himself such as he paid in vision to the seven churches of Asia! With him is the oil to feed the living flame, and he knows how to pour it in according to due measure; with him are those golden snuffers with which to remove every superfluity of naughtiness, that our lights may so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Oh for his presence now, to search us and to sanctify us; to cause us to shine forth to his Father’s praise! We would be judged of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. We would pray this morning, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with



whom we have to do; and we delight to have it so. We invite thee, O great High Priest, to come into this sanctuary, and look to this thy lamp this morning.

In the text, as it is addressed to the church at Ephesus and to us, we note three things. First, we note that Christ perceives: “I know thy works . . . nevertheless I have somewhat against thee.” Secondly, Christ prescribes: “Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent,” and so forth. Thirdly, Christ persuades — persuades with a threatening: “I will remove thy candlestick out of his place;” persuades, also, with a promise: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” If the Lord himself be here at this time, our plan of discourse will be a river of life; but if he be not among us by his Holy Spirit, it will be as the dry bed of a torrent which bears the name of “river,” but lacks the living stream. We expect our Lord’s presence; he will come to the lamps which his office calls upon him to trim; it has been his wont to be with us; some of us have met him this morning already, and we have constrained him to tarry with us.

# I. First, then, we notice that HE PERCEIVES.

Our Lord sorrowfully perceives the faults of his church — “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee;” but he does not so perceive those faults as to be forgetful of that which he can admire and accept; for he begins his letter with commendations, “I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil.” Do not think, my brethren, that our Beloved is blind to the beauties of his church. On the contrary, he delights to observe them. He can see beauties where she herself cannot see them. Where we observe much to deplore, his loving eyes see much to admire. The graces which he himself creates he can always perceive. When we in the earnestness of self-examination overlook them, and write bitter things against ourselves, the Lord Jesus sees even in those bitter self-condemnations a life and earnestness and sincerity which he loves. Our Lord has a keen eye for all that is good. When he searches our hearts he never passes by the faintest longing, or desire, or faith, or love, of any of his people. He says, “I know thy works.”

But this is our point at this time, that while Jesus can see all that is good, yet in very faithfulness he sees all that is evil. His love is not blind. He does not say, "As many as I love I commend;" but, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." It is more necessary for us that we should make a discovery of our faults than of our virtues. So notice in this text that Christ perceiveth the flaw in his church, even in the midst of her earnest service. The church at Ephesus was full of work. "I know thy works and thy labor, and for my name's sake thou hast labored, and hast not fainted." It was such a laborious church that it pushed on and on with diligent perseverance, and never seemed to flag in its divine mission. Oh that we could say as much of all our churches! I have lived to see many brilliant projects lighted and left to die out in smoke. I have heard of schemes which were to illuminate the world; but not a spark remains. Holy perseverance is a great desideratum. In these three and thirty years we thank God he has enabled us to labor and not to faint. There has been a continuance of everything attempted, and no drawing back from anything. "This is the work, this is the labor," to hold out even to the end. Oh how I have dreaded lest we should have to give up any holy enterprise or cut short any gracious effort! Hitherto the Lord has helped us. With men and means, liberality and zeal, he has supplied us. In this case the angel of the church has been very little of an angel from heaven, but very much of a human angel; for in the weakness of my flesh and in the heaviness of my spirit have I pursued my calling; but I have pursued it. By the help of God I continue to this day, and this church with equal footsteps is at my side; for which the whole praise is due to the Lord, who fainteth not, neither is weary. Having put my hand to the plough I have not looked back, but have steadily pressed forward, making straight furrows; but it has been by the grace of God alone.

Alas! under all the laboring the Lord Jesus perceived that the Ephesians had left their first love; and this was a grievous fault. So it may be in this church; every wheel may continue to revolve, and the whole machinery of ministry may be kept going at its normal rate, and yet there may be a great secret evil which Jesus perceives, and this may be marring all.

But this church at Ephesus was not only laborious, it was patient in suffering great persecution. He says of it: "I know thy works and thy patience, and how thou hast borne, and hast patience, and hast not

fainted." Persecution upon persecution visited the faithful, but they bore it all with holy courage and constancy, and continued still confessing their Lord. This was good, and the Lord highly approved it; but yet underneath it he saw the tokens of decline; they had left their first love. So there may seem to be all the patient endurance and dauntless courage that there should be, and yet as a fair apple may have a worm at its core, so may it be with the church when it looks best to the eye of friends.

The Ephesian church excelled in something else, namely, in its discipline, its soundness in the faith, and fidelity towards heretics; for the Lord says of it, "how thou canst not bear them which are evil." They would not have it; they would not tolerate false doctrine, they would not put up with unclean living. They fought against evil, not only in the common people, but in prominent individuals. "Thou has tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." They had dealt with the great ones; they had not flinched from the unmasking of falsehood. Those who seemed to be apostles they had dragged to the light and discovered to be deceivers. This church was not honeycombed with doubt; it laid no claim to breadth of thought and liberality of view; it was honest to its Lord. He says of it, "This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." This was grand of them: it showed a backbone of truth. I wish some of the churches of this age had a little of this holy decision about them; for nowadays, if a man be clever, he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of hell, and it will go down with some. He may assail every doctrine of the gospel, he may blaspheme the Holy Trinity, he may trample on the blood of the Son of God, and yet nothing shall be said about it if he be held in repute as a man of advanced thought and liberal ideas. The church at Ephesus was not of this mind. She was strong in her convictions; she could not yield the faith, nor play the traitor to her Lord. For this her Lord commended her: and yet he says, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." When love dies orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism. Adhesion to the truth sours into bigotry when the sweetness and light of love to Jesus depart. Love Jesus, and then it is well to hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes; but mere hate of evil will tend to evil if love of Jesus be not there to sanctify it. I need not make a personal application; but that which is spoken to Ephesus may be spoken at this

hour to ourselves. As we hope that we may appropriate the commendation, so let us see whether the expostulation may not also apply to us. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Thus I have shown you that Jesus sees the evil beneath all the good; he does not ignore the good, but he will not pass over the ill.

So, next, this evil was a very serious one; it was love declining: "Thou hast left thy first love." "Is that serious?" saith one. It is the most serious ill of all; for the church is the bride of Christ, and for a bride to fail in love is to fail in all things. It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient, and so forth: if love to her husband has evaporated, her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled, she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. So, my brethren, this is a most important matter, our love to Christ, because it touches the very heart of that communion with him which is the crown and essence of our spiritual life. As a church we must love Jesus, or else we have lost our reason for existence. A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Have I not often reminded you that almost any disease may be hopefully endured except disease of the heart? But when our sickness is a disease of the heart, it is full of danger; and it was so in this case; "Thou hast left thy first love." It is a disease of the heart, a central, fatal disease, unless the great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress, and to deliver us from it. Oh, in any man, in any woman, any child of God here, let alone in the church as a whole, if there be a leaving of the first love, it is a woeful thing! Lord have mercy upon us; Christ have mercy upon us: this should be our solemn litany at once. No peril can be greater than this. Lose love, lose all. Leave our first love, we have left strength, and peace, and joy, and holiness.

I call your attention, however, to this point, that it was he that found it out. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Jesus himself found it out! I do not know how it strikes you; but as I thought it over, this fact brought the tears to my eyes. When I begin to leave off loving Christ, or love him less than I do, I would like to find it out myself; and if I did so, there would soon be a cure for it. But for him to find it out, oh, it seems so hard, so sad a thing! That we should keep on growing cold, and cold, and cold, and never care about it till the Beloved points it out to us. Why even the angel of the church did not find it out;

the minister did not know it; but He saw it who loves us so well, that he delights in our love, and pines when it begins to fail. To him we are unutterably dear; he loved us up out of the pit into his bosom, loved us up from the dunghill among beggars to sit at his right hand upon his throne; and it is sorrowful that he should have to complain of our cooling love while we are utterly indifferent to the matter. Does Jesus care more about our love than we do? He loves us better than we love ourselves. How good of him to care one jot about our love! This is no complaint of an enemy, but of a dear wounded friend.

I notice that Jesus found it out with great pain. I can hardly conceive a greater grief to him as the husband of his church than to look her in the face and say, "Thou hast left thy first love." What can she give him but love? Will she deny him this? A poor thing is the church of herself: her Lord married her when she was in beggary; and if she does not give him love, what has she to give him? If she begins to be unfaithful in heart to him, what is she worth? Why, any unloving wife is a foul fountain of discomfort and dishonor to her husband. O beloved, shall it be so with thee? Wilt thou grieve Emmanuel? Wilt thou wound thy Well-beloved? Church of God, wilt thou grieve him whose heart was pierced for thy redemption? Brother, sister, can you and I let Jesus find out that our love is departing, that we are ceasing to be zealous for his name? Can we wound him so? Is not this to crucify the Lord afresh? Might he not hold up his hands this morning with fresh blood upon them, and say, "These are the wounds which I received in the house of my friends. It was nothing that I died for them, but ill it is that, after having died for them, they have failed to give me their hearts?" Jesus is not so sick of our sin as of our lukewarmness. It is a sad business to my heart; I hope it will be sad to all whom it concerns, that our Lord should be the first to spy out our declines in love.

The Savior, having thus seen this with pain, now points it out. As I read this passage over to myself, I noticed that the Savior had nothing to say about the sins of the heathen among whom the Ephesians dwelt: they are alluded to because it must have been the heathen who persecuted the church, and caused it to endure, and exhibit patience. The Savior, however, has nothing to say against the heathen; and he does not say much more than a word about those who were evil. These had been cast out, and he

merely says: "Thou canst not bear them which are evil." He denounced no judgment upon the Nicolaitanes, except that he hated them; and even the apostles which were found to be liars the Master dismisses with that word. He leaves the ungodly in their own condemnation. But what he has to say is against his own beloved: "I have somewhat against thee." It seems as if the Master might pass over sin in a thousand others, but he cannot wink at failure of love in his own espoused one. "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." The Savior loves, so that his love is cruel as the grave against cold-heartedness. He said of the church of Laodicea, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." This was one of his own churches, too, and yet she made him sick with her lukewarmness. God grant that we may not be guilty of such a crime as that!

The Savior pointed out the failure of love; and when he pointed it out he called it by a lamentable name. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen." He calls it a fall to leave our first love. Brothers, sisters, this church had not been licentious, it had not gone aside to false doctrine, it had not become idle, it had not been cowardly in the hour of persecution; but this one sin summed up the whole — she did not love Christ as she once loved him, and he calls this a fall. A fall indeed it is. "Oh, I thought," saith one, "that if a member of the church got drunk that was a fall." That is a grievous fall, but it is a fall if we become intoxicated with the world, and lose the freshness of our devotion to Jesus. It is a fall from a high estate of fellowship to the dust of worldliness. "Thou art fallen." The word sounds very harshly in my ears — no, not harshly, for his love speaks it in so pathetic a manner; but it thunders in my soul deep down. I cannot bear it. It is so sadly true. "Thou art fallen." "Remember from whence thou art fallen." Indeed, O Lord, we have fallen when we have left our first love for thee.

The Master evidently counts this decline of love to be a personal wrong done to himself. "I have somewhat against thee." It is not an offense against the king, nor against the judge, but against the Lord Jesus as the husband of the church: an offense against the very heart of Christ himself. "I have somewhat against thee." He does not say, "Thy neighbor has somewhat against thee, thy child has somewhat against thee, thy God has somewhat against thee," but, "I, I thy hope, thy joy, thy delight, thy Savior, I have this against thee." The word somewhat is an intruder here.

Our translators put it in italics, and well they might, for it is a bad word, since it seems to make a small thing of a very grave change. The Lord has this against us, and it is no mere “somewhat.” Come, brothers and sisters, if we have not broken any law, nor offended in any way so as to grieve anybody else, this is sorrow enough, if our love has grown in the least degree chill towards him; for we have done a terrible wrong to our best friend. This is the bitterness of our offense; Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that I have left my first love. The Savior tells us this most lovingly. I wish I knew how to speak as tenderly as he does; and yet I feel at this moment that I can and must be tender in this matter, for I am speaking about myself as much as about anybody else. I am grieving, grieving over some here present, grieving for all of us, but grieving most of all for myself, that our Well-beloved should have cause to say, “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”

So much for what our Lord perceives. Holy Spirit, bless it to us!

**II.** And now, secondly, let us note what THE SAVIOR PRESCRIBES. The Savior’s prescription is couched in these three words: “Remember,” “Repent,” “Return.”

The first word is Remember. “Thou hast left thy first love.” Remember, then, what thy first love was, and compare thy present condition with it. At first nothing diverted thee from thy Lord. He was thy life, thy love, thy joy. Now thou lookest for recreation somewhere else, and other charms and other beauties win thy heart. Art thou not ashamed of this? Once thou wast never wearied with hearing of him and serving him. Never wert thou overdone with Christ and his gospel: many sermons, many prayer-meetings, many Bible readings, and yet none too many. Now sermons are long, and services are dull, and thou must have thy jaded appetite excited with novelties. How is this? Once thou wast never displeased with Jesus whatever he did with thee. If thou hadst been sick, or poor, or dying, thou wouldst still have loved and blessed his name for all things. He remembers this fondness, and regrets its departure. He says to thee to-day, “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness.” Thou wouldst have gone after thy Lord anywhere in those days: across the sea,

or through the fire, thou wouldst have pursued him; nothing would have been too hot or too heavy for thee then. Is it so now? Remember! Remember from whence thou art fallen. Remember the vows, the tears, the communings, the happy raptures of those days; remember and compare with them thy present state.

Remember and consider, that when thou wast in thy first love, that love was none too warm. Even then, when thou didst live to him, and for him, and with him, thou wast none too holy, none too consecrated, none too zealous. If thou wast not too forward then, what art thou now — now that thou hast come down even from that poor attainment? Remember the past with sad forebodings of the future. If thou hast come down from where thou wast, who is to tell thee where thou wilt cease thy declining? He who has sunk so far may fall much farther. Is it not so? Though thou sayest in thy heart like Hazael, “Is thy servant a dog?” thou mayest turn out worse than a dog yet, yea, prove a very wolf. Who knows? thou mayest even now be a devil! Thou mayest turn out a Judas, a son of perdition, and deny thy Master, selling him for thirty pieces of silver. When a stone begins to fall it falls with an ever-increasing rate; and when a soul begins to leave its first love, it quits it more and more, and more and more, til at last it falleth terribly. Remember!

The next word of the prescription is “Repent.” Repent as thou didst at first. The word so suitable to sinners is suitable to thee, for thou hast grievously sinned. Repent of the wrong thou hast done thy Lord by leaving thy first love of him. Couldst thou have lived a seraphic life, only breathing his love, only existing for him, thou hadst done little enough; but to quit thy first love, how grievously hast thou wronged him! That love was well deserved, was it not? Why, then, hast thou left it? Is Jesus less fair than he was? Does he love thee less than he did? Has he been less kind and tender to thee than he used to be? Say, hast thou outgrown him? Canst thou do without him? Hast thou a hope of salvation apart from him? I charge thee, repent of this thine ill-doing towards one who has a greater claim upon thy love than ever he had. He ought to be to-day loved more than thou didst love him at thy very best! O my heart, is not all this most surely true? How ill art thou behaving! What an ingrate art thou! Repent! Repent!



Repent of much good that thou hast left undone through want of love. Oh, if thou hadst always loved thy Lord at thy best, what mightest thou not have known of him by this time! What good deeds thou mightest have done by force of his love! How many hearts mightest thou have won for thy Lord if thine own heart had been fuller of love, if thine own soul had been more on fire! Thou hast lived a poor beggarly life because thou hast allowed such poverty of love.

Repent! Repent! To my mind, as I thought over this text, the call for repentance grew louder and louder, because of the occasion of its utterance. Here is the glorious Lord, coming to his church and speaking to her angel in tones of tender kindness. He condescends to visit his people in all his majesty and glory, intending nothing but to manifest himself in love to his own elect as he doth not to the world. And yet he is compelled even then to take to chiding, and to say, "I have this against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Here is a love-visit clouded with upbraiding — necessary upbraiding. What mischief sin has done! It is a dreadful thing that when Jesus comes to his own dear bride he should have to speak in grief, and not in joy. Must holy communion, which is the wine of heaven, be embittered with the tonic of expostulation? I see the upper springs of nearest fellowship, where the waters of life leap from their first source in the heart of God. Are not these streams most pure and precious? If a man drink thereof he liveth for ever. Shall it be that even at the fountain-head they shall be dashed with bitterness? Even when Christ communes personally with us must he say, "I have somewhat against thee?" Break, my heart, that it should be so! Well may we repent with a deep repentance when our choicest joys are flavoured with the bitter herbs of regret, that our best Beloved should have somewhat against us.

But then he says in effect, Return. The third word is this — "Repent, and do the first works." Notice, that he does not say, "Repent, and get back thy first love." This seems rather singular; but then love is the chief of the first works, and, moreover, the first works can only come of the first love. There must be in every declining Christian a practical repentance. Do not be satisfied with regrets and resolves. Do the first works; do not strain after the first emotions, but do the first works. No renewal is so valuable as the practical cleansing of our way. If the life be made right, it will prove that the love is so. In doing the first works you will prove that you have

come back to your first love. The prescription is complete, because the doing of the first works is meant to include the feeling of the first feelings, the sighing of the first sighs, the enjoying of the first joys: these are all supposed to accompany returning obedience and activity.

We are to get back to these first works at once. Most men come to Christ with a leap; and I have observed that many who come back to him usually do so at a bound. The slow revival of one's love is almost an impossibility; as well expect the dead to rise by degrees. Love to Christ is often love at first sight: we see him, and are conquered by him. If we grow cold, the best thing we can do is to fasten our eyes on him till we cry, "My soul melted while my Beloved spake." It is a happy circumstance if I can cry, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." How sweet for the Lord to put us back again at once into the old place, back again in a moment! My prayer is that it may be so this morning with any declining one. May you so repent as not merely to feel the old feelings, but instantly to do the first works, and be once more as eager, as zealous, as generous, as prayerful, as you used to be! If we should again see you breaking the alabaster box, we should know that the old love had returned. May the good Master help us to do as well as ever, yea, much better than before!

Notice, however, that this will require much of effort and warfare; for the promise which is made is "to him that overcometh." Overcoming implies conflict. Depend upon it, if you conquer a wandering heart, you will have to fight for it. "To him that overcometh," saith he, "will I give to eat of the tree of life." You must fight your way back to the garden of the Lord. You will have to fight against lethargy, against an evil heart of unbelief, against the benumbing influence of the world. In the name and power of him who bids you repent, you must wrestle and struggle till you get the mastery over self, and yield your whole nature to your Lord.

So I have shown you how Christ prescribes, and I greatly need a few minutes for the last part, because I wish to dwell with solemn earnestness upon it. I have no desire to say a word by which I may prove myself a true brother pleading with you in deep sympathy, because in all the ill which I rebuke I mourn my own personal share. Bless us, O Spirit of the Lord!

**III.** Now see, brethren, HE PERSUADES. This is the third point: the Lord Jesus persuades his erring one to repent.

First, he persuades with a warning: “I will come unto thee;” “quickly” is not in the original: the Revised Version has left it out. Our Lord is generally very slow at the work of judgment: “I will come unto thee, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.” This he must do: he cannot allow his light to be apart from love, and if the first love be left, the church shall be left in darkness. The truth must always shine, but not always in the same place. The place must be made fit by love, or the light shall be removed.

Our Lord means, first, I will take away the comfort of the Word. He raises up certain ministers, and makes them burning and shining lights in the midst of his church, and when the people gather together they are cheered and enlightened by their shining. A ministry blessed of the Lord is a singular comfort to the church of God. The Lord can easily take away that light which has brought comfort to so many: he can remove the good man to another sphere, or he can call him home to his rest. The extinguisher of death can put out the candle which now gladdens the house. The church which has lost a ministry by which the Lord’s glory has shone forth has lost a good deal; and if this loss has been sent in chastisement for decline of love it is all the harder to bear. I can point you to places where once was a man of God, and all went well; but the people grew cold, and the Lord took away their leader, and the place is now a desolation: those who now attend those courts and listen to a modern ministry cry out because of the famine of the Word of the Lord. O friends, let us value the light while we have it, and prove that we do so by profiting by it; but how can we profit if we leave our first love? The Lord may take away our comfort as a church if our first zeal shall die down.

But the candlestick also symbolizes usefulness: it is that by which a church shines. The use of a church is to preserve the truth, wherewith to illuminate the neighborhood, to illuminate the world. God can soon cut short our usefulness, and he will do so if we cut short our love. If the Lord be withdrawn, we can go on with our work as we used to do, but nothing will come of it: we can go on with Sunday-schools, mission-stations, branch churches, and yet accomplish nothing. Brethren, we can go on with

the Orphanage, the College, the Colportage, the Evangelistic Society, the Book Fund, and all else, and yet nothing will be effected if the arm of the Lord be not made bare.

He can, if he wills, even take away from the church her very existence as a church. Ephesus is gone: nothing but ruins can be found. Rome once held a noble church of Christ, but has not her name become the symbol of antichrist? The Lord can soon take away candlesticks out of their places if the church uses her light for her own glory, and is not filled with his love. God forbid that we should fall under this condemnation! Of thy mercy, O Lord, forbid it! Let it not so happen to any one of us. Yet this may occur to us as individuals. You, dear brother or sister, if you lose your first love, may soon lose your joy, your peace, your usefulness. You, who are now so bright, may grow dull. You, who are now so useful, may become useless. You were once an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes; but if the Lord be withdrawn you will instruct nobody, you will be in the dark yourself. Alas! you may come to lose the very name of Christians, as some have done who once seemed to be burning and shining lights. They were foolish virgins, and ere long they were heard to cry, "Our lamps are gone out!" The Lord can and will take away the candlestick out of its place if we put him out of his place by a failure in our love to him.

How can I persuade you, then, better than with the warning words of my Master? My beloved, I persuade you from my very soul not to encounter these dangers, not to run these terrible risks; for as you would not wish to see either the church or your own self left without the light of God, to pine in darkness, it is needful that you abide in Christ, and go on to love him more and more.

The Savior holds out a promise as his other persuasive. Upon this I can only dwell for a minute. It seems a very wonderful promise to me: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Observe, those who lose their first love fall, but those who abide in love are made to stand. In contrast to the fall which took place in the paradise of God, we have man eating of the tree of life, and so living for ever. If we, through grace, overcome the common tendency to decline in love, then shall we be confirmed and settled in the favor of the Lord. By eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil we

fell; by eating of the fruit of a better tree we live and stand fast for ever. Life proved true by love shall be nourished on the best of food: it shall be sustained by fruit from the garden of the Lord himself, gathered by the Savior's own hand.

Note again, those who lose their first love wander far, they depart from God. "But," saith the Lord, "if you keep your first love you shall not wander, but you shall come into closer fellowship. I will bring you nearer to the center. I will bring you to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The inner ring is for those who grow in love; the center of all joy is only to be reached by much love. We know God as we love God. We enter into his paradise as we abide in his love. What joy is here! What a reward hath love!

Then notice the mystical blessing which lies here, waiting for meditation. Do you know how we fell? The woman took of the fruit of the forbidden tree, and gave to Adam, and Adam ate and fell. The reverse is the case in the promise before us: the Second Adam takes of the divine fruit from the tree of promise, and hands it to his spouse; she eats and lives for ever. He who is the Father of the age of grace hands down to us immortal joys, which he has plucked from an unwithering tree. The reward of love is to eat the fruit of life. "We are getting into mysteries," says one. Yes, I am intentionally lifting a corner of the veil, and no more. I only mean to give you a glimpse at the promised boon. Into his innermost joys our Lord will bring us if we keep up our first love, and go from strength to strength therein. Marvelous things are locked up in the caskets whereof love holds the key. Sin set the angel with a flaming sword between us and the tree of life in the midst of the garden; but love has quenched that sword, and now the angel beckons us to come into the innermost secrets of paradise. We shall know as we are known when we love as we are loved. We shall live the life of God when we are wholly taken up with the love of God. The love of Jesus answered by our love to Jesus makes the sweetest music the heart can know. No joy on earth is equal to the bliss of being all taken up with love to Christ. If I had my choice of all the lives that I could live, I certainly would not choose to be an emperor, nor to be a millionaire, nor to be a philosopher; for power, and wealth, and knowledge bring with them sorrow and travail; but I would choose to have nothing to do but to love my Lord Jesus — nothing, I mean, but to do all things for his sake, and out

of love to him. Then I know that I should be in paradise, yea, in the midst of the paradise of God, and I should have meat to eat which is all unknown to men of the world.

Heaven on earth is abounding love to Jesus. This is the first and last of true delight — to love him who is the first and the last. To love Jesus is another name for paradise. Lord, let me know this by continual experience. “You are soaring aloft,” cries one. Yes, I own it. Oh that I could allure you to a heavenward flight upon wings of love! There is bitterness in declining love: it is a very consumption of the soul, and makes us weak, and faint, and low. But true love is the antepast of glory. See the heights, the glittering heights, the glorious heights, the everlasting hills to which the Lord of life will conduct all those who are faithful to him through the power of his Holy Spirit. See, O love, thine ultimate abode! I pray that what I have said may be blessed by the Holy Spirit to the bringing of us all nearer to the Bridegroom of our souls. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON -  Revelation 1; 2:1-7.


HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 425, 797, 804.

# THE LORD AND THE LEPER

SERMON NO. 2008

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
FEBRUARY 12TH, 1888,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. and Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.” —  Mark 1:40-42.

BELOVED, we saw in the reading, that our Lord had been engaged in special prayer. He had gone alone on the mountain-side to have communion with God. Simon and the rest search for him, and he comes away in the early morning with the burrs from the hill-side upon his garments, the smell of the field upon him, even of a field that the Lord God had blessed; he comes forth among the people, charged with power which he had received in communion with the Father; and now we may expect to see wonders. And we do see them; for devils fear and fly when he speaks the word; and by-and-by, there comes to him one, an extraordinary being, condemned to live apart from the rest of men, lest he should spread defilement all around. A leper comes to him, and kneels before him, and expresses his confident faith in him, that he can make him whole. Now is the Son of Man glorious in his power to save.

The Lord Jesus Christ at this day has all power in heaven and in earth. He is charged with a divine energy to bless all who come to him for healing. Oh, that we may see today some great wonder of his power and grace! Oh, for one of the days of the Son of Man here and now! To that end it is absolutely needful that we should find a case for his spiritual power to

work upon. Is there not one here in whom his grace may prove its omnipotence? Not you, ye good, ye self-righteous! You yield him no space to work in. You that are whole have no need of a physician: in you there is no opportunity for him to display his miraculous force. But yonder are the men we seek for. Forlorn, and lost, full of evil, and self-condemned, you are the characters we seek. You that feel as if you were possessed with evil spirits, and you that are leprous with sin, you are the persons in whom Jesus will find ample room and verge enough for the display of his holy skill. Of you I might say, as he once said of the man born blind: you are here that the works of God may be manifest in you. You, with your guilt and your depravity, you furnish the empty vessels into which his grace may be poured, the sick souls upon whom he may display his matchless power to bless and save. Be hopeful, then, ye sinful ones! Look up this morning for the Lord's approach, and expect that even in you he will work great marvels. This leper shall be a picture-yea, I hope a mirror- in whom you will see yourselves. I do pray that as I go over the details of this miracle many here may put themselves in the leper's place, and do just as the leper did, and receive, just as the leper received, cleansing from the hand of Christ. O Spirit of the living God, the thousands of our Israel now entreat thee to work, that Jesus, the Son of God, may be glorified here and now!

**I.** I will begin my rehearsal of the gospel narrative by remarking, first, that THIS LEPER'S FAITH MADE HIM EAGER TO BE HEALED. He was a leper; I will not stay just now to describe what horrors are compacted into that single word; but he believed that Jesus could cleanse him, and his belief stirred him to an anxious desire to be healed at once.

Alas! we have to deal with spiritual lepers eaten up with the foul disease of sin; but some of them do not believe that they ever can be healed, and the consequence is that despair makes them sin most greedily. "I may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb," is the inward impression of many a sinner when he fears that there is no mercy and no help for him. Because there is no hope, therefore they plunge deeper and yet deeper into the slough of iniquity. Oh, that you might be delivered from that false idea! Mercy still rules the hour. There is hope while Jesus sends his gospel to you, and bids you repent. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins": this is a sweet sentence of a true creed. I believe also in the renewal of



men's hearts; for the Lord can give new hearts and right spirits to the evil and unthankful. I would that you believed it; for if you did, I trust it would quicken you into seeking that your sins might be forgiven and your minds might be renewed. Do you believe it? Then come to Jesus and receive the blessings of free grace.

We have a number of lepers who come in among us whose disease is white upon their brows, and visible to all beholders, and yet they are indifferent: they do not mourn their wickedness, nor wish to be cleansed from it. They sit among God's people, and they listen to the doctrine of a new birth, and the news of pardon, and they hear the teaching as though it had nothing to do with them. If now and then they half wish that salvation would come to them, it is too languid a wish to last. They have not yet so perceived their disease and their danger as to pray to be delivered from them. They sleep on upon the bed of sloth, and care neither for heaven nor hell.

Indifference to spiritual things is the sin of the age. Men are stolid of heart about eternal realities. An awful apathy is upon the multitude. The leper in our text was not so foolish as this. He eagerly desired to be delivered from his dreadful malady: with heart and soul he pined to be cleansed from its terrible defilement. Oh that it were so with you! May the Lord make you feel how depraved your heart is, and how diseased with sin are all the faculties of your soul! Alas, dear friends, — there are some that even love their leprosy! Is it not a sad thing to have to speak thus? Surely, madness is in men's hearts. Men do not wish to be saved from doing evil. They love the ways and wages of iniquity. They would like to go to heaven, but they must have their drunken frolics on the road; they would very well like to be saved from hell, but not from the sin which is the cause of it. Their notion of salvation is not to be saved from the love of evil, and to be made pure and clean; but that is God's meaning when he speaks of salvation. How can they hope to be the slaves of sin, and yet at the same time be free? Our first necessity is to be saved from sinning. The very name of Jesus tells us that: he is called Jesus because "he shall save his people from their sins." These persons do not care for a salvation which would mean self-denial and the giving up of ungodly lusts. O wretched lepers, that count their leprosy to be a beauty, and take pleasure in sin which in the sight of God is far more loathsome than the worst disease of the body! Oh, that Christ Jesus would come and change their views of

things until they were of the same mind as God towards sin; and you know he calls it “that abominable thing which I hate.” Oh, if men could see their love to wrong things to be a disease more sickening than leprosy, they would fain be saved, and saved at once! Holy Spirit, convince of sin, that sinners may be eager to be cleansed!

Lepers were obliged to consort together: lepers associated with lepers, and they must have made up a dreadful confraternity. How glad they would have been to escape from it! But I know spiritual lepers who love the company of their fellow lepers. Yes, and the more leprous a man becomes, the more do they admire him. A bold sinner is often the idol of his comrades. Though foul is his life, others cling to him for that very reason. Such persons like to learn some new bit of wickedness, they are eager to be initiated into a yet darker form of impure pleasure. Oh, how they long to hear that last lascivious song, to read that last impure novel! It seems to be the desire of many to know as much evil as they can. They flock together, and take a dreadful pleasure in talk and action which is the horror of all pure minds. Strange lepers, that heap up leprosy as a treasure! Even those who do not go into gross open sin, yet are pleased with infidel notions and skeptical opinions, which are a wretched form of mental leprosy. O horrible malady, which makes men doubt the word of the living God!

Lepers were not allowed to associate with healthy persons except under severe restrictions. Thus were they separated from their nearest and dearest friends. What a sorrow! Alas! I know persons thus separated, who do not wish to associate with the godly: to them holy company is dull and wearisome; they do not feel free and easy in such society, and therefore they avoid it as much as decency allows. How can they hope to live with saints for ever, when they shun them now as dull and moping acquaintances?

O my hearers, I have come hither this morning in the hope that God would bless the word to some poor sinner who feels he is a sinner, and would fain be cleansed: such is the leper I am seeking with my whole heart. I pray God to bless the word to those who wish to escape from evil company, who would no longer sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor run in the paths of the unholy. To those who have grown weary of their

sinful companions, and would escape from them, lest they should be bound up in bundles with them to burn at the last great day — to such I speak at this time with a loving desire for their salvation. I hope my word will come with divine application to some poor heart here that is crying, “I wish I might be numbered with the people of God. I wish I were fit to be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord. Oh, that my dreadful sinfulness were conquered, so that I could have fellowship with the godly, and be myself one of them!” I hope my Lord has brought to this place just such lost ones, that he may find them. I am looking out for them with tearful eyes. But my feeble eyes cannot read inward character; and it is well that the loving Savior, who discerns the secrets of all hearts, and reads all inward desire, is looking from the watch-towers of heaven, that he may discover those who are coming to him, even though as yet they are a great way off. Oh that sinners may now beg and pray to be rescued from their sins! May those who have become habituated to evil long to break off their evil habits! Happy will the preacher be if he finds himself surrounded with penitents who hate their sins, and guilty ones who cry to be forgiven, and to be so changed that they shall go and sin no more.

**II.** In the second place, let us remark that THIS LEPER’S FAITH WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO MAKE HIM BELIEVE THAT HE COULD BE HEALED OF HIS HIDEOUS DISEASE. Leprosy was an unutterably loathsome disease. As it exists even now, it is described by those who have seen it in such a way that I will not harrow your feelings by repeating all the sickening details. The following quotation may be more than sufficient. Dr. Thomson in his famous work, “The Land and the Book,” speaks of lepers in the East, and says, “The hair falls from the head and eye-brows; the nails loosen, decay and drop off; joint after joint of the fingers and toes shrink up and slowly fall away. The gums are absorbed, and the teeth disappear. The nose, the eyes, the tongue and the palate are slowly consumed.” This disease turns a man into a mass of loathsomeness, a walking pile of pests. Leprosy is nothing better than a horrible and lingering death. The leper in the narrative before us had sad personal experience of this, and yet he believed that Jesus could cleanse him. Splendid faith! Oh that you who are afflicted with moral and spiritual leprosy could believe in this fashion! Jesus Christ of Nazareth can heal even you. Over the horror of leprosy faith triumphed. Oh that in your case it would overcome the terribleness of sin!

Leprosy was known to be incurable. There was no case of a man being cured of real leprosy by any medical or surgical treatment. This made the cure of Naaman in former ages so noteworthy. Observe, moreover, that our Savior himself, so far as I can see, had never healed a leper up to the moment when this poor wretch appeared upon the scene. He had cured fever, and had cast out devils, but the cure of leprosy was in the Savior's life as yet an unexampled thing. Yet this man, putting this and that together, and understanding something of the nature and character of the Lord Jesus Christ, believed that he could cure him of his incurable disease. He felt that even if the great Lord had not yet healed leprosy, he was assuredly capable of doing so great a deed, and he determined to apply to him. Was not this grand faith? Oh that such faith could be found among my hearers at this hour! Here me, O trembling sinner: if thou be as full of sin this morning as an egg is full of meat, Jesus can remove it all. If thy propensities to sin be as untamable as the wild boar of the wood, yet Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, can subdue thine iniquities, and make thee the obedient servant of his love. Jesus can turn the lion into a lamb, and he can do it now. He can transform thee where thou art sitting, saving thee in yonder pew while I am speaking the word. All things are possible to the Savior God; and all things are possible to him that believeth. I would thou hadst such a faith as this leper had, although if it were even less it might serve thy turn, since thou hast not all his difficulties to contend with, since Jesus has already saved many sinners like thyself, and changed many hearts as hard as thine. If he shall regenerate thee, he will be doing for thee no strange thing, but only one of the daily miracles of his grace. He has now healed thousands of thy fellow lepers: canst thou not believe that he can heal the leprosy in thee?

This man had a marvelous faith, thus to believe while he was personally the victim of the mortal malady. It is one thing to trust a doctor when you are well, but quite another to confide in him when your body is rotting away. For a real, conscious sinner to trust the Savior is no mean thing. When you hope that there is some good thing in you, it is easy to be confident; but to be conscious of total ruin and yet to believe in the divine remedy — this is real faith. To see in the sunshine is mere natural vision; but to see in the dark needs the eye of faith: to believe that Jesus has saved you when you see the signs of it, is the result of reason; but to trust him

to cleanse you while you are still defiled with sin — this is the essence of saving faith.

The leprosy was firmly seated and fully developed in this man. Luke says that he was “full of leprosy”: he had as much of the poison in him as one poor body could contain, it had come to its worst stage in him; and yet he believed that Jesus of Nazareth could make him clean. Glorious confidence! O my hearer, if thou art full of sin, if thy propensities and habits have become as bad as bad can be, I pray the Holy spirit to give thee and renew thee, and do it at once. With one word of his mouth Jesus can turn your death into life, your corruption into comeliness. Changes which we cannot work in others, much less in ourselves, Jesus, by his invincible Spirit, can work in the hearts of the ungodly. Of these stones he can raise up children unto Abraham. His moral and spiritual miracles are often wrought upon cases which seem beyond all hope, cases which pity itself endeavors to forget because her efforts have been so long in vain.

I like best about this man’s faith the fact that he did not merely believe that Jesus Christ could cleanse a leper, but that he could cleanse him! He said, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” It is very easy to believe for other people. There is really no faith in such impersonal, proxy confidence. The true faith believes for itself first, and then for others. Oh, I know some of you are saying, “I believe that Jesus can save my brother. I believe that he can save the vilest of the vile. If I heard that he had saved the biggest drunkard in Southward I should not wonder.” Canst thou believe all this, and yet fear that he cannot save thee? This is strange inconsistency. If he heals another man’s leprosy, can he not heal thy leprosy? If one drunkard is saved, why not another? If in one man a passionate temper is subdued, why not in another? If lust, and covetousness, and lying, and pride have been cured in many men, why not in thee? Even if thou art a blasphemer, blasphemy has been cured; why should it not be so in thy case? He can heal thee of that particular form of sin which possesses thee, however high a degree its power may have reached; for nothing is too hard for the Lord. Jesus can change and cleanse thee now. In a moment he can impart a new life and commence a new character. Canst thou believe this? This is the faith which glorified Jesus, and brought healing to this leper; and it is the faith which will save you at once if you now exercise it. O Spirit of the living God, work this faith in

the minds of my dear hearers, that they may thus win their suit with the Lord Jesus, and go their way healed of the plague of sin!

**III.** Now, notice, thirdly, that this man's faith WAS FIXED ON JESUS CHRIST ALONE. Let me read the man's words again. He said unto Jesus, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Throw the emphasis upon the pronouns. See him kneeling before the Lord Jesus and hear him say, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He has no idea of looking to the disciples; no, not to one of them or to all of them. He had no notion of trusting in a measure to the medicine which physicians would prescribe for him. All that is gone. No dream of other hope remains; but with his eye fully fixed on the blessed Miracle-worker of Nazareth, he cries, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." In himself he had no shade of confidence; every delusion of that kind had been banished by a fierce experience of his disease. He knew that none on earth could deliver him, and that by no innate power of constitution could he throw out the poison; but he confidently believed that the Son of God could by himself effect the cure. This was God-given faith — the faith of God's elect, and Jesus was its sole object.

How came this man to have such faith? I cannot tell you the outward means, but I think we may guess without presumption. Had he not heard our Lord preach? Matthew puts this story immediately after the Sermon on the Mount, and says, "When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Had this man managed to stand at the edge of the crowd and hear Jesus speak, and did those wondrous words convince him that the great Teacher was something more than man? As he noted the style, and manner, and matter of that marvelous sermon, did he say within himself, "never man spake like this man. Truly he is the Son of God. I believe in him. I trust him. he can cleanse me"? May God bless the preaching of Christ crucified to you who hear me this day! Is not this used of the Lord, and made to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth?

Perhaps this man had seen our Lord's miracles. I feel sure he had. He had seen the devils cast out, and had heard of Peter's wife's mother, who had lain sick of a fever, and had been instantaneously recovered. The leper

might very properly argue — To do this requires omnipotence; and once granted that omnipotence is at work, then omnipotence can as well deal with leprosy as with fever. Did he not reason well if he argued thus — What the Lord has done, he can do again: if in one case he has displayed almighty power, he can display that same power in another case? Thus would the acts of the Lord corroborate his words, and furnish a sure foundation for the leper's hope. My hearer, have you not seen Jesus save others? Have you not at least read of his miracles of grace? Believe him, then, for his works' sake, and say to him, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

Besides, I think this man may have heard something of the story of Christ, and may have been familiar with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. We cannot tell but some disciple may have informed him of John's witness concerning the Christ, and of the signs and tokens which supported John's testimony. He may thus have discerned in the Son of Man the Messiah of God, the Incarnate Deity. At any rate, as knowledge must come before faith, he had received knowledge enough to feel that he could trust this glorious personage, and to believe that, if he willed it, Jesus could make him clean. O my dear hearers, cannot you trust the Lord Jesus Christ in this way? Do you not believe — I hope you do — that he is the Son of God; and if so, why not trust him? He that was born of Mary at Bethlehem was God over all, blessed forever! Do you not believe this? Why, then, do you not rely upon God in our nature? You believe in his consecrated life, his suffering death, his resurrection, his ascension, his sitting in power at the right hand of the Father; why do you not trust him? God hath highly exalted him, and caused all fullness to dwell in him: he is able to save unto the uttermost, why do you not come to him? Believe that he is able, and then with all thy sins before thee, red like scarlet — and with all thy sinful habits, and thy evil propensities before thee, ingrained like the leopard's spots — believe that the Savior of men can at once make thee whiter than snow as to past guilt, and free from the present and future tyranny of evil. A divine Savior must be able to cleanse thee from all sin. Only Jesus can do it, but he can do it — do it himself alone, do it now, do it in thee, do it with a word. If Jesus wills to do it, it is all that is wanted; for his will is the will of the Almighty Lord. Say, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Faith must be fixed alone

on Jesus. None other name is given among men whereby we must be saved. I do pray the Lord to give that faith to all my dear friends present this morning who as yet have not received cleansing at the Lord's hands. Jesus is God's ultimatum of salvation: the unique hope of guilty men both as to pardon and renewal. Accept him even now.

**IV.** Now let me go a step further: THIS MAN'S FAITH HAD RESPECT TO A REAL MATTER-OF-FACT CURE. He did not think of the Lord Jesus Christ as a priest who would perform certain ceremonies over him, and formally say, "Thou art clean"; for that would not have been true. He wanted really to be delivered from the leprosy; to have those dry scales, into which his skin kept turning, taken all away, that his flesh might become as the flesh of a little child; he wanted that the rottenness, which was eating up his body, should be stayed, and that health should be actually restored. Friends, it is easy enough to believe in a mere priestly absolution if you have enough credulity; but we need more than this. It is very easy to believe in Baptismal Regeneration, but what is the good of it? What practical result does it produce? A child remains the same after it has been baptismally regenerated as it was before, and it grows up to prove it. It is easy to believe in Sacramentarianism if you are foolish enough; but there is nothing in it when you believe in it. No sanctifying power comes with outward ceremonials in and of themselves. To believe that the Lord Jesus Christ can make us love the good things which once we despised, and shun those evil things in which we once took pleasure — this is to believe in him indeed and of a truth. Jesus can totally change the nature, and make a sinner into a saint. This is faith of a practical kind; this is a faith worth having.

None of us would imagine that this leper meant that the Lord Jesus could make him feel comfortable in remaining a leper. Some seem to fancy that Jesus came to let us go on in our sins with a quiet conscience; but he did nothing of the kind. His salvation is cleansing from sin, and if we love sin we are not saved from it. We cannot have justification without sanctification. There is no use in quibbling about it; there must be a change, a radical change, a change of heart, or else we are not saved. I put it now to you, Do you desire a moral and a spiritual change, a change of life, thought and motive? This is what Jesus gives. Just as this leper needed a thorough physical change, so do you need an entire renewal of your spiritual nature,



so as to become a new creature in Jesus Christ. Oh that many here would desire this, for it would be a cheering sign. The man who desires to be pure is beginning to be pure; the man who sincerely longs to conquer sin has struck the first blow already. The power of sin is shaken in that man who looks to Jesus for deliverance from it. The man who frets under the yoke of sin will not long be a slave to it; if he can believe that Jesus Christ is able to set him free, he shall soon quit his bondage. Some sins which have hardened down into habits, will yet disappear in a moment when Jesus Christ looks upon a man in love. I have known many instances of persons who, for many years, had never spoken without an oath, or a filthy expression, who, being converted, have never been known to use such language again, and have scarcely ever been tempted in that direction. This is one of the sins which seem to die at the first shot, and it is a very wonderful thing it should be so. Others I have known so altered at once that the very propensity which was strongest in them has been the last to annoy them afterwards: they have had such a reversion of the mind's action that, while other sins have worried them for years, and they have had to set a strict watch against them, yet their favorite and dominant sin has never again had the slightest influence over them, except to excite an outburst of horror and deep repentance. Oh, that you had faith in Jesus that he could thus cast down and cast out your reigning sins! Believe in the conquering arm of the Lord Jesus, and he will do it. Conversion is the standing miracle of the church. Where it is genuine, it is as clear a proof of divine power going with the gospel, as was the casting out of devils, or even the raising of the dead in our Lord's day. We see these conversions still; and have proof that Jesus is able to work great moral marvels still. O my hearer, where art thou? Canst thou not believe that Jesus is able to make a new man of thee? O brethren, who have been saved, I entreat you to breathe a prayer at this time for those who are not yet cleansed from the foul disease of sin. Pray that they may have grace to believe in the Lord Jesus for purification of heart, pardon of sin, and the implantation of eternal life. Then when faith is given, the Lord Jesus will work their sanctification, and none shall effectually hinder. In silence let us pray for a moment. (Here there was a pause, and silent prayer went up to heaven.)

**V.** And now we will go another step: THIS MAN'S FAITH WAS ATTENDED WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE A HESITANCY. But after thinking it over a

good deal, I am hardly inclined to think it such a hesitancy as many have judged it to be. He said, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." There was an "if" in this speech, and that "if" has aroused the suspicions of many preachers. Some think it supposes that he doubted our Lord's willingness. I hardly think that the language justly bears so harsh a construction. What he meant may have been this — "Lord, I do not know yet that thou art sent to heal lepers; I have not seen that thou hast ever done so; but, still, if it be within the compass of thy commission, I believe thou wilt do it, and assuredly thou canst if thou wilt. Thou canst heal not only some lepers, but me in particular; thou canst make me clean." Now, I think this was a legitimate thing for him to say, as he had not seen a leper healed — "If it be within the compass of thy commission, I believe thou canst make me whole."

Moreover, I admire in this text the deference which the leper pays to the sovereignty of Christ's will as to the bestowal of his gifts. "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"; — as much as to say, "I know thou hast a right to distribute these great favors exactly as thou pleasest. I have no claim upon thee; I cannot say that thou art bound to make me clean; I appeal to thy pity and free favor. The matter remains with thy will." The man had never read the text which saith, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," for it was not yet written; but he had in his mind the humble spirit suggested by that grand truth. He owned that grace must come as a free gift of God's good pleasure when he said "Lord, if thou wilt." Beloved, we need never raise a question as to the Lord's will to give grace when we have the will to receive it; but still, I would have every sinner feel that he has no claim upon God for anything. O sinner, if the Lord should give thee up, as he did the heathen described in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, thou deservest it. If he should never look upon thee with an eye of love, what couldst thou say against his righteous sentence? Thou hast wilfully sinned, and thou deservest to be left in thy sin. Confessing all this, we still cling to our firm belief in the power of grace, and cry, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst." We appeal to our Savior's pitying love, relying upon his boundless power.

See, also, how the leper, to my mind, really speaks without any hesitancy, if you understand him. He does not say, "Lord, if thou putttest out thy hand, thou canst make me clean"; nor, "Lord, if thou speakest, thou canst

make me clean"; but only, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean": thy mere will can do it. Oh, splendid faith! If you are inclined to spy a little halting in it, I would have you admire it for running so well with a lame foot. If there was a weakness anywhere in his faith, still it was so strong that the weakness only manifests its strength. Sinner, it is so; and I pray God that thy heart may grasp it — if the Lord wills it he can make thee clean. Believest thou this? If so, carry out practically what thy faith will suggest to thee — namely, that thou come to Jesus and plead with him, and get from him the cleansing which thou needest. To that end I am hoping to lead thee, as the Holy Spirit shall enable me.

**VI.** In the sixth place, notice that THIS MAN'S FAITH HAD EARNEST ACTION FLOWING OUT OF IT. Believing that, if Jesus willed, he could make him clean, what did the leper do? At once he came to Jesus. I know not from what distance, but he came as near to Jesus as he could. Then we read that he besought him; that is to say, he pleaded, and pleaded, and pleaded again. He cried, "Lord, cleanse me! Lord heal my leprosy!" Nor was this all; he fell on his knees and worshipped; for we read, "Kneeling down to him." He not only knelt, but knelt to Jesus. He had no difficulty as to paying him divine honor. He worshipped the Lord Christ, paying him reverent homage. He then went on to honor him by an open acknowledgment of his power, his marvelous power, his infinite power, by saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." I should not wonder if some that stood by began to smile at what they thought the poor man's fanatical credulity. They murmured, "What a poor fool as this leper is, to think that Jesus of Nazareth can cure him of his leprosy!" Such a confession of faith had seldom been heard. But whatever critics and skeptics might think, this brave man boldly declared, "Lord, this is my confession of faith: I believe that if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Now, poor soul, thou that art full of guilt, and hardened in sin, and yet anxious to be healed, look straight away to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is here now. In the preaching of the gospel he is with us always. With the eyes of thy mind behold him, for he beholdeth thee. Thou knowest that he lives, even though thou seest him not. Believe in this living Jesus; believe for perfect cleansing. Cry to him, worship him, adore him, trust him. He is very God of very God; bow before him, and cast thyself upon his mercy. Go home, and on thy knees say, "Lord, I believe that thou canst make me

clean.” He will hear your cry, and will save you. There will be no interval between your prayer and the gracious reward of faith, of which I am now to speak.

**VII.** Lastly, HIS FAITH HAD ITS REWARD. Have patience with me just a minute. The reward of this man’s faith was, first, that his very words were treasured up. Matthew, Mark, Luke, all three of them record the precise words which this man used: “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” They evidently did not see so much to find fault with in them as some have done; on the contrary, they thought them gems to be placed in the setting of their gospels. Three times over are they recorded, because they are such a splendid confession of faith for a poor diseased leper to have made. I believe that God is as much glorified by that one sentence of the leper as by the song of Cherubim and Seraphim, when they continually do cry, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth.” A sinner’s lips declaring his confident faith in God’s own Son can breathe sonnets unto God more sweet than those of the angelic choirs. This man’s first faith- words are folded up in the fair linen of three evangels, and laid up in the treasury of the house of the Lord. God values the language of humble confidence.

His next reward was, that Jesus echoed his words. He said, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean”; and Jesus said, “I will; be thou clean.” As an echo answers to the voice, so did Jesus to his supplicant. The Lord Jesus was so pleased with this man’s words that he caught them as they leaped out of his mouth, and used them himself, saying, “I will; be thou clean.” If you can only get, then, as far as this leper’s confession, I believe that our Lord Jesus from his throne above will answer to your prayer.

So potent were the words of this leper that they moved our Lord very wonderfully. Read the forty-first verse: “And Jesus, moved with compassion.” The Greek word here used, if I were to pronounce it in your hearing, would half suggest its own meaning. It expresses a stirring of the entire manhood, a commotion in all the inward parts. The heart and all the vitals of the man are in active movement. The Savior was greatly moved. You have seen a man moved, have you not? When a strong man is unable any longer to restrain himself, and is forced to give way to his feelings, you have seen him tremble all over, and at last burst out into an evident break-down. It was just so with the Savior: his pity moved him, his delight

in the leper's faith mastered him. When he heard the man speak with such confidence in him, the Savior was moved with a sacred passion, which, as it was in sympathy with the leper, is called "compassion." Oh, to think that a poor leper should have such power over the divine Son of God! Yet, my hearer, in all thy sin and misery, if thou canst believe in Jesus, thou canst move the heart of thy blessed Savior. Yea, even now his bowels yearn towards thee.

No sooner was our Lord Jesus thus moved than out went his hand, and he touched the man and healed him immediately. It did not require a long time for the working of the cure; but the leper's blood was cooled and cleansed in a single second. Our Lord could work this miracle, and make all things new in the man; for "all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." He restored the poor, decaying, putrefying body of this man, and he was cleansed at once. To make him quite sure that he was cleansed, the Lord Jesus bade him go to the priest, and seek a certificate of health. He was so clean that he might be examined by the appointed sanitary authority, and come off without suspicion. The cure which he had received was a real and radical one, and therefore he might go away at once, and get the certificate of it. If our converts will not bear practical tests, they are worth nothing; let even our enemies judge whether they are not better men and women when Jesus has renewed them. If Jesus saves a sinner, he does not mind all men testing the change. Jesus does not seek display, but he seeks examination from those able to judge. Our converts will bear the test. Come hither, angels! Come hither, pure intelligences, able to observe men in secret! Here is a wretch of a sinner who came hither this morning. He seemed first cousin to the devil; but the Lord Jesus Christ has converted him and changed him. Now look at him, ye angels; look at him at home in his chamber! Watch him in private life. We can read your verdict. "There is joy in presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth"; and this proves what you think. It is such a wonderful change, and angels are so sure of it, that they give their certificates at once. How do they give their certificates? Why, each one manifests his joy as he sees the sinner turning from his sinful ways. Oh, that the angels might have work of this kind to do this morning! Dear hearer, may you be one over whom they rejoice! If thou believest on Jesus Christ, and if thou wilt trust him, as the sent One of God, fully and

entirely with thy soul, he will make thee clean. Behold him on the cross, and see sin put away. Behold him risen from the dead, and see new life bestowed. Behold him enthroned in power, and see evil conquered. I am ready to be bound for my Lord, to be his surety, that if thou, my hearer, wilt come to him, he will make thee clean. Believe thy Savior, and thy cure is wrought. God help thee, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~Mark~~ Mark 1:16-45.


HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 428, 602, 546.


# THE RENT VEIL

## SERMON NO. 2015

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 25TH, 1888,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom —  Matthew 27:50-51.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the, veil, that is to say, his flesh —  Hebrews 10:19-20.

THE DEATH of our Lord Jesus Christ was fitly surrounded by miracles; yet it is itself so much greater a wonder than all besides, that it as far exceeds them as the sun outshines the planets which surround it. It seems natural enough that the earth should quake, that tombs should be opened, and that the veil of the temple should be rent, when He who only hath immortality gives up the ghost. The more you think of the death of the Son of God, the more will you be amazed at it. As much as a miracle excels a common fact, so doth this wonders of wonders rise above all miracles of power. That the divine Lord, even though veiled in mortal flesh, should condescend to be subject to the power of death, so as to bow His head on the cross, and submit to be laid in the tomb, is among mysteries the greatest. The death of Jesus is the marvel of time and eternity, which, as Aaron's rod swallowed up all the rest, takes up into itself all lesser marvels.

Yet the rending of the veil of the temple is not a miracle to be lightly passed over. It was made of "fine twined linen, with Cherubims of cunning work." This gives the idea of a substantial fabric, a piece of lasting tapestry, which would have endured the severest strain. No human hands could have torn that sacred covering; and it could not have been divided in

the midst by any accidental cause; yet, strange to say, on the instant when the holy person of Jesus was rent by death, the great veil which concealed the holiest of all was “rent in twain from the top to the bottom.” What did it mean? It meant much more than I can tell you now.

It is not fanciful to regard it as a solemn act of mourning on the part of the house of the Lord. In the East men express their sorrow by rending their garments; and the temple, when it beheld its Master die, seemed struck with horror, and rent its veil. Shocked at the sin of man, indignant at the murder of its Lord, in its sympathy with Him who is the true temple of God, the outward symbol tore its holy vestment from the top to the bottom. Did not the miracle also mean that from that hour the whole system of types, and shadows, and ceremonies had come to an end? The ordinances of an earthly priesthood were rent with that veil. In token of the death of the ceremonial law, the soul of it quitted its sacred shrine, and left its bodily tabernacle as a dead thing. The legal dispensation is over. The rent of the veil seemed to say — “Henceforth God dwells no longer in the thick darkness of the Holy of Holies, and shines forth no longer from between the cherubim. The special enclosure is broken up, and there is no inner sanctuary for the earthly high priest to enter: typical atonements and sacrifices are at an end.”

According to the explanation given in our second text, the rending of the veil chiefly meant that the way into the holiest, which was not before made manifest, was now laid open to all believers. Once in the year the high priest solemnly lifted a corner of this veil with fear and trembling, and with blood and holy incense he passed into the immediate presence of Jehovah; but the tearing of the veil laid open the secret place. The rent front top to bottom gives ample space for all to enter who are called of God’s grace, to approach the throne, and to commune with the Eternal One. Upon that subject I shall try to speak this morning, praying in my inmost soul that you and I, with all other believers, may have boldness actually to enter into that which is within the veil at this time of our assembling for worship. Oh, that the Spirit of God would lead us into the nearest fellowship which mortal men can have with the Infinite Jehovah!

First, this morning, I shall ask you to consider what has been done. The veil has been rent. Secondly, we will remember what we therefore have: we



have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood Jesus.” Then, thirdly, we will consider how we exercise this grace: we “enter by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.”

**I.** First, think of WHAT HAS BEEN DONE. In actual historical fact the glorious veil of the temple has been rent in twain from the top to the bottom: as a matter of spiritual fact, which is far more important to us, the separating legal ordinance is abolished. There was under the law this ordinance — that no man should ever go into the holiest of all, with the one exception of the high priest, and he but once in the year, and not without blood. If any man had attempted to enter there he must have died, as guilty of great presumption and of profane intrusion into the secret place of the Most High. Who could stand in the presence of Him who is a consuming fire? This ordinance of distance runs all through the law; for even the holy place, which was the vestibule of the Holy of Holies, was for the priests alone. The place of the people was one of distance. At the very first institution of the law when God descended upon Sinai, the ordinance was, “Thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about,” There was no invitation to draw near. Not that they desired to do so, for the mountain was together on a smoke, and “even Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.” “The Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish.” If so much as a beast touch the mountain it must be stoned, or thrust through with a dart. The spirit of the old law was reverent distance. Moses and here and there a man chosen by God, might come near to Jehovah; but as for the bulk of people, the command was, “Draw not nigh hither.” When the Lord revealed His glory at the giving of the law, we read — “When the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.” All this is ended. The precept to keep back is abrogated, and the invitation is, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.” “Let it draw near” is now the filial spirit of the gospel. How thankful I am for this! What a joy it is to my soul! Some of God’s people have not yet realized this gracious fact, for still they worship afar off. Very much of prayer is to be highly commended for its reverence; but it has in it a lack of childlike confidence. I can admire the solemn and stately language of worship which recognizes the greatness of God; but it will not warm my heart nor express

my soul until it has also blended therewith the joyful nearness of that perfect love which casteth out fear, and ventures to speak with our Father in heaven as a child speaketh with its father on earth. My brother, no veil remains. Why dost thou stand afar off, and tremble like a slave? Draw near with full assurance of faith. The veil is rent: access is free. Come boldly to the throne of grace. Jesus has made thee nigh, as nigh to God as even He Himself is. Though we speak of the holiest of all, even the secret place of the Most High, yet it is of this place of awe, even of this sanctuary of Jehovah, that the veil is rent; therefore, let nothing hinder thine entrance. Assuredly no law forbids thee; but infinite love invites thee to draw nigh to God.

This rending of the veil signified, also, the removal of the separating sin. Sin is, after all, the great divider between God and man. That veil of blue and purple and fine twined linen could not really separate man from God: for He is, as to His omnipresence, not far from any one of us. Sin is a far more effectual wall of separation: it opens in abyss between the sinner and his Judge. Sin shuts out prayer, and praise, and every form of religious exercise. Sin makes God walk contrary to us, because we walk contrary to Him. Sin, by separating the soul from God, causes spiritual death, which is both the effect and the penalty of transgression. How can two walk together except they be agreed? How can a holy God have fellowship with unholy creatures? Shall justice dwell with injustice? Shall perfect purity abide with the abominations of evil? No, it cannot be. Our Lord Jesus Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He taketh away the sin of the world, and so the veil is rent. By the shedding of His most precious blood we are cleansed from all sin, and that most gracious promise of the new covenant is fulfilled — “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” When sin is gone, the barrier is broken down, the unfathomable gulf is filled. Pardon, which removes sin, and justification, which brings righteousness, make up a deed of clearance so real and so complete that nothing now divides the sinner from his reconciled God. ‘The Judge is now the Father: He, who once must necessarily have condemned, is found justly absolving and accepting. In this double sense the veil is rent: the separating ordinance is abrogated, and the separating sin is forgiven.

Next, be it remembered that the separating sinfulness is also taken away through our Lord Jesus. It is not only what we have done, but what we are

that keeps us apart from God. We have sin engrained in us: even those who have grace dwelling them have to complain, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." How can we commune with God with our eyes blinded, our ears stopped, our hearts hardened, and our senses deadened by sin? Our whole nature is tainted, poisoned, perverted by evil; how can we know the Lord? Beloved, through the death of our Lord Jesus the covenant of grace is established with us, and its gracious provisions are on this wise: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." When this is the case, when the will of God is inscribed on the heart, and the nature is entirely changed, then is the dividing veil which hides us from God taken away: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Blessed are all they that love righteousness and follow after it, for they are in a way in which the Righteous One can walk in fellowship with them. Spirits that are like God are not divided from God. Difference of nature hangs up a veil; but the new birth, and the sanctification which follows upon it, through the precious death of Jesus, remove that veil. He that hates sin, strives after holiness, and labors to perfect it in the fear of God, is in fellowship with God. It is a blessed thing when we love what God loves, when we seek what God seeks, when we are in sympathy with divine aims, and are obedient to divine commands: for with such persons will the Lord dwell. When grace makes us partakers of the divine nature; then are we at one with the Lord, and the veil is taken away.

"Yes," saith one, "I see now how the veil is taken away in three different fashions; but still God is God, and we are but poor puny men: between God and man there must of necessity be a separating veil, caused by the great disparity between the Creator and the creature. How can the finite and the infinite commune? God is all in all, and more than all; we are nothing, and less than nothing; how can we meet?" When the Lord does come near to I His favored ones, they own how incapable they are of enduring the excessive glory. Even the beloved John said, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." When we have been especially conscious of the presence and working of our Lord, we have felt our flesh creep, and our blood chill; and then we have understood what Jacob meant when he said, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God,

and this is the gate of heaven.” All this is true; for the Lord saith, “Thou canst not see my face and live.” Although this is a much thinner veil than those I have already mentioned, yet it is a veil; and it is hard for man to be at home with God. But the Lord Jesus bridges the separating distance. Behold the blessed Son of God has come into the world, and taken upon Himself our nature! “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of the flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.” Though He is God as God is God, yet is He as surely man as man is man. Mark well how in the, person of the Lord Jesus we see God and man in the closest conceivable alliance; for they are united in one person forever. The gulf is completely filled by the fact that Jesus has gone through with us even to the bitter end, to death, even to the death of the cross. He has followed out the career of manhood even to the tomb; and thus we see that the veil, which hung between the nature of God and the nature of man, is rent in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We enter into the holiest of all through His flesh, which links manhood to Godhead.

Now, you see what it is to have the veil taken away. Solemnly note that this avails only for believers: those who refuse Jesus refuse the only way of access to God. God is not approachable, except through the rending of the veil by the death of Jesus. There was one typical way to the mercy-seat of old, and that was through the turning aside of the veil; there was no other. And there is now no other way for any of you to come into fellowship with God, except through the rent veil, even the death of Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin. Come this way, and you may come freely. Refuse to come this way, and there hangs between you and God an impassable veil. Without Christ you are without God, and without hope. Jesus Himself assures you, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” God grant that this may not happen to any of you!

For believers the veil is not rolled up, but rent. The veil was not unhooked, and carefully folded up, and put away, so that it might be put in its place at some future time. Oh, no! But the divine hand took it and rent it front top to bottom. It can never be hung up again; that is impossible. Between those who are in Christ Jesus and the great God, there will never be another separation. “Who shall separate us from the love of God?” Only one veil was made, and as that is rent, the one and only separator is

destroyed. I delight to think of this. The devil himself can never divide me from God now. He may and will attempt to shut me out from God; but the worst he could do would be to hang up a rent veil. What would that avail but to exhibit his impotence? God has rent the veil, and the devil cannot mend it. There is access between a believer and his God; and there must be such free access forever, since the veil is not rolled up, and put on one side to be hung up again in days to come; but it is rent, and rendered useless.

The rent is not in one corner, but in the midst, as Luke tells us. It is not a slight rent through which we may see a little; but it is rent from the top to the bottom. There is an entrance made for the greatest sinners. If there had only been a small hole cut through it, the lesser offenders might have crept through; but what an act of abounding mercy is this, that the veil is rent in the midst, and rent from top to bottom, so that the chief of sinners may find ample passage! This also shows that for believers there is no hindrance to the fullest and freest access to God. Oh, for much boldness, this morning, to come where God has not only set open the door, but has lifted the door from its hinges; yea, removed it, post, and bar, and all!

I want you to notice that this veil, when it was rent, was rent by God, not by man. It was not the act of an irreverent mob; it was not the midnight outrage of a set of profane priests: it was the act of God alone. Nobody stood within the veil; and on the outer side of it stood the priests only fulfilling their ordinary vocation of offering sacrifice. It must have astounded them when they saw that holy place laid bare in a moment. How they fled, as they saw that massive veil divided without human hand in a second of time! Who rent it? Who but God Himself? If another had done it, there might have been a mistake about it, and the mistake might need to be remedied by replacing the curtain; but if the Lord has done it, it is done rightly, it is done finally, it is done irreversibly. It is God Himself who has laid sin on Christ, and in Christ has put that sin away. God Himself has opened the gate of heaven to believers, and cast up a highway along which the souls of men may travel to Himself. God Himself has set the ladder between earth and heaven. Come to Him now, ye humble ones. Behold, He sets before you an open door!

**II.** And now I ask you to follow me, dear friends, in the second place, to an experimental realization of my subject. We now notice **WHAT WE HAVE**: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest,” Observe the threefold “having” in the paragraph now before us, and be not content without the whole three. We have “boldness to enter in.” There are degrees in boldness; but this is one of the highest. When the veil was rent it required some boldness to look within. I wonder whether the priests at the altar did have the courage to gaze upon the mercy-seat. I suspect that they were so struck with amazement that they fled from the altar, fearing sudden death. It requires a measure of boldness steadily to look upon the mystery of God: “Which things the angels desire to look into.” It is well not to look with a merely curious eye into the deep things of God. I question whether any man is able to pry into the mystery of the Trinity without great risk. Some, thinking to look there with the eyes of their natural intellect, have been blinded by the light of that sun, and have henceforth wandered in darkness. It needs boldness to look into the splendors of redeeming and electing love. If any did look into the holiest when the veil was rent, they were among the boldest of men; for others must have feared lest the fate of the men of Bethshemesh would be theirs. Beloved, the Holy Spirit invites you to look into the holy place, and view it all with reverent eye for it is full of teaching to you. Understand the mystery of the mercy-seat, and of the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold, and of the pot of manna, and of the tables of stone, and of Aaron’s rod that budded. Look, look boldly through Jesus Christ: but do not content yourself with looking! Hear what the text says: “Having boldness to enter in.” Blessed be God if He has taught us this sweet way of no longer looking from afar, but of entering into the inmost shrine with confidence! “Boldness to enter in” is what we ought to have.

Let us follow the example of the high priest, and, having entered, let us perform the functions of one who enters in. “Boldness to enter in” suggests that we act as men who are in their proper places. To stand within the veil filled the servant of God with an overpowering sense of the divine presence. If ever in his life he was near to God, he was certainly near to God then, when quite alone, shut in, and excluded from all the world, he had no one with him, except the glorious Jehovah. O my beloved, may we this morning enter into the holiest in this sense! Shut out

front the world, both wicked and Christian, let us know that the Lord is here, most near and manifest. Oh that we may now cry out with Hagar, "Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" Oh, how sweet to realize by personal enjoyment the presence of Jehovah! How cheering to feel that the Lord of hosts is with us! We know our God to be a very present help in trouble. It is one of the greatest joys out of heaven to be able to sing — Jehovah Shammah — the Lord is here. At first we tremble in the divine presence; but as we feel more of the spirit of adoption we draw near with sacred delight, and feel so fully at home with our God that we sing with Moses, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." Do not live as if God were as far off from you as the east is from the west. Live not far below on the earth; but live on high, as if you were in heaven. In heaven You Will be with God; but on earth He will be with you: is there much difference? He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Jesus hath made us nigh by His precious blood. Try day by day to live in as great nearness to God, as the high priest felt when he stood for awhile within the secret of Jehovah's tabernacle.

The high priest had a sense of communion with God; he was not only near, but he spoke with God. I cannot tell what he said, but I should think that on the special day the high priest unburdened himself of the load of Israel's sin and sorrow, and made known his requests unto the Lord. Aaron, standing there alone, must have been filled with memories of his own faultiness, and of the idolatries and backslidings of the people. God shone upon him, and he bowed before God. He may have heard things which it was not lawful for him to utter, and other things which he could not have uttered if they had been lawful. Beloved, do you know what it is to commune with God? Words are poor vehicles for this fellowship; but what a blessed thing it is! Proofs of the existence of God are altogether superfluous to those of us who are in the habit of conversing with the Eternal One. If anybody were to write an essay to prove the existence of my wife, or my son, I certainly should not read it, except for the amusement of the thing; and proofs of the existence of God to the man who communes with God are much the same. Many of you walk with God: what bliss! Fellowship with the Most High is elevating, purifying, strengthening. Enter into it boldly. Enter into His revealed thoughts, even

as He graciously enters into yours: rise to His plans, as He condescends to yours; ask to be uplifted to Him, even as He deigns to dwell with you.

This is what the rent of the veil brings us when we have boldness to enter in; but, mark you, the rent veil brings us nothing until we have boldness to enter in. Why stand we without? Jesus brings us near, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Let us not be slow to take up our freedom, and come boldly to the throne. The high priest entered within the veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, with blood, and with incense, that he might pray for Israel; and there he stood before the Most High, pleading with Him to bless the people. O beloved, prayer is a divine institution, and it belongs to us. But there are many sorts of prayers. There is the prayer of one who seems shut out from God's holy temple; there is the prayer of another who stands in the court of the Gentiles afar off, looking towards the temple; there is the prayer of one who gets where Israel stands and pleads with the God of the chosen; there is the prayer in the court of the priests, when the sanctified man of God makes intercession; but the best prayer of all is offered in the holiest of all. There is no fear about prayer being heard when it is offered in the holiest. The very position of the man proves that he is accepted with God. He is standing on the surest ground of acceptance, and he is so near to God that his every desire is heard. There the man is seen through and through; for he is very near to God. His thoughts are read, his tears are seen, his sighs are heard; for he has boldness to enter in. He may ask what he will, and it shall be done unto him. As the altar sanctifieth the gift, so the most holy place, entered by the blood of Jesus, secures a certain answer to the prayer that is offered therein. God give us such power in prayer! It is a wonderful thing that the Lord should hearken to the voice of a man; yet are there such men. Luther came out of his closet, and cried, *Vici* — "I have conquered." He had not yet met his adversaries; but as he had prevailed with God for men, he felt that he should prevail with men for God.

But the high priest, if you recollect, after he had communed and prayed with God, came out and blessed the people. He put on his garments of glory and beauty, which he had laid aside when he went into the holy place, for there he stood in simple white, and nothing else; and now he came out wearing the breast-plate and all his precious ornaments, and he



blessed the people. That is what you will do if you have the boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus: you will bless the people that surround you. The Lord has blessed you, and He will make you a blessing. Your ordinary conduct and conversation will be a blessed example; the words you speak for Jesus will be like a dew from the Lord: the sick will be comforted by your words; the despondent will be encouraged by your faith; the lukewarm will be recovered by your love. You will be, practically, saying to each one who knows you, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and give thee peace." You will become a channel of blessing: "Out of your belly shall flow rivers of living water." May we each one have boldness to enter in, that we may come forth laden with benedictions!

If you will kindly look at the text, you will notice, what I shall merely hint at, that this boldness is well grounded. I always like to see the apostle using a "therefore": "Having therefore boldness." Paul is often a true poet, but he is always a correct logician; he is as logical as if he were dealing with mathematics rather than theology. Here he writes one of his therefores.

Why is it that we have boldness? Is it not because of our relationship to Christ which makes us "brethren?" "Having therefore, brethren, boldness." The feeblest believer has as much right to enter into the holy places as Paul had; because he is one of the brotherhood. I remember a rhyme by John Ryland, in which he says of heaven —

***"They shall all be there, the great and the small;  
Poor I shall shake hands with the blessed St. Paul."***

I have no doubt we shall have such a position, and such fellowship. Meanwhile, we do shake hands with I Him this morning as he calls us brethren. We are brethren to one another, because we are brethren to Jesus. Where we see the apostle go, we will go; yea, rather, where we see the Great Apostle and High Priest of our profession enter, we will follow. "Having therefore, boldness."

Beloved, we have now no fear of death in the most holy place. The high priest, whoever he might be, must always have dreaded that solemn day of atonement, when he had to pass into the silent and secluded place. I cannot tell whether it is true, but I have read that there is at tradition

among the Jews, that a rope was fastened to the high priest's foot that they might draw out his corpse in case he died before the Lord. I should not wonder if their superstition devised such a thing, for it is an awful position for a man to enter into the secret dwelling of Jehovah. But we cannot die in the holy place now, since Jesus has died for us. The death of Jesus is the guarantee of the eternal life of all for whom He died. We have boldness to enter, for we shall not perish.

Our boldness arises from the perfection of His sacrifice. Read the fourteenth verse: "He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." We rely upon the sacrifice of Christ, believing that He was such a perfect Substitute for us, that it is not possible for us to die after our Substitute has died; and we must be accepted, because He is accepted. We believe that the precious blood has so effectually and eternally put away sin from us, that we are no longer obnoxious to the wrath of God. We may safely stand where sin must be smitten, if there be any sin upon us; for we are so washed, so cleaned, and so fully justified that we are accepted in the Beloved. Sin is so completely lifted from us by the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, that we have boldness to enter where Jehovah Himself dwells.

Moreover, we have his for certain, that as a priest had a right to dwell near to God, we have that privilege; for Jesus hath made us kings and priests unto God, and all the privileges of the office come to us with the office itself. We have a mission within the holy place; we are called to enter there upon holy business, and so we have no fear of being intruders. A burglar may enter a house, but he does not enter with boldness; he is always afraid lest he should be surprised. You might enter a stranger's house, without an invitation, but You Would feel no boldness there. We do not enter the holiest as housebreakers, nor as strangers; we come in obedience to a call, to fulfill our office. When once we accept the sacrifice of Christ, we are at home with God. Where should a child be bold but in his father's house? Where should a priest stand but in the temple of his God, for whose service he is set apart? Where should a blood-washed sinner live but with his God, to whom he is reconciled?

It is a heavenly joy to feel this boldness! We have now such a love for God, and such a delight in Him, that it never crosses our minds that we are trespassers when we draw near to Him. We never say, "God, my dread,"

but “God, my exceeding joy.” His name is the music to which our lives are set: though God be a consuming fire we love Him as such, for He will only consume our dross, and that we desire to lose. Under no aspect is God now distasteful to us. We delight in Him, be He what He may. So you see, beloved, we have good grounds for boldness when we enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

I cannot leave this point until I have reminded you that we may have this boldness of entering in at all times, because the veil is always rent, and is never restored to its old place. “The Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy Place within the veil before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not”; but the Lord saith not so to us. Dear child of God, you may at all times have “boldness to enter in.” The veil is rent both day and night. Yea, let me say it, even when thine eye of faith is dim, still enter in; when evidences are dark, still have “boldness to enter in”; and even if thou hast unhappily sinned, remember that access is open to thy penitent prayer. Come still through the rent veil, sinner as thou art. What though thou hast backslidden, what though thou art grieved with the sense of thy wanderings, come even now! “Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart,” but enter at once; for the veil is not there to exclude thee, though doubt and unbelief may make you think it is so. The veil cannot be there, for it was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

**III.** My time has fled, and I shall not have space to speak as I meant to do upon the last point — **HOW WE EXERCISE THIS GRACE.** Let me give you the notes of what I would have said.

Let us at this hour enter into the holiest. Behold the way! We come by the way of atonement: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” I have been made to feel really ill through the fierce and blasphemous words that have been used of late by gentlemen of the modern school concerning the precious blood. I will not defile my lips by a repetition of the thrice-cursed things which they have dared to utter while trampling on the blood of Jesus. Everywhere throughout this divine Book you meet with the precious blood. How can he call himself a Christian who speaks in flippant and profane language of the blood of atonement? My brothers, there is no way into the holiest,

even though the veil be rent, without blood. You might suppose that the high priest of old brought the blood because the veil was there; but you have to bring it with you though the veil is gone. The way is open, and you have boldness to enter; but not without the blood of Jesus. It would be an unholy boldness which would think of drawing near to God without the blood of the great Sacrifice. We have always to plead the atonement. As without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, so without that blood there is no access to God.

Next, the way by which we come is an unfailing way. Please notice that word — “by a new way”; this means by a way which is always fresh. The original Greek suggests the idea of “newly slain.” Jesus died long ago, but His death is the same now as at the moment of its occurrence. We come to God, dear friends, by a way which is always effectual with God. It never, never loses one whit of its power freshness.

*Dear dying lamb, thy precious blood  
Shall never lose its power.*

The way is not worn away by long traffic: it is always new. If Jesus Christ had died yesterday, would you not feel that you could plead His merit today? Very well, you can plead that merit after these 19’ centuries with as much confidence as at the first hour. The way to God is always newly laid. In effect, the wounds of Jesus incessantly bleed our expiation. The cross is as glorious as though He were still upon it. So far as the freshness, vigor, and force of the atoning death is concerned, we come by a new way. Let it be always new to our hearts. Let the doctrine of atonement never grow stale, but let it have dew upon your souls.

Then the apostle adds, it is a “living way.” A wonderful word! The way by which the high priest went into the holy place was of course a material way, and so a dead way. We come by a spiritual way, suitable to our spirits. The way could not help the high priest, but our way helps us abundantly. Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” When we come to God by this way, the way itself leads, guides, bears, brings us near. This way gives its life with which to come.

It is a dedicated way. “which he hath consecrated for us.” When a new road is opened, it is set apart and dedicated for the public use. Sometimes

a public building is opened by a king or a prince, and so is dedicated to its purpose. Beloved, the way to God through Jesus Christ is dedicated by Christ, and ordained by Christ for the use of poor believing sinners, such as we are. He has consecrated the way towards God, and dedicated it for us, that we may freely use it. Surely, if there is a road set apart for me, I may use it without fear; and the way to God and heaven through Jesus Christ is dedicated by the Savior for sinners; it is the King's highway for wayfaring men, who are bound for the City of God; therefore, let us use it. "Consecrated for us!" Blessed word!

Lastly, it is a Christly way; for when we come to God, we still come through His flesh. There is no coming to Jehovah, except by the incarnate God. God in human flesh is our way to God; the substitutionary death of the Word made flesh is also the way to the Father. There is no coming to God, except by representation. Jesus represents us before God, and we come to God through Him who is our covenant head, our representative and forerunner before the throne of the Most High. Let us never try to pray without Christ; never try to sing without Christ; never try to preach without Christ. Let us perform no holy function, nor attempt to have fellowship with God in any shape or way, except through that rent which He has made in the veil by His flesh, sanctified for us, and offered upon the cross on our behalf.

Beloved, I have done when I have just remarked upon the next two verses, which are necessary to complete the sense, but which I was obliged to omit this morning, since there would be no time to handle them. We are called to take holy freedoms with God. "Let us draw near," at once, "with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Let us do so boldly, for we have a great high priest. The twenty-first verse reminds us of this. Jesus is the great Priest, and we are the sub-priests under Him, and since He bids us come near to God, and Himself leads the way, let follow Him into the inner sanctuary. Because He lives, we shall live also. We shall not die in the holy place, unless He dies. God will not smite us unless He smites Him. So, "having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

And then the apostle tells us that we may not only come with boldness, because our high priest leads the way, but because we ourselves are

prepared for entrance. Two things the high priest had to do before he might enter: one was, to be sprinkled with blood, and this we have; for “our hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience.”

The other requisite for the priests was to have their “bodies washed with pure water.” This we have received in symbol in our baptism, and in reality in the spiritual cleansing of regeneration. To us has been fulfilled the prayer —

*“Let the water and the blood,  
From thy riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

We have known the washing of water by the Word, and we have been sanctified by the Spirit of His grace; therefore let us enter into the holiest. Why should we stay away? Hearts sprinkled with blood, bodies washed with pure water — these are the ordained preparations for acceptable entrance. Come near, beloved! May the Holy Spirit be the spirit of access to you now. Come to your God, and then abide with Him! He is your Father, your all in all. Sit down and rejoice in Him; take your fill of love; and let not your communion be broken between here and heaven. Why should it be? Why not begin today that sweet enjoyment of perfect reconciliation and delight in God which shall go on increasing in intensity until you behold the Lord in open vision, and go no more out? Heaven will bring a great change in condition, but not in our standing, if even now we stand within the veil. It will be only such a change as there is between the perfect day and the daybreak; for we have the same sun, and the same light from the sun, and the same privilege of walking in the light. “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Division.” Amen, and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~ROM~~ HEBREWS 10.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 318, 296, 395.

# THE BLESSING OF FULL ASSURANCE

SERMON NO. 2023

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 13TH, 1888,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have Eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” —

 1 John 5:13.

JOHN wrote to believers — “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.” It is worthy of note that all the epistles are so written. They are not letters to everybody, they are letters to those who are called to be saints. It ought to strike some of you with awe when you open the Bible and think how large a part of it is not directed at you. You may read it, and God’s Holy Spirit may graciously bless it to you, but it is not directed to you. You are reading another man’s letter: thank God that you are permitted to read it, but long to be numbered with those to whom it is directed. Thank God much more if any part of it should be used of the Holy Ghost for your salvation. The fact that the Holy Spirit speaks to the churches and to believers in Christ should make you bow the knee and cry to God to put you among the children, that this Book may become your Book from beginning to end, that you may read its precious promises as made to you. This solemn thought may not have struck some of you: let it impress you now.

We do not wonder that certain men do not receive the epistles, for they were not written to them. Why should they cavil at words which are addressed to men of another sort from themselves? Yet we do not marvel, for we knew it would be so. Here is a will, and you begin to read it; but

you do not find it interesting: it is full of words and terms which you do not take the trouble to understand, because they have no relation to yourself; but should you, in reading that will, come upon a clause in which an estate is left to you, I warrant you that the nature of the whole document will seem changed to you. You will be anxious now to understand the terms, and to make sure of the clauses, and you will even wish to remember every word of the clause which refers to yourself. O dear friends, may you read the Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ as a testament of love to yourselves, and then you will prize it beyond all the writings of the sages.

This leads me to make the second remark, that as these things are written to believers, believers ought especially to make themselves acquainted with them, and to search into their meaning and intent. John says, “These things have I written to you that believe on the name of the Son of God.” Do not, I beseech you, neglect to read what the Holy Ghost has taken care to write to you. It is not merely John that writes. John is inspired of the Lord, and these things are written to you by the Spirit of God. Give earnest heed to every single word of what God has sent as his own epistle to your hearts. Value the Scriptures. Luther said that “he would not be in paradise, if he might, without the Word of the Lord; but with the Word he could live in hell itself.” He said at another time that “he would not take all the world for one leaf of the Bible.” The Scriptures are everything to the Christian — his meat and his drink. The saint can say, “O how I love thy law!” If we cannot say so, something is wrong with us. If we have lost our relish for Holy Scripture, we are out of condition, and need to pray for spiritual health.

This much is the porch of my sermon, let us now enter more fully into our subject, noticing, first, that John wrote with a special purpose; and then going on to assert, secondly, that this purpose we ought to follow up.

**I.** First, JOHN WROTE WITH A SPECIAL PURPOSE. Men do not write well unless they have some end in writing. To sit down with paper and ink before you, and so much space to fill up, will ensure very poor writing. John knew what he was at. His intent and aim were clear to his own mind, and he tells us what they were.



According to the text the beloved apostle had one clear purpose which branched out into three.

To begin with, John wrote that we might enjoy the full assurance of our salvation. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life."

Many who believe on the name of Jesus are not sure that they have eternal life; they only hope so. Occasionally they have assurance, but the joy is not abiding. They are like a minister I have heard of, who said he felt assured of his salvation, "except when the wind was in the east." It is a wretched thing to be so subject to circumstances as many are. What is true when the wind is in the soft south or the reviving west is equally true when the wind is neither good for man nor beast. John would not have our assurance vary with the weather-glass, nor turn with the vane. He says, "These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." He would have us certain that we are partakers of the new life, and so know it as to reap the golden fruit of such knowledge, and be filled with joy and peace through believing.

I speak affectionately to the weaker ones, who cannot yet say that they know they have believed. I speak not to your condemnation, but to your consolation. Full assurance is not essential to salvation, but it is essential to satisfaction. May you get — may you get it at once; at any rate may you never be satisfied to live without it. You may have full assurance. You may have it without personal revelations: it is wrought in us by the Word of God. These things are written that you may have it; and we may be sure that the means used by the Spirit are equal to the effect which he desires. Under the guidance of the Spirit of God, John so wrote as to attain his end in writing. What, then, has he written with the design of making us know that we have eternal life? Go through the whole Epistle, and you will see that it all presses in that direction; but we shall not at this present have time to do more than glance through this chapter.

He begins thus: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Do you believe that Jesus is the anointed of God? Is he so to you? Is he anointed as your prophet, priest, and king? Have you realized his anointing so as to put your trust in him? Do you receive Jesus as appointed of God to be the Mediator, the Propitiation for sin, the Savior

of men? If so, you are born of God. “How may I know this?” Brethren, our evidence is the witness of God himself as here recorded. We need no other witness. Suppose an angel were to tell you that you are born of God, would that be a more sure testimony than the infallible Scripture? If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God. John has thus positively declared the truth, that you may know that you have eternal life. Can anything be more clear than this?

The loving spirit of John leads him to say, “Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.” Do you love God? Do you love his Only-begotten Son? You can answer those two questions surely. I knew a dear Christian woman who would sometimes say, “I know that I love Jesus; but my fear is that he does not love me.” Her doubt used to make me smile, for it never could have occurred to me. If I love him, I know it is because he first loved me. Love to God in us is always the work of God’s love towards us. Jesus loved us, and gave himself for us, and therefore we love him in return. Love to Jesus is an effect which proves the existence of its cause. Do you love Jesus? Do you feel a delight in him? Is his name as music to your ear, and honey to your mouth? Do you love to hear him extolled? Ah, dear friends! I know that to many of you a sermon full of his dear name is as a royal banquet; and if there is no Christ in a discourse, it is empty, and vain, and void to you. Is it not so? If you do indeed love him that begat and him that is begotten of him, then this is one of the things that is written “that ye may know that ye have eternal life.”

John goes on to give another evidence: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.” Do you love God? and do you love his children? Listen to another word from the same apostle: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” That may appear to be a very small evidence; but I can assure you it has often been a great comfort to my soul. I know I love the brethren: I can say unto my Lord,

*“Is there a lamb among thy flock  
I would disdain to feed?”*

I would gladly cheer and comfort the least of his people. Well, then, if I love the brethren, I love the Elder Brother. If I love the babes, I love the

Father; and I know that I have passed from death unto life. Brethren, take this evidence home in all its force. It is conclusive: John has said, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren”; and he would not have spoken so positively if it had not been even so. Brethren, never be content with sentimental comforts; set your feet firmly upon the rock of fact and truth. True Christian assurance is not a matter of guesswork, but of mathematical precision. It is capable of logical proof, and is no rhapsody or poetical fiction. We are told by the Holy Ghost that, if we love the brethren, we have passed from death to life. You can tell whether you love the brethren, as such, for their Master’s sake, and for the truth’s sake that is in them; and if you can truly say that you thus love them, then you may know that you have eternal life.

Our apostle gives us this further evidence: “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” Obedience is the grand test of love. If you are living after your own will, and pay no homage to God, you are none of his. If you never think of the Lord Jesus as your Master, and never recognize the claims of God, and never wish to be obedient to his will, you are not in possession of eternal life. If you desire to be obedient, and prove that desire by your actions, then you have the divine life within you. Judge yourselves. Is the tenor of your life obedience or disobedience? By the fruit you can test the root and the sap.

But note, that this obedience must be cheerful and willing. No doubt some for a while obey the commands of God unwillingly. They do not like them, though they bow to them. They fret and grizzle because of the restraints of piety; and this proves that they are hypocrites. What you wish to do you practically are doing in the sight of God. If there could be such a thing as holiness forced upon a man, it would be unholiness. O my hearer, it may be that you cannot fall into a certain line of sin; but if you could, you would: your desires show what you really are. I have heard of Christian people, so called, going to sinful amusements, just, as they say, to enjoy a little pleasure. Ah well, we see where you are! Where your pleasure is, your heart is. If you enjoy the pleasures of the world, you are of the world, and with the world you will be condemned. If God’s commands are grievous to you, then you are a rebel at heart. Loyal subjects delight in the royal law. “His commandments are not grievous.” I

said to one who came to join the church the other day, "I suppose you are not perfect"? and the reply was, "No, sir, I wish I might be." I said, "And suppose you were"? "Oh, then," she said, "that would be heaven to me." So it would be to me. We delight in the law of God after the inward man. Oh, that we could perfectly obey in thought, and word, and deed! This is our view of heaven. Thus we sing of it:

*"There shall we see his face,  
And never, never sin;  
There from the rivers of his grace  
Drink endless pleasures in."*

We would scarce ask to be rid of sorrow, if we might be rid of sin. We would bear any burden cheerfully if we could live without spot we shall also be without grief. His commandments are not grievous, but they are ways of pleasantness and peace to us. Do you feel that you love the ways of God, that you desire holiness, and follow after it joyfully? Then, dear friends, you have eternal life, and these are the sure evidences of it. Obedience, holiness, delight in God never came into a human heart except from a heavenly hand. Wherever they are found they prove that the Lord has implanted eternal life, for they are much too precious to be buried away in a dead soul.

John then proceeds to mention three witnesses. Now, dear hearers, do you know anything about these three witnesses? "There are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." Do you know "the Spirit"? Has the Spirit of God quickened you, changed you, illuminated you, sanctified you? Does the Spirit of God dwell in you? Do you feel his sacred impulses? Is he the essence of the new life within you? Do you know him as clothing you with his light and power? If so, you are alive unto God. Next, do you know "the water," the purifying power of the death of Christ? Does the crucified Lord crucify your sins? Is the water applied to you to remove the power of sin? Do you now long to perfect holiness in the fear of God? This proves that you have eternal life. Do you also know "the blood"? This is a wretched age, in which men think little of the precious blood. My heart has well-nigh been broken, and my very flesh has been enfeebled, as I have thought upon the horrible things which have been spoken of late about the precious blood by men called Christian ministers. "O my soul, come not thou into their

secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united.” Beloved friends, do you know the power of the blood to take away sin, the power of the blood to speak peace to the conscience, the power of the blood to give access to the throne of grace? Do you know the quickening, restoring, cheering power of the precious blood of Christ which is set forth in the Lord’s Supper by the fruit of the vine? Then in the mouth of these three witnesses shall the fact of your having eternal life be fully established. If the Spirit of God be in you, he is the earnest of your eternal inheritance. If the water has washed you, then you are the Lord’s. Jesus said to Peter, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me.” But ye are washed, and therefore the Lord’s. If the precious blood has cleansed you from the guilt of sin, you know that it has also purchased you from death, and it is to you the guarantee of eternal life. I pray that you may from this moment enjoy the combined light of these three lamps of God — “the spirit, and the water, and the blood,” and so have full assurance of faith.

One thing more I would notice. Read the ninth verse: the apostle puts our faith and assurance on the ground that we receive “the witness of God.” If I believe that I am saved because of this, that, and the other, I may be mistaken: the only sure ground is “the witness of God.” The inmost heart of Christian faith is that we take God as his word; and we must accept that word, not because of the probabilities of its statements, nor because of the confirmatory evidence of science and philosophy, but simply and alone because the Lord has spoken it. Many professing Christians fall sadly short of this point. They dare to judge the Word instead of bowing before it. They do not sit at the Master’s feet, but become doctors themselves. I thank God that I believe everything that God has spoken, whether I am able to see its reason or not. To me the fact that the mouth of God hath spoken it stands in the place of all argument, either for or against. If Jehovah says so, so it is. Do you accept the witness of God? If not, you have made him a liar, and the truth is not in you; but if you have received “the witnesses of God,” then this is his witness, that “He hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” I say again, if your faith stands in the wisdom of men, and is based upon the cleverness of a preacher, it will fail you; but if it stands on the sure Word of the Lord it will stand for ever, and this may be to you a special token that you have eternal life. I have said enough upon this subject; oh that God may bless it

to you! May we be enabled, from what John has written, to gather beyond doubt that we have the life of God within our souls.

Furthermore, John wrote that we might know our spiritual life to be eternal. Please notice this, for there are some of God's children who have not yet learned this cheering lesson. The life of God in the soul is not transient, but abiding; not temporary but eternal. Some think that the life of God in the believer's soul may die out; but how, then, could it be eternal? If it die it is not eternal life. If it be eternal life it cannot die. I know that modern deceivers deny that eternal means eternal, but you and I have not learned their way of pumping the meanings out of the words which the Holy Spirit uses. We believe that "eternal" means endless, and that if I have eternal life, I shall live eternally, Brethren, the Lord would have us know that we have eternal life.

Learn, then, the doctrine of the eternality of life given in the new birth. It must be eternal life, because it is "the life of God." We are born again of the Spirit of God by a living and incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever. We are said to be "made partakers of the divine nature." Surely, this means, among other things, that we receive an undying life; for immortality is of the essence of the Life of God. His name is "I am that I am." He hath life in himself, and the Son hath life in himself, and of this life we are the receivers. This was his purpose concerning his Son, that he might give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him. If it be the life of God which is in a believer — and certainly it is, for he hath begotten us again — then that life must be eternal. As children of God, we partake of his life, and as heirs of God, we inherit his eternity. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ calls the life of his people eternal life. How often do I quote this text! It seems to lie on the tip of my tongue: "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." And again, "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." It is not temporary life, not life which at a certain period must grow old and die, but everlasting life. "It shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." This is the life of Christ within the soul. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "I live;

yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” If our life is Christ’s life, we shall not die until Christ dies. If our life is hidden in him, it will never be discovered and destroyed until Christ himself is destroyed. Let us rest in this.

Mark again how our Lord has put it: “Because I live, ye shall live also.” As long, then, as Jesus lives, his people must live, for the argument will always be the same, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” We are so one with Christ that while the head lives the members cannot die. We are so one Christ that the challenge is given, “Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” A list is added of things which may be supposed to separate, but we are told that they cannot do so, for “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” Is it not clear, then, that we are quickened with a life so heavenly and divine that we can never die? John tells us in this very chapter, “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not.” He does not go back to his old sin, he does not again come under the dominion of sin; but, “he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.”

Beloved, I entreat you to keep a hard and firm grip of this blessed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. How earnestly do I long “that ye may know that ye have eternal life”! Away with your doctrine of being alive in Christ to-day and dead tomorrow. Poor, miserable doctrine that! Hold fast to eternal salvation through the eternal covenant carried out by eternal love unto eternal life; for the Spirit of God has written these things unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life.

Once more, according to the Authorized text, though not according to the Revised Version, John desired the increase and confirmation of their faith. He says, “That ye might believe on the name of the Son of God.” John wrote to those who believed, that they might believe in a more emphatic sense. As our Savior has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly, so does John write, that having faith we may have more of it. Come beloved, listen for a moment to this! You have the milk of faith, but God wills that you should have this cream of assurance! He would increase your faith. May you believe more

extensively. Perhaps you do not believe all the truth, because you have not yet perceived it. There were members of the Corinthian church who had not believed in the resurrection of the dead, and there were Galatians who were very cloudy upon justification by faith. Many a Christian man is narrow in the range of his faith from ignorance of the Lord's mind. Like certain tribes of Israel, they have conquered a scanty territory as yet, though all the land is theirs from Dan to Beersheba. John would have us push out our fences, and increase the enclosure of our faith. Let us believe all that God has revealed, for every truth is precious and practically useful. Perhaps your doctrinal belief has been poor and thin. Oh that the Lord would turn the water into wine! Many of you live upon milk, and yet your years qualify you to feed on meat. Why keep the babes' diet? You that believe are exhorted to "go in and out, and find pasture"; range throughout the whole revelation of God.

It will be well for you if your faith also increases intensively. Oh that you may more fully believe what you do believe! We need deeper insight and firmer conviction. We do not half believe, as yet, any of us. Many of you only skim the pools of truth. Blessed is the wing which brushes the surface of the river of life; but infinitely more blessed is it to plunge into the depths of it. This is John's desire for you, that you would believe with all you heart, and soul, and strength.

He would have you believe more constantly, so that you may say, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." It is not always so with us. We are at times chicken-hearted. We play the man today, and the mouse tomorrow. Lord have mercy upon us: we are an inconsistent people, fickle as the wind. The Lord would have us abide always in him with strong and mighty confidence, being rooted and built up in him.

He would have us trust courageously. Some can believe in a small way about small things. Oh for a boundless trust in the infinite God! We need more of a venturesome faith: the faith to do and dare. Often we see the way of power, but have not the faith which would be equal to it. See Peter walking on the sea! I do not advise any of you to try it, neither did our Lord advise Peter to do so: we do well enough if we walk uprightly on land. But when Peter had once taken a few steps on the sea, he ought to



have known that his Lord could help him all the rest of the way; but alas! His faith failed, and he began to sink. He could have walked all the way to Jesus if he had believed right on. So is it with us: our faith is good enough for a spurt, but it lacks staying power. Oh, may God give us to believe, so that we may not only trip over a wave or two, but walk on the water to the end! If the Lord bids you, you may go through fire and not be burned, through the floods and not be drowned. Such a fearless, careless, conquering faith may the Lord work in us!

We need also to have our faith increased in the sense of its becoming more practical. Some people have a fine new faith, as pretty as the bright poker in the parlour, and as useless. We want an everyday faith, not to look at, but to use. Brothers and sisters, we need faith for the kitchen and the pantry, as well as for the drawing-room and the conservatory. We need workshop faith, as well as prayer-meeting faith. We need faith as to the common things of life, and the trying things of death. We could do with less paint if we had more power. We need less varnish and more verity. God give to you that you may believe on the name of the Son of God with a sound, common-sense faith, which will be found wearable, and washable, and workable throughout life.

We need to believe more joyfully. Oh what a blessed thing it is when you reach the rest and joy of faith! If we would truly believe the promise of God, and rest in the Lord's certain fulfillment of it, we might be as happy as the angels. I notice how very early in the morning how the birds begin to sing: before the sun is up or even the first grey tints of morning light are visible, the little songsters are awake and singing. Too often we refuse to sing until the sun is more than up, and noon is near. Shame on us! Will we never trust our God? Will we never praise him for favors to come? Oh for a faith that can sing through the night and through the winter! Faith that can live on a promise is the faith of God's elect. You will never enjoy heaven below until you believe without wavering. The Lord give you such faith.

**II.** Thus I have gone through my first head, and taken nearly all the time. I must now come to push of pike, as the old soldiers used to say. We must drive our teaching home. THE PURPOSE WHICH JOHN HAD IN HIS MIND WE OUGHT TO FOLLOW UP. If he wished us to know that we have eternal life,

brothers and sisters, let us try to know it. The Word of God was written for this purpose; let us use it for its proper end. The whole of these Scriptures were written that “we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing we might have life through his name.” This Book is written to you who believe, that you may know that you believe. Will you suffer your Bibles to be a failure to you? Will you live in perpetual questioning and doubt? If so, the Book has missed its mark for you. The Bible is sent that you may have full assurance of your possession of eternal life; do not, therefore, dream that it will be presumptuous on your part to aspire to it. Our conscience tells us that we ought to seek full assurance of salvation. It cannot be right for us to be children of God, and not to know our own Father. How can we kneel down and say, “Our Father which art in heaven,” when we do not know whether he is our Father or not? Will not a life of doubt tend to be a life of falsehood? May we not be using language which is not true to our consciousness? Can you sing joyful hymns which you fear are not true to you? Will you join in worship when your heart does not know that God is your God? Until the spirit of adoption enables you to cry, “Abba, Father,” where is your love to God? Can you rest? Dare you rest, while it is a question whether you are saved or not? Can you go home to your dinner to-day and enjoy your meal, while there is a question about your soul’s eternal life? Oh, be not so foolhardy as to run risks on that matter! I pray you, make sure work for eternity. If you leave anything in uncertainty, let it concern your body or your estate, but not your soul. Conscience bids you seek to know that you have eternal life, for without this knowledge many duties will be impossible of performance. Many Scriptures which I cannot quote this morning stir you up to this duty. Are you not bidden to make your calling and election sure? Are you not a thousand times over exhorted to rejoice in the Lord, and to give thanks continually? But how can you rejoice, if the dark suspicion haunts you, that perhaps, after all, you have not the life of God? You must get this question settled, or you cannot rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Come, brothers and sisters, I beseech you, as you would follow Scripture, and obey the Lord’s precepts, get the assurance without which you cannot obey them.

Listen, as I close, to this mass of reasons why each believer should seek to know that he has eternal life. Here they are. Assurance of your salvation

will bring you “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” If you know that you are saved, you can sit down in poverty, or in sickness, or under slander, and feel perfectly content. Full assurance is the Koh-i-noor amongst the jewels wherewith the heavenly Bridegroom adorns his spouse. Assurance is a mountain of spices, a land that floweth with milk and honey. To be the assured possessor of eternal life is to find a paradise beneath the stars, where the mountains and the hills break forth before you into singing.

Full assurance will sometimes overflow in cataracts of delight. Peace flows like a river, and here and there it leaps in cascades of ecstatic joy. There are seasons when the plant of peace is in flower, and then it sheds a perfume as of myrrh and cassia. Oh, the blessedness of the man who knows that he has eternal life! Sometimes in our room alone, when we have been enjoying this assurance, we have laughed outright, for we could not help it. If anybody had wondered why a man was laughing by himself alone, we could have explained that it was nothing ridiculous which had touched us, but our mouth was filled with laughter because the Lord had done great things for us, whereof we were glad. That religion which sets no sweatmeats on the table is a niggardly housekeeper. I do not wonder that some people give up their starveling religion: it is hardly worth the keeping. The child of God who knows that he has eternal life goes to school, be he has many a holiday; and he anticipates that day of home-going when he shall see the face of his Beloved for ever.

Brethren, full assurance will give us the full result of the gospel. The gospel ought to make us holy; and so it will when we are in full possession of it. The gospel ought to make us separate from the world, the gospel ought to make us lead a heavenly life here below; and so it will if we drink deep draughts of it; but if we take only a sip of it now and again, we give it no chance of working out its design in us. Do not paddle about the margin of the water of life, but first wade in up to your knees, and then hasten to plunge into the waters to swim in. Beware of contentment with shallow grace. Prove what the grace of God can do for you by giving yourself up to its power.

Full assurance gives a man a grateful zeal for the God he loves. These are the people that will go to the Congo for Jesus, for they know they are his.

These are the people that will lay down their all for Christ, for Christ is theirs. These are the people that will bear scorn and shame and misrepresentation for the truth's sake, for they know that they have eternal life. These are they that will keep on preaching and teaching, spending and working, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and they know it. Men will do little for what they doubt, and much for what they believe. If you have lost your title deeds, and you do not know whether your house is your own or not, you are not going to spend much in repairs and enlargements. When you know that heaven is yours, you are anxious to get ready for it. Full assurance finds fuel for zeal to feed upon.

This also creates and sustains patience. When we know that we have eternal life, we do not fret about the trials of this passing life. I could point to the brethren here this morning, and I could mention sisters at home, who amaze me by their endurance of pain and weakness. This I know concerning them, that they never have a doubt about their interest in Christ; and for this cause they are able to surrender themselves into those dear hands which were pierced for them. They know that they are the Lord's, and so they say, "Let him do what seemeth him good." A blind child was in his father's arms, and a stranger came into the room, and took him right away from his father. Yet he did not cry or complain. His father said to him, "Johnny, are you afraid? You do not know the person who has got hold of you." "No, father," he said, "I do not know who he is, but you do." When pain gives us an awkward nip, and we do not know whether we shall live or die, when we are called to undergo a dangerous operation, and pass into unconsciousness, then we can say, "I do not know where I am, but my Father knows, and I leave all with him." Assurance makes us strong to suffer.

This, dear friends, will give you constant firmness in your confession of divine truth. You who do not know whether you are saved or not, I hope the Lord will keep you from denying the faith; but those who have a firm grip of it, these are the men who will never forsake it. A caviller in an omnibus said to a Christian man one day, "Why, you have nothing after all to rest upon. I can prove to you that your Scriptures are not authentic." The humble Christian man replied, "Sir, I am not a learned man, and I cannot answer you questions; but I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I have experienced such a change in character, and I feel such a joy and peace

through believing, that I wish you knew my Savior, too.” The answer he received was a very unexpected one: the unbeliever said, “You have got me there; I cannot answer that.” Just so: we have got them there. If we know what has been wrought in us by grace, they cannot overcome us. The full-assurance man baffles the very devil. Satan is cunning enough, but those who know and are persuaded, are birds which he cannot take in the snares of hell. When you know that your Lord is able to keep that which you have committed to him until that day, then you are firm as a rock. God make you so.

Dear brethren, this is the kind of thing that will enable you to bear a telling testimony for your Lord. It is of no use to stand up and preach things that may or may not be true. I am charged with being a dreadful dogmatist, and I am not anxious to excuse myself. When a man is not quite sure of a thing, he grows very liberal: anybody can be a liberal with money which he cannot claim to be his own. The broad-school man says, “I am not sure, and I do not suppose that you are sure, for indeed nothing is sure.” Does this sandy foundation suit you? I prefer rock. The things which I have spoken to you from my youth up have been such as I have tried and proved, and to me they wear an absolute certainty, confirmed by my personal experience. I have tried these things: they have saved me, and I cannot doubt them. I am a lost man if the gospel I have preached to you be not true; and I am content to bide the issue of the day of Judgement. I do not preach doubtingly, for I do not live doubtingly. I know what I have told you to be true; why should I speak as if I were not sure? If you want to make your own testimony tell in such a day as this, you must have something to say that you are sure about; and until you are sure about it I would advise you to hold you tongue. We do not require any more questionings; the market is overstocked. We need no more doubt, honest or dishonest; the air is dark with these horrible blacks.

Brethren, if you know that you have eternal life, you are prepared to live, and equally prepared to die. How frequently do I stand at the bedside of our dying members! I am every now and then saying to myself, “I shall certainly meet with some faint-hearted one. Surely I shall come across some child of God who is dying in the dark.” But I have not met with any such. Brethren, a child of God may die in the dark. One said to old Mr. Dodd, the quaint old Puritan — “How sad that our brother should have

passed away in the darkness! Do you doubt his safety?" "No," said old Mr. Dodd, "no more than I doubt the safety of him who said, when he was dying, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" Full assurance, as we have said before, is not of the essence of salvation. Still, I beg of you to note this, that all along through these many years, in each case, when I have gone to visit any of our brethren and our sisters at death, I have always found them departing in sure and certain hope of seeing the face of their Lord in glory. I have often marvelled that this should be without exception, and I glory in it. Often have they said to me, "We have fed on such good food that we may well be strong in the Lord." God grant that you may have this assurance, all of you! May sinners begin to believe in Jesus, and saints believe more firmly, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~1~~1 JOHN 5.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK" — 175, 738, 711.

# THE SLUGGARD'S FARM

## SERMON NO. 2027

“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.” — ~~2027~~ Proverbs 24:30-32.

NO DOUBT Solomon was sometimes glad to lay aside the robes of state, escape from the forms of court, and go through the country unknown. On one occasion, when he was doing so, he looked over the broken wall of a little estate which belonged to a farmer of his country. This estate consisted of a piece of ploughed land and a vineyard. One glance showed him that it was owned by a sluggard, who neglected it, for the weeds had grown right plentifully and covered all the face of the ground. From this Solomon gathered instruction. Men generally learn wisdom if they have wisdom. The artist's eye sees the beauty of the landscape because he has beauty in his mind. “To him that hath shall be given,” and he shall have abundance, for he shall reap a harvest even from a field that is covered with thorns and nettles. There is a great difference between one man and another in the use of the mind's eye. I have a book entitled, “The harvest of a Quiet Eye,” and a good book it is: the harvest of a quiet eye can be gathered from a sluggard's land as well as from a well-managed farm. When we were boys we were taught a little poem, called “Eyes and no Eyes,” and there was much of truth in it, for some people have eyes and see not, which is much the same as having no eyes; while others have quick eyes for spying out instruction. Some look only at the surface, while others see not only the outside shell but the living kernel of truth which is hidden in all outward things.

We may find instruction everywhere. To a spiritual mind nettles have their use, and weeds have their doctrine. Are not all thorns and thistles meant to be teachers to sinful men? Are they not brought forth of the earth on

purpose that they may show us what sin has done, and the kind of produce that will come when we sow the seed of rebellion against God? “I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding,” says Solomon; “I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.” Whatever you see, take care to consider it well, and you will not see it in vain. You shall find books and sermons everywhere, in the land and in the sea, in the earth and in the skies, and you shall learn from every living beast, and bird, and fish, and insect, and from every useful or useless plant that springs out of the ground.

We may also gather rare lessons from things that we do not like. I am sure that Solomon did not in the least degree admire the thorns and the nettles that covered the face of the vineyard, but he nevertheless found instruction in them. Many are stung by nettles, but few are taught by them. Some men are hurt by briars, but here is one who was improved by them. Wisdom hath a way of gathering grapes of thorns and figs of nettles, and she distills good from herbs which in themselves are noisome and evil. Do not fret, therefore, over thorns, but get good out of them. Do not begin stinging yourself with nettles, grip them firmly, and then use them for your soul’s health. Trials and troubles, worries and turmoils, little frets and little disappointments, may all help you if you will. Like Solomon, see and consider them well — look upon them, and receive instruction.

As for us, we will now, first, consider Solomon’s description of a sluggard: he is “a man void of understanding”; secondly, we shall notice his description of the sluggard’s land: “it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof.” When we have attended to these two matters we will close by endeavoring to gather the instruction which this piece of waste ground may yield us.

First think of SOLOMON’S DESCRIPTION OF A SLOTHFUL MAN. Solomon was a man whom none of us would contradict, for he knew as much as all of us put together; and besides that, he was under divine inspiration when he wrote this Book of Proverbs. Solomon says, a sluggard is “a man void of understanding.” The slothful does not think so; he puts his hands in his pockets, and you would think from his important air that he had all the Bank of England at his disposal. You can see that he is a very wise man in his own esteem, for he gives himself airs which are meant to impress you



with a sense of his superior abilities. How he has come by his wisdom it would be hard to say. He has never taken the trouble to think, and yet I dare not say that he jumps at his conclusions, because he never does such a thing as jump, he lies down and rolls into a conclusion. Yet he knows everything, and has settled all points: meditation is too hard work for him, and learning he never could endure; but to be clever by nature is his delight. He does not want to know more than he knows, for he knows enough already, and yet he knows nothing. The proverb is not complimentary to him, but I am certain that Solomon was right when he called him “a man void of understanding.” Solomon was rather rude according to the dainty manners of the present times, because this gentleman had a field and a vineyard, and as Poor Richard saith, “When I have a horse and a cow every man biddeth me good morrow.” How can a man be void of understanding who has a field and a vineyard? Is it not generally understood that you must measure a man’s understanding by the amount of his ready cash? At all events you shall soon be flattered for your attainments if you have attained unto wealth. Such is the way of the world, but such is not the way of Scripture. Whether he has a field and a vineyard or not, says Solomon, if he is a sluggard he is a fool, or if you would like to see his name written out a little larger, he is a man empty of understanding. Not only does he not understand anything, but he has no understanding to understand with. He is empty-headed if he is a sluggard. He may be called a gentleman, he may be a landed proprietor, he may have a vineyard and a field; but he is none the better for what he has: nay, he is so much the worse, because he is a man void of understanding, and is therefore unable to make use of his property.

I am glad to be told by Solomon so plainly that a slothful man is void of understanding, for it is useful information. I have met with persons who thought they perfectly understood the doctrines of grace, who could accurately set forth the election of the saints, the predestination of God, the firmness of the divine decree, the necessity of the Spirit’s work, and all the glorious doctrines of grace which build up the fabric of our faith; but these gentlemen have inferred from these doctrines that they have to do nothing, and thus they have become sluggards. Do-nothingism is their creed. They will not even urge other people to labor for the Lord, because, say they, “God will do his own work. Salvation is all of grace!” The

notion of these sluggards is that a man is to wait, and do nothing; he is to sit still, and let the grass grow up to his ankles in the hope of heavenly help. To arouse himself would be an interference with the eternal purpose, which he regards as altogether unwarrantable. I have known him look sour, shake his aged head, and say hard things against earnest people who were trying to win souls. I have known him run down young people, and like a great steam ram, sink them to the bottom, by calling them unsound and ignorant. How shall we survive the censures of this dogmatic person? How shall we escape from this very knowing and very captious sluggard? Solomon hastens to the rescue and extinguishes this gentleman by informing us that he is void of understanding. Why, he is the standard of orthodoxy, and he judges everybody! Yet Solomon applies another standard to him, and says he is void of understanding. He may know the doctrine, but he does not understand it; or else he would know that the doctrines of grace lead us to seek the grace of the doctrines; and that when we see God at work we learn that he worketh in us, not to make us go to sleep, but to will and to do of his good pleasure. God's predestination of a people in his ordaining them unto good works that they may show forth his praise. So, if you or I shall from any doctrines, however true, draw the inference that we are warranted in being idle and indifferent about the things of God, we are void of understanding; we are acting like fools; we are misusing the gospel; we are taking what was meant for meat and turning it into poison. The sluggard, whether he is sluggish about his business or about his soul, is a man void of understanding.

As a rule we may measure a man's understanding by his useful activities; this is what the wise man very plainly tells us. Certain persons call themselves "cultured," and yet they cultivate nothing. Modern thought, as far as I have seen anything of its actual working, is a bottle of smoke, out of which comes nothing solid; yet we know men who can distinguish and divide, debate and discuss, refine and refute, and all the while the hemlock is growing in the furrow, and the plough is rusting. Friend, if your knowledge, if your culture, if your education does not lead you practically to serve God in your day and generation, you have not learned what Solomon calls wisdom, and you are not like the Blessed One, who was incarnate wisdom, of whom we read that "he went about doing good." A lazy man is not like our Savior, who said, "My Father worketh hitherto,

and I work.” True wisdom is practical: boastful culture vapours and theorizes. Wisdom ploughs its field, wisdom hoes its vineyard, wisdom looks to its crops, wisdom tries to make the best of everything; and he who does not do so, whatever may be his knowledge of this, of that, or of the other, is a man void of understanding.

Why is he void of understanding? Is it not because he has opportunities which he does not use? His day has come, his day is going, and he lets the hours glide by to no purpose. Let me not press too hardly upon anyone, but let me ask you all to press as hardly as you can upon yourselves while you enquire each one of himself — Am I employing the minutes as they fly? This man had a vineyard, but he did not cultivate it; he had a field, but he did not till it. Do you, brethren, use all your opportunities? I know we each one have some power to serve God; do we use it? If we are his children he has not put one of us where we are of necessity useless. Somewhere we may shine by the light which he has given us, though that light be only a farthing candle. Are we thus shining? Do we sow beside all waters? Do we in the morning sow our seed, and in the evening still stretch out our hand; for if not, we are rebuked by the sweeping censure of Solomon, who saith that the slothful is a “man void of understanding.”

Having opportunities he did not use them, and next, being bound to the performance of certain duties he did not fulfill them. When God appointed that every Israelite should have a piece of land, under that admirable system which made every Israelite a landowner, he meant that each man should possess his plot, not to let it lie waste, but to cultivate it. When God put Adam in the garden of Eden it was not that he should walk through the glades and watch the spontaneous luxuriance of the unfallen earth, but that he might dress it and keep it, and he had the same end in view when he allotted each Jew his piece of land; he meant that the holy soil should reach the utmost point of fertility through the labor of those who owned it. Thus the possession of a field and a vineyard involved responsibilities upon the sluggard which he never fulfilled, and therefore he was void of understanding. What is your position, dear friend? A father? A master? A servant? A minister? A teacher? Well, you have your farms and your vineyards in those particular spheres; but if you do not use those positions aright you will be void of understanding, because you neglect the

end of your existence. You miss the high calling which your Maker has set before you.

The slothful farmer was unwise in these two respects, and in another also; for he had capacities which he did not employ. He could have tilled the field and cultivated the vineyard if he had chosen to do so. He was not a sickly man, who was forced to keep his bed, but he was a lazybones who was there of choice.

You are not asked to do in the service of God that which is utterly beyond you, for it is expected of us according to what we have and not according to what we have not. The man of two talents is not required to bring in the interest of five, but he is expected to bring in the interest of two.

Solomon's slothful was too idle to attempt tasks which were quite within his power. Many have a number of dormant faculties of which they are scarcely aware, and many more have abilities which they are using for themselves, and not for him who created them. Dear friends, if God has given us any power to do good, pray let us do it, for this is a wicked, weary world. We should not even cover a glow-worm's light in such a darkness as this. We should not keep back a syllable of divine truth in a world that is full of falsehood and error. However feeble our voices, let us lift them up for the cause of truth and righteousness. Do not let us be void of understanding, because we have opportunities that we do not use, obligations that we do not fulfill, and capacities which we do not exercise.

As for a sluggard in soul matters, he is indeed void of understanding, for he trifles with matters which demand his most earnest heed. Man, hast thou never cultivated thy heart? Has the ploughshare never broken up the clods of thy soul? Has the seed of the Word never been sown in thee? Or has it taken no root? Hast thou never watered the young plants of desire? Hast thou never sought to pull up the weeds of sin that grow in thy heart? Art thou still a piece of the bare common or wild hearth? Poor soul! Thou canst trim thy body, and spend many a minute at the glass; dost thou not care for thy soul? How long thou takest to decorate thy poor flesh, which is but worm's meat, or would be in a minute if God took away thy breath! And yet all the while thy soul is uncombed, unwashed, unclad, a poor neglected thing! Oh it should not be so. You take care of the worse part and leave the better to perish through neglect. This is the height of folly!

He that is a sluggard as to the vineyard of his heart is a man void of understanding. If I must be idle, let it be seen in my field and my garden, but not in my soul.

Or are you a Christian? Are you really saved, and are you negligent in the Lord's work? Then, indeed, whatever you may be, I cannot help saying you have too little understanding; for surely, when a man is save himself, and understands the danger of other men's souls, he must be in earnest in trying to pluck the firebrands from the flame. A Christian sluggard! Is there such a being? A Christian man on half time? A Christian man working not all for his Lord; how shall I speak of him? Time does not tarry, DEATH does not tarry, HELL does not tarry; Satan is not lazy, all the powers of darkness are busy: how is it that you and I can be sluggish, if the master has put us into his vineyard? Surely we must be void of understanding if, after being saved by the infinite love of God, we do not spend and be spent in his service. The eternal fitness of things demands that a saved man should be an earnest man.

The Christian who is slothful in his Master's service has no idea what he is losing; for the very cream of religion lies in holy consecration to God. Some people have just enough religion to make it questionable whether they have any or no. They have enough godliness to make them uneasy in their ungodliness. They have washed enough of their face to show the dirt upon the rest of it. "I am glad," said a servant, "that my mistress takes the sacrament, for otherwise I should not know she had any religion at all." You smile, and well you may. It is ridiculous that some people should have no goods in their shop, and yet advertise their business in all the papers; should make a show of religion, and yet have none of the Spirit of God I wish some professors would do Christ the justice to say, "No, I am not one of his disciples; do not think so badly of him as to imagine that I can be one of them." We ought to be reflections of Christ; but I fear many are reflections upon Christ. When we see a lot of lazy servants, we are apt to think that their master must be a very idle person himself, or he would never put up with them. He who employs sluggards, and is satisfied with their snail-like pace, cannot be a very active man himself. O, let not the world think that Christ is indifferent to human woe, that Christ has lost his zeal, that Christ has lost his energy: yet I fear they will say it or think it if they see those who profess to be laborers in the vineyard of Christ

nothing better than mere sluggards. The slothful, then, is a man void of understanding; he loses the honor and pleasure which he would find in serving his Master; he is a dishonor to the cause which he professes to venerate, and he is storing up thorns for his dying pillow. Let that stand as settled — the slothful, whether he be a minister, deacon, or private Christian, is a man void of understanding.

Now, secondly, LET US LOOK AT THE SLUGGARD'S LAND: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof." Note, first, that land will produce something. Soil which is good enough to be made into a field and a vineyard must and will yield some fruit or other; and so you and I, in our hearts and in the sphere God gives us to occupy, will be sure to produce something. We cannot live in this world as entire blanks; we shall either do good or do evil, as sure as we are alive. If you are idle in Christ's work, you are active in the devil's work. The sluggard by sleeping was doing more for the cultivation of thorns and nettles than he could have done by any other means. As a garden will either yield flowers or weeds, fruits or thistles, so something either good or evil will come out of our household, our class, or our congregation. If we do not produce a harvest of good whether, by laboring for Christ, we shall grow tares to be bound up in bundles for the last dread burning.

Note again that, if it be not farmed for God, the soul will yield its natural produce; and what is the natural produce of land if left to itself? What but thorns and nettles, or some other useless weeds? What is the natural produce of your heart and mine? What but sin and misery? What is the natural produce of your children if you leave them untrained for God? What but unholiness and vice? What is the natural produce of this great city if we leave its streets, and lanes, and alleys without the gospel? What but crime and infamy? Some harvest there will be, and the sheaves will be the natural produce of the soil, which is sin, death, and corruption.

If we are slothful, the natural produce of our heart and of our sphere will be most inconvenient and unpleasant to ourselves. Nobody can sleep on thorns, or make a pillow of nettles. No rest can come out of an idleness which lets ill alone, and does not by God's Spirit strive to uproot evil. While you are sleeping, Satan will be sowing. If you withhold the seed of

good, Satan will be lavish with the seed of evil, and from that evil will come anguish and regret for time, and it may be for eternity. O man, the garden put into thy charge, if thou waste thy time in slumber, will reward thee with all that is noisome and painful. “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.”

In many instances there will be a great deal of this evil produce; for a field and a vineyard will yield more thistles and nettles than a piece of ground that has never been reclaimed. If the land is good enough for a garden, it will present its owner with a fine crop of weeds if he only stays his hand. A choice bit of land fit for a vineyard of red wine will render such a profusion of nettles to the slothful that he shall rub his eyes with surprise. The man who might do most for God, if he were renewed, will bring forth most for Satan if he be let alone. The very region which would have glorified God most if the grace of God were there to convert its inhabitants, will be that out of which the vilest enemies of the gospel will arise. Rest assured of that; be best will become the worse if we neglect it. Neglect is all that is needed to produce evil. If you want to know the way of salvation I must take some pains to tell you; but if you want to know the way to be lost, my reply is easy; for it is only a matter of negligence; — “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” If you desire to bring forth a harvest unto God, I may need long to instruct you in ploughing, sowing, and watering; but if you wish your mind to be covered with Satan’s hemlock, you have only to leave the furrows of your nature to themselves. The slothful asks for “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep,” and the thorns and thistles multiply beyond all numbering, and prepare for him many a sting.

While we look upon the lazy man’s vineyard let us also peep into the ungodly sluggard’s heart. He does not care about repentance and faith. To think about his soul, to be in earnest about eternity, is too much for him. He wants to take things easy, and have a little more folding of the arms to sleep. What is growing in his mind and character? In some of these spiritual sluggards you can see drunkenness, uncleanness, covetousness, anger, and pride, and all sorts of thistles and nettles; or where these ranker weeds do not appear, by reason of the restraint of pious connections, you find other sorts of sin. The heart cannot possess it. My dear friend, if you are not decided for God, you cannot be a neutral. In this war every man is

for God or for his enemy. You cannot remain like a sheet of blank paper. The legible handwriting of Satan is upon you — can you not see the blots? Unless Christ has written across the page his own sweet name, the autograph of Satan is visible. You may say, “I do not go into open sin; I am moral,” and so forth. Ah, if you would but look, and consider, and search into your heart, you would see that enmity to God and to his ways, and hatred of purity, are there. You do not love God’s law, nor love his Son, nor love his gospel, you are alienated in your heart, and there is in you all manner of evil desires and vain thoughts, and these will flourish and increase so long as you are a spiritual sluggard, and leave your heart uncultivated. O, may the Spirit of God arouse you; may you be stirred to anxious, earnest thought, and then you will see that these rank growths must be uprooted, and that your heart must be turned up by the plough of conviction, and sown with the good seed of the gospel, till a harvest rewards the great Husbandman.

Friend, if you believe in Christ, I want to peep over the hedge into your heart also, if you are a sluggish Christian; for I fear that nettles and thistles are threatening you also? Did I not hear you sing the other day — “‘Tis a point I long to know”? That point will often be raised, for doubt is a seed which is sure to grow in lazy men’s minds. I do not remember reading in Mr. Wesley’s diary a question about his own salvation. He was so busy in the harvest of the Master that it did not occur to him to distrust his God. Some Christians have little faith in consequence of their having never sown the grain of mustard seed which they have received. If you do not sow your faith by using it, how can it grow? When a man lives by faith in Christ Jesus, and his faith exercises itself actively in the service of his Lord, it takes root, grows upward, and becomes strong, till it chokes his doubts. Some have sadly morbid forebodings; they are discontented, fretful, selfish, murmuring, and all because they are idle. These are the weeds that grow in sluggards’ gardens. I have known the slothful become so peevish that nothing could please them; the most earnest Christian could not do right for them; the most loving Christians could not be affectionate enough; the most active church could not be energetic enough; they detected all sorts of wrong where God himself saw much of the fruit of his Spirit. This censoriousness, this contention, this perpetual complaining is one of the nettles that are quite sure to grow in men’s gardens when they



fold their arms in sinful ease. If your heart does not yield fruit to God it will certainly bring forth that which is mischievous in itself, painful to you, and injurious to your fellow-men. Often the thorns choke the good seed; but it is a very blessed thing when the good seed comes up so thick and fast that it chokes the thorns. God enables certain Christians to become so fruitful in Christ that their graces and works stand thick together, and when Satan throws in the tares they cannot grow because there is not room for them. The Holy Spirit by his power makes evil to become weak in the heart, so that it no longer keeps the upper land. If you are slothful, friend, look over the field of your heart, and weep at the sight.

May I next ask you look into your own house and home? It is a dreadful thing when a man does not cultivate the field of his own family. I recollect in my early days a man who used to walk out with me into the villages when I was preaching. I was glad of his company till I found out certain facts, and then I shook him off, and I believe he hooked on to somebody else, for he must needs be gadding abroad every evening of the week. He had many children, and these grew up to be wicked young men and women, and the reason was that the father, while he would be at this meeting and that, never tried to bring his own children to the Savior. What is the use of zeal abroad if there is neglect at home? How sad to say, "My own vineyard have I not kept." Have you never heard of one who said he did not teach his children the ways of God because he thought they were so young that it was very wrong to prejudice them, and he had rather leave them to choose their own religion when they grew older? One of his boys broke his arm, and while the surgeon was setting it the boy was swearing all the time. "Ah," said the good doctor, "I told you what would happen. You were afraid to prejudice your boy in the right way, but the devil had no such qualms; he has prejudiced him the other way, and pretty strongly too." It is our duty to prejudice our field in favor of corn, or it will soon be covered with thistles. Cultivate a child's heart for good, or it will go wrong of itself, for it is already depraved by nature. O that we were wise enough to think of this, and leave no little one to become a prey to the destroyer.

As it is with homes, so it is with schools. A gentleman who joined this church some time ago had been an atheist for years, and in conversing with him I found that he had been educated at one of our great public schools, and to that fact he traced his infidelity. He said that the boys were stowed

away on Sunday in a lofty gallery at the far end of a church, where they could scarcely hear a word that the clergyman said, but simply sat imprisoned in a place where it was dreadfully hot in summer and cold in winter. On Sundays there were prayers, and prayers, and prayers, but nothing that ever touched his heart; until he was so sick of prayers that he vowed if he once got out of the school he would have done with religion. This is a sad result, but a frequent one. You Sunday-school teachers can make your classes so tiresome to the children that they will hate Sunday. You can fritter away the time in school without bringing the lads and lasses to Christ, and so you may do more hurt than good. I have known Christian fathers who by their severity and want of tenderness have sown their family field with the thorns and thistles of hatred to religion instead of scattering the good seed of love to it. O that we may so but love our Father who is in heaven. May fathers and mothers set such an example of cheerful piety that sons and daughters shall say, "Let us tread in our father's footsteps, for he was a happy and a holy man. Let us follow our mother's ways, for she was sweetness itself." If piety does not rule in your house, when we pass by your home we shall see disorder, disobedience, pride of dress, folly, and the beginnings of vice. Let not your home be a sluggard's field, or you will have to rue it in years to come.

Let every deacon, every class-leader, and also every minister enquire diligently into the state of the field he has to cultivate. You see, brothers and sisters, if you and I are set over any department of our Lord's work, and we are not diligent in it, we shall be like barren trees planted in an orchard, which are a loss altogether, because they occupy the places of other trees which might have brought forth fruit unto their owners. We shall cumber the ground, and do damage to our Lord, unless we render him actual service. Will you think of this? If you could be put down as a mere cipher in the accounts of Christ, that would be very sad; but, brother, it cannot be so, you will cause a deficit unless you create a gain. Oh that through the grace of God we may be profitable to our Lord and Master. Who among us can look upon His life-work without some sorrow? If anything has been done aright we ascribe it all to the grace of God; but how much there is to weep over! How much that we would wish to amend! Let us not spend time in idle regrets, but pray for the Spirit of God, that in the future we may not be void of understanding, but may

know what we ought to do, and where the strength must come from with which to do it, and then give ourselves up to the doing of it.

I beg you once more to look at the great field of the world. Do you see how it is overgrown with thorns and nettles? If an angel could take a survey of the whole race, what tears he would shed, if angels could weep! What a tangled mass of weeds the whole earth is! Yonder the field is scarlet with the poppy of popery, and over the hedge it is yellow with the wild mustard of Mahometanism. Vast regions are smothered with the thistles of infidelity and idolatry. The world is full of cruelty, oppression, drunkenness, rebellion, uncleanness, misery. What the moon sees! What God's sun sees! What scenes of horror! How far is all this to be attributed to a neglectful church? Nearly nineteen hundred years are gone, and the sluggard's vineyard is but little improved! England has been touched with the spade, but I cannot say that it has been thoroughly weeded or ploughed yet. Across the ocean another field equally favored knows well the ploughman, and yet the weeds are rank. Here and there a little good work has been done, but the vast mass of the world still lies a moorland never broken up, a waste, a howling wilderness. What has the church been doing all these years? She ceased after a few centuries to be a missionary church, and from that hour she almost ceased to be a living church. Whenever a church does not labor for the reclaiming of the desert it becomes itself a waste. You shall not find on the roll of history that for a length of time any Christian community has flourished after it has become negligent of the outside world. I believe that if we are put into the Master's vineyard, and will not take away the weeds, neither shall the vine flourish, nor shall the corn yield its increase. However, instead of asking what the church has been doing for this nineteen hundred years, let us ask ourselves, What are we going to do now? Are the missions of the churches of Great Britain always to be such poor, feeble things as they are? Are the best of our Christian young men always going to stay at home? We go on ploughing the home field a hundred times over, while millions of acres abroad are left to the thorn and nettle. Shall it always be so? God send us more spiritual life, and wake us up from our sluggishness, or else when the holy watcher gives in his report, he will say, "I went by the field of the sluggish church, and it was all grown over with thorns and nettles, and the stone wall was broken down, so that one could scarcely

tell which was the church and which was the world, yet still she slept, and slept, and slept, and nothing could waken her.”

I conclude by remarking that **THERE MUST BE SOME LESSON IN ALL THIS**. I cannot teach it as I would, but I want to learn it myself. I will speak it as though I were talking to myself.

The first lesson is, that unaided nature always will produce thorns and nettles, and nothing else. My soul, if it were not for grace, this is all thou wouldst have produced. Beloved, are you producing anything else? Then it is not nature, but the grace of God that makes you produce it. Those lips that now most charmingly sing the praises of God would have been delighted with an idle ballad if the grace of God had not sanctified them. Your heart, that now cleaves to Christ, would have continued to cling to your idols — you know what they were — if it had not been for grace divine. And why should grace have visited you or me — why? Echo answers, *Why? What answer can we give?* “‘Tis even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Let the recollection of what grace has done move us to manifest the result of that grace in our lives. Come, brothers and sisters, inasmuch as we were aforetime rich enough in the soil of our nature to produce so much of nettle and thistle — and God only knows how much we did produce — let us now pray that our lives may yield as much of good corn for the great Husbandman. Will you serve Christ less than you served your lusts? Will you make less sacrifice for Christ than you did for your sins? Some of you were whole-hearted enough when in the service of the evil one, will you be half-hearted in the service of God? Shall the Holy Spirit produce less fruit in you than that which you yielded under the spirit of evil?

God grant that we may not be left to prove what nature will produce it left to itself.

We see here, next, the little value of natural good intentions; for this man, who left his field and vineyard to be overgrown, always meant to work hard one of these fine days. To do him justice, we must admit that he did not mean to sleep much longer, for he said — “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.” Only a little doze, and then he would tuck up his sleeves and show his muscle. Probably the worst people in the world are those who have the best intentions, but never

carry them out. In that way Satan lulls many to sleep. They hear an earnest sermon; but they do not arise and go to their Father; they only get as far as saying, "Yes, yes, the far country is not a fit place for me; I will not stay here long. I mean to go home by-and-by." They said that forty years ago, but nothing came of it. When they were quite youths they had serious impressions, they were almost persuaded to be Christians, and yet they are not Christians even now. They have been slumbering forty years! Surely that is a liberal share of sleep! They never intended to dream so long, and now they do not mean to lie in bed much longer. They will not turn to Christ at once, but they are resolved to do so one day. When are you going to do it, friend? "Before I die." Going to put it off to the last hour or two, are you? And so, when unconscious, and drugged to relieve your pain, you will begin to think of your soul? Is this wise? Surely you are void of understanding. Perhaps you will die in an hour. Did you not hear the other day of the alderman who died in his carriage? Little must he have dreamed of that. How would it have fared with you had you also been smitten while riding at your ease? Have you not heard of persons who fall dead at their work? What is to hinder your dying with a spade in your hand? I am often startled when I am told in the week that one whom I saw on Sunday is dead — gone from the shop to the judgment-seat. It is not a very long time ago since one went out at the doorway of the Tabernacle, and fell dead on the threshold. We have had deaths in the house of God, unexpected deaths; and sometimes people are hurried away unprepared who never meant to have died unconverted, who always had from their youth up some kind of desire to be ready, only still they wanted a little more sleep. Oh, my hearers, take heed of little delays, and short puttings off. You have wasted time enough already, come to the point at once before the clock strikes again. May God the Holy Spirit bring you to decision.

"Surely you do not object to my having a little more sleep?" says the sluggard. "You have waked me so soon. I only ask another little nap." "My dear man, it is far into the morning." He answers, "It is rather late, I know; but it will not be much later if I take just another doze." You wake him again, and tell him it is noon. He says, "It is the hottest part of the day: I daresay if I had been up I should have gone to the sofa and taken a little rest from the hot sun." You knock at his door when it is almost

evening, and then he cries, “It is of no use to get up now, for the day is almost over.” You remind him of his overgrown field and weedy vineyard, and he answers, “Yes, I must get up, I know.” He shakes himself and says, “I do not think it will matter much if I wait till the clock strikes. I will rest another minute or two.” He is glued to his bed, dead while he liveth, buried in his laziness. If he could sleep for ever he would, but he cannot, for the judgment-day will rouse him. It is written, “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment.” God grant that you spiritual sluggards may wake before that; but you will not unless you bestir yourselves betimes, for “now is the accepted time”; and it may be now or never. To-morrow is only to be found in the calendar of fools; to-day is the time of the wise man, the chosen season of our gracious God. Oh that the Holy Spirit may lead you to seize the present hour, that you may at once give yourselves to the Lord by faith in Christ Jesus, and then from his vineyard —

*“Quick uproot  
The noisome weeds, that without profit suck  
The soil’s fertility from wholesome plants.”*

# SOWN AMONG THORNS

## SERMON NO. 2040

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 19TH, 1888,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them”*  
— ~~REV~~ Matthew 13:7.

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful — ~~REV~~ Matthew 13:22.

WHEN that which comes of his sowing is unfruitful, the sower's work is wasted: he has spent his strength for nothing. Without fruit the sower's work would even seem to be insane, for he takes good wheat, throws it away, and loses it in the ground. Preaching is the most idle of occupations if the Word is not adapted to enter the heart, and produce good results. O my hearers, if you are not converted, I waste time and energy in standing here! People might well think it madness that one whole day in the week should be given up to hearing speeches—madness, indeed, it would be if nothing came of it to conscience and heart. If you do not bring forth fruit to holiness, and the end is not everlasting life, I would be better employed in breaking stones on the road-side than in preaching to you.

Fruit-bearing made the difference appear in the various soils upon which the sower scattered seed. You would not so certainly have known the quality if you had not seen the failure or success of the seed. We do not know your hearts until we see your bearing toward the Gospel. If it produces in you holiness and love to God and humanity, then we know that there is good soil in you; but if you are merely promising people, but not performing people, then we know that the ground of your heart is hard, or stony, or thorny. The Word of the Lord tries the hearts of the children of men, and in this it is as the fire which distinguishes between

metal and dross. O my dear hearers, you undergo a test today! Peradventure you will be judging the preacher, but a greater than the preacher will be judging you, for the Word itself shall judge you. You sit here as a jury upon yourselves; your own condition will be brought clearly out by the way in which you receive or refuse the Gospel of God. If you bring forth fruit to the praise of God's grace, well; but if not, however you may seem to hear with attention and may retain what you hear in your memories, if no saving effect is produced upon your souls we shall know that the soil of your heart has not been prepared of the Lord and remains in its native barrenness.

What fruit have you born hitherto from all your hearing? May I venture to put the question to each one of you very pointedly? Some of you have been hearers from your childhood — are you any the better? What long lists of sermons you must have heard by now! Count over your Sundays; how many they have been! Think of the good men now in heaven to whom you once listened! Remember the tears that were drawn from you by their discourses! If you are not saved yet, will you ever be saved? If you are not holy yet, will you ever be holy? Why has the Lord spent so much on one who makes no return? To what purpose is this waste? Surely you will have much to answer for in that great day when the servants of God shall give in their accounts, and shall have no joy when they come to mention you. How will you excuse yourselves before God for having occasioned them so much disappointment?

At this time I will only deal with one class of you. I will not speak to those of you who hear the Word, and retain none of it because of the hardness of your hearts; such are the wayside hearers. Neither will I address myself to those who receive the truth with sudden enthusiasm, and as readily quit it when trial befalls them; such are the rocky-ground hearers. But I will deal with those of you who hear the Word attentively, and, in a sense, receive it into your hearts and understandings, so that the seed grows in you, though its fruit never comes to perfection. You are religious persons, and to all appearance you are under the influence of godliness. You exhibit plenty of leaf, but there is no corn in the ear, no substance in your Christianity. I cannot speak with any degree of physical vigor to you by reason of the infirmity under which I struggle; but what I do say to you is steeped in earnest desire that the Lord may bless it to



you. An eloquent congregation will make any preacher eloquent: help me then this morning. If you will give me your ear, you will make up for my deficiency of tongue: especially if you give to God your hearts, He will bless His truth, however feebly I may utter it.

First, I desire to talk to you a little about the seed which you have received; secondly about the thorns; thirdly about the result.

**I.** First a little about THE SEED. Remember, first, that it was the same seed in every case. Yonder it has brought forth thirty-fold; it was the same seed which was lost upon you. In a still better case, the seed has brought forth a hundred-fold; it was precisely the same corn with which your field has been sown. The sower went to his master's granary for all his seed; how is it that in your case it is all lost? If there were two Gospels, we might expect two results without fault in the soil which failed. But with many of you to whom I speak there has been only one Gospel throughout the whole of your lives. You have been attending in this house of prayer, where we have never changed our seed, but have gone on sowing the one eternal truth of God. Many have brought forth fruit a hundred-fold from the seed which has been scattered broadcast from this platform. They heard no more than you have heard, but how much better they treated it than you have done! I want you to consider this. How covered with briars and thorns must your mind be that the Gospel which converted your sister or friend never touched you! Though you may be nominally a believer in the Word of God, it has never so affected you as to make you gracious and holy. You are still a hearer only. How is this? The fault is not in the seed, for it is the same which has been so useful to others.

You have heard the Gospel with pleasure. "Heard it!" You say, "I heard it when a little child." Your mother brought you to the house of God in her arms. You have heard it and still hear it, though it is rather like an old song to you: but is this to be all? I am very grateful that you do hear the Gospel, for I hope that one of these days God may cause it to grow in you and yield fruit. But still a grave responsibility is upon you. Think how favored you have been! How will you answer for this privilege if it is neglected and rendered useless by that neglect? Dear hearers, if we lived in the heart of Africa and we died without believing in a Christ of whom we had not heard, we could not be blamed for that. But here we are in the

heart of London where the Gospel is preached in all our streets, and our blood will be on our own heads if we perish. Do you mean to go down to hell? Are you so desperate that you will go there wearing the garb of Christians? If you do persist ruining your souls, my eyes shall follow you with tears; and when I cannot warn you any longer, I will weep in secret places because of your perversity.

Those described in my text were not only hearers, but in a measure they accepted the good Word. The seed fell not only on this ground, but into it, so that it began to grow. Of you it is true that you do not refuse the Gospel, or raise disputes concerning it. I am glad that you have no difficulties about the inspiration of Scripture, or the Deity of our Lord, or the fact of His atonement. You do not befog yourselves with “modern thought,” but you avow your belief in the old, old Gospel. So far so good; but what shall I make of the strange fact that your acceptance of the truth has no effect upon you? It is a very lamentable case, is it not, that a person should believe the Gospel to be true, and yet should live as if it were a lie? If it is the truth, why do you not yield obedience to it? The person knows that there is an atonement for sin, but he has never confessed his sin and accepted the great sacrifice. Those great truths, which circle about the Cross like a coronet of stars, he has seen their beauty and enjoyed their brilliance, but he has never allowed their light to enter his heart and find a reflection in his moral character. This is evil, only evil. If you believe the truth, what do you more than the Devil? No, you are behind him, for he believes, and trembles, and you have not gone so far as the trembling. It should be so, that every great truth which is believed should influence the mind, sway the thoughts, and mold the life. This is the natural fruitage of great spiritual truth. The doctrine of grace, when it takes possession of the mind and governs the heart, produces the purest results; but if it is held in unrighteousness, it is a curse rather than a blessing to have a head knowledge. Is it not a dreadful thing to believe God’s revelation without receiving God’s Spirit? This is to accept a well, but never to drink of the water; to accept corn in the barn, and yet die of hunger. God have mercy upon the possessors of a dead faith!

The seed sown among thorns lived and continued to grow. And in many people’s minds the Gospel of divine truth is growing after a fashion: they understand it better, can defend it more valorously, and speak of it more

fluently. Moreover, it does influence them in some form and degree, for gross vices are forsaken. They are decent imitations of believers: you can see the shape of an ear: the stalk has struggled up through the thorns until you can see its head, and you are led to expect corn. But go to that apparent wheat-ear, and feel it: there are the sheaths but there is nothing in them; you have all the makings of an ear of wheat, but it will yield no grain. I would speak to those before me who, perhaps, have been baptized and are members of the church; I want to ask of them a question or two. Do you not think that there is a great deal of empty profession nowadays? Do you not think that many have a name to live and are dead? "Yes," say you, "I know a neighbor whom I judge to be in that condition." May not another neighbor judge the same of you? Would it not be well to raise the question about yourself? Have you really believed in the Lord Jesus? Are you truly converted from sin and self? Turn that sharp eye of yours homeward for a while. Examine your own actions, and judge your condition by them. Put yourself into the crucible. O my God, what if I should be a preacher to others, and should be myself a castaway! Will not every deacon and elder, and every individual church member, speak to himself after the same fashion. You will go to your Sunday school class this afternoon; will you be teaching the children what you do not know? You mean to go to a meeting this evening and talk to others about conversion; will you be exhorting them to that which you have never yourself experienced? Will it be so? You do not need fine preaching, but you do need probing in the conscience. A thorough examination will do the healthy no harm, and it may bless the sick. "Lord, let me know the worst of my case," is one of my frequent prayers, and I suggest it to you.

So much then about the seed: it was good seed, it was sown, it was received by the soil, it grew and promised well, but yet in the end it was unfruitful. No doubt multitudes, who receive Christianity, become regular attendants at our place of worship, and are honest in their moral character; but Christ is not all in all to them. He holds a very secondary place in their affections. Their wheat is overshadowed with a thicket of thorns, and is so choked that it comes to nothing. Their religion is buried beneath their worldliness. Sad will their end be. God in mercy save us from such a doom!

**II.** But now, secondly, I would speak a little about THE THORNS. They are by Matthew described as “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches.” Luke adds, “and pleasures of this life,” and Mark still further mentions, “the lusts of other things.” I suppose that the sower did not see any thorns when he threw the handful of corn; they had all been cut down level with the surface. He probably hoped that it was all good ground, and therefore he sowed it little suspecting that the thorns were in possession.

Note well that thorns are natural to the soil. Since the fall these are the firstborn children of the ground. Any evil which hinders religion is not at all an extraordinary thing — it is what we ought to expect among fallen human beings. Grace is an exotic; thorns are indigenous. Sin is very much at home in the human heart and, like an ill weed, it grows apace. If you wish to go to heaven, I might take a little time to show you the way, and I would need to stir you up to diligence; but if you must go to hell — well, “easy is the way to destruction” — it is only a little matter of neglect. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” Evil things are easy things: for they are natural to our fallen nature. Right things are rare flowers that need cultivation. If any of you are being injured by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, I am not astonished; it is natural that it should be so. Therefore, be on your guard against these mischiefs. I pray you say to yourself, “Come, there is something in this man’s talk. He is very slow and dull, but still there is something in what he says. I may, after all, be tolerating those thorns in my heart which will kill the good seed, for I am of like passions and infirmities with other people.” I beseech you look to yourselves, that you be not deceived at the last.

The thorns were already established in the soil. They were not only the natural inhabitants of the soil, but they were rooted and fixed in it. Our sins within us claim the freehold of our faculties, and they will not give it up if they can help it. They will not give way to the Holy Spirit, or to the new life, or to the influences of divine grace, without a desperate struggle. The roots of sin run through and through our nature, grasp it with wonderful force, and keep up their grasp with marvelous tenacity. O my dear hearer, whoever you may be, you are a fallen creature! If you were the Pope himself, or the President of the United States, or the Queen of England, it would be true of you that you were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and your unregenerate heart is deceitful above all things and

desperately wicked. The established church of the town of Mansoul has the Devil for its archbishop. Sin has enclasped our nature as a boa constrictor encircles its victim, and when it has maintained its hold for twenty, forty, or sixty years, I hope you are not so foolish as to think that holy things will easily get the mastery. Our evil nature is radically conservative, and it will endeavor to crush out every attempt at a revolution by which the grace of God should reign through righteousness. Wherefore, watch and pray, lest temptation choke that which is good in you. Watch earnestly, for grace is a tender plant in a foreign soil, in an uncongenial clime, while sin is in its own element, and is strongly rooted in the soil.

Do you know why so many professing Christians are like the thorny ground? It is because processes have been omitted which would have gone far to alter the condition of things. It was the husbandman's business to uproot the thorns, or burn them on the spot. Years ago when people were converted, there used to be such a thing as conviction of sin. The great subsoil plow of soul-anguish was used to tear deep into the soul. Fire also burned in the mind with exceeding heat: as people saw sin and felt its dreadful results, the love of it was burned out of them. But now we are dinned with braggings about rapid salvations. As for myself, I believe in instantaneous conversions, and I am glad to see them; but I am still more glad when I see a thorough work of grace, a deep sense of sin, and an effectual wounding by the law. We shall never get rid of thorns with plows that scratch the surface. Those fields grow the best corn which are best plowed. Converts are likely to endure when the thorns cannot spring up because they have been plowed up. Dear hearer, are you undergoing today a very severe conviction of sin? Thank God for it. Are you in awful trouble and anguish? Do not think that a calamity has happened to you. May God Himself continue to plow you, and then sow you, and make sure work in you for years to come! So you see these thorns were natives, and old-established natives, and it would have been well had they been cut up.

The thorns were bound to grow. There is an awful vitality in evil. First the thorns sent up a few tiny shoots. These shoots branched out, and more and more came to keep them company, until the wheat stood as a lonely thing in a thicket of briars, and was more and more overtopped and

shadowed by them. The thorns aspired to the mastery, and they soon obtained it; that done, they set to work to destroy the wheat. They blocked it up, crowded it out, and some of the thorn shoots twisted around it, and held the wheat by the neck until it was choked.

The thorns sucked away all the nutriment from the wheat, and it was starved, for there is only a certain quantity of nourishment in the soil, and if the thorns have it, the wheat must go without it. There is only a certain amount of thought and energy in a person; and if the world gets it, Christ cannot have it. If our thoughts run upon care and pleasure, they cannot be eager about true religion: is not that clear? That is the way in which those thorns served the wheat; they starved it by devouring its food, and they choked it by keeping off the air and sun; the poor thing became shriveled and weak, and quite unable to produce the grain which the sower expected of it. So it is with many professing Christians. They are at first worldly, but not so very worldly. They are fairly religious, though by no means too zealous. They seek the pleasures of the world, but by no means quite so much as others we could name. But very soon the thorns grow, and it becomes doubtful which will win, sin or grace, the world or Christ. Two masters there cannot be, and in this case it is especially impossible since neither of the contending powers will brook a rival. Sin has sprung from a royal though evil stock, and if it be in the heart, it will struggle for the throne. So it came to pass that the tares, being tolerated, choked the good seed.

Let me describe these thorns a little. Putting together Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find that there were four sorts of thorns. The first is called “the care of this world.” This assuredly comes to the poor; they are apt to grow anxious and mistrustful about temporal things. “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” This trinity of doleful questions much afflicts many. But anxiety comes to rich people also. Care dwells with wealth as well as with poverty. “How shall I get more? How shall I lay it up? How shall I still increase it?” — and so on. It is “the care of the age” which we are most warned against. Each age has its own special fret. It is not a care for God — that is not the care of any age; but the care of the age is some vanity or another, and as a standing thing it is the ambition to keep up with your fellows, to be respectable, and to keep up appearances. This is the care which eats as does a canker in the

case of many. Grim care turns many a black hair white, and furrows many a brow. If you let care grow in your soul, it will choke up your religion: you cannot care for God and for mammon too. "We must have care," says one. There is a care which is proper, and there is an anxiety which is improper. That is proper care which you can cast upon God — "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." That is an improper care which you dare not take to God but have to bear yourself. Take heed of anxiety; it will eat the heart out of your religion.

There were others who felt "the deceitfulness of riches." Our Lord does not say "riches," but "the deceitfulness of riches." The two things grow together: riches are evermore deceitful. They deceive people in the getting of them, for people judge matters very unfairly when a prospect of gain is before them. The jingle of the charming guinea, or of "the almighty dollar," makes a world of difference to the ear when it is hearing a case. People cannot afford to lose by integrity and so they take the doubtful way, and either sail near the wind or speculate until it amounts to gambling. They would not endure the idea of such conduct were it not that the hope of gain deceives them. Our line of conduct ought never to be ruled by gain or loss. Do right if the heavens fall. Do no wrong, even though a kingdom should be its reward. People turn to Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations," a wonderful book, and there they find certain laws which I believe to be as fixed and unalterable as the laws of gravitation; led on by the deceitfulness of riches, people make these laws into an excuse for grinding the faces of the poor. They might as well take people to the top of a rock, fling them down, and dash them to pieces, and then cry out, "This is the natural result of the law of gravitation." Of course, the law of gravitation operates remorselessly, and so will the law of supply and demand. We must not use either of these laws as a cover for cruelty to the poor and needy, yet many do so through "the deceitfulness of riches."

Riches are very deceitful when they are gained, for they breed in men and women many vices which they do not themselves suspect. One man is purse-proud, but he thinks he is humble. He is a self-made man and worships him that made him. Is it not natural that a person should worship his maker? In his heart he thinks: "I am somebody. I came up to London with half-a-crown in my pocket, and now I could buy a whole street!" People ought to respect someone of that kind, ought they not,

even though he may have made his money by very queer practices? It little matters how you make money nowadays; only get it, and you will have plenty of admirers and the deceitfulness of riches will enable you to admire yourself. With pride comes a desire for wealthy society and vain company, and thus again religion receives severe injury. There is apt to grow up in the mind an idolatry of this world and its treasures. "I don't love money," says one. "You know it is not money that is the root of all evil, but the love of it." Just so; but are you sure that you do not love it? Your thoughts run a good deal after it. You hug it rather closely and you find it hard to part with it. I will not accuse you, but I would have you awake to the fact that riches worm themselves into a person's heart before he is well aware of it.

You may perceive the deceitfulness of riches if you note the excuses which people make for getting so much and withholding it from the cause of God. "They intend to do a great deal of good with it." Did you hear the Devil laugh? I am not speaking of many dear people in this place who are doing a great deal of good with their means, but I am speaking of those who are simply living to accumulate wealth, and who say that they will one day do a great deal of good with it. They say so. Will it ever be more than saying? I fear that in this thing many rich people deceive themselves. They go on accumulating the means but never using them; making bricks, but never building. All they will get with it will be a corner in "The Illustrated London News" to say that they died worth so much. O sirs, how can you be content thus to have your good things choked? Wherever this deceitfulness of riches is allowed the upper hand, it chokes the good seed. A person cannot be eager to get, and eager to keep, and eager to increase, and eager to become a millionaire, and at the same time be a true servant of the Lord Jesus. As the body grows rich, the soul grows poor.

Luke tells us of another kind of weed, namely, "the pleasures of this life." I am sure that these thorns play a dreadful part nowadays. I have nothing to say against recreation in its proper place. Certain forms of recreation are needful and useful; but it is a wretched thing when amusement becomes a vocation. Amusement should be used to do us good "like a medicine"; it must never be used as the food of the individual. From early morning until late at night some spend their time in a round of frivolities, or else their very work is simply carried on to furnish them funds for their pleasures.



This is vicious. Many have had all holy thoughts and gracious resolutions stamped out by perpetual trifling. Pleasure, so called, is the murderer of thought. This is the age of excessive amusement. Everybody craves for it, like a babe for its rattle. In the more sober years of our fathers, men and women had something better to live for than silly sports. The thorns are choking the age.

Mark adds, “and the lusts of other things.” I will not enumerate all those other things, but all things except the things of Christ and of the Father are “other things.” If anybody spends his life on any object, however good, short of the glory of God, the good seed is choked by the inferior object. One person is eminently scientific, and he will do well if his science is used for holy purposes, but it can be used to choke the seed. Another person is a great proficient in the arts, and he does well if the arts are used as a mule for Christ to ride upon, but if art is to ride upon Christ, then it is ill enough. I met with a clergyman many years ago who was going a long distance to find a new beetle. He was a great entomologist, and I did not blame him for it, for to a thoughtful person entomology may yield many profitable lessons. But if he neglected his preaching to catch insects, then I do not wonder that a parishioner would wish that the beetles would nibble his old sermons, for they were very stale. I call it choking the seed when any inferior pursuit becomes the master of our minds, and the cause of God and truth takes a secondary place. The seed is choked in our souls whenever Christ is not our all in all. You see my drift: be it what it may — gain, glory, study, pleasure — all these may be briars that will choke the seed.

Mr. Jay was never more pleased than when at Bristol he had a note sent up to him which ran as follows: “A young man, who is prospering in business, begs the prayers of God’s people that prosperity may not be a snare to him.” Take care that you look thus upon your prosperity. My dear friend Dr. Taylor, of New York, speaks of some Christians nowadays as having a “butterfly Christianity.” When time, and strength, and thought, and talent are all spent upon mere amusement, what else are men and women but mere butterflies? “Society” is just a mass of idle people keeping each other in countenance. O dear hearers, surely we did not come into this world to play away our days! I do not think we came into this world either to slave ourselves to death, or to rust away in laziness. We

have come here as a man enters into the porch that he may afterward enter the house. This life is the doorway to the palace of heaven. Pass through it in such style that you may enter before the King with holy joy. If you give your minds and thoughts to these passing things, be they what they may, you will ruin your souls, for the good seed cannot grow.

**III.** So I close in the last place by noticing THE RESULT. The seed was unfruitful.

These briars and thorns could not pull the seed up, or throw it away. It remained where it was, but they choked it. So it may be that your business, your cares, your pleasures have not torn up your religion by the roots — it is there still, such as it is. But these things suffocate your better feelings. Someone that is choked is not good for much. If a thief gets into his house, and he desires to defend his property, what can he do while he is choked? He must wait until he gets his breath again. What an amount of choked religion we have around us! It may be alive. I do not know whether it is or not; but it looks very black in the face. God save you from having your religion choked!

I have already told you it was drained of all its sustenance. Look at many Christians; I call them Christians for they call themselves so. A boy in the streets, selling mince pies, kept crying, “Hot mince pies!” A person bought one of them, and found it quite cold. “Boy,” said he, why did you call these pies hot?” “That’s the name they go by, sir,” said the boy. So there are plenty of people that are called Christians, but they are not Christians — that’s the name they go by; but all the substance is drained out of them by other matters. You see the shape of a Christian, the make of a Christian, and some of the talk of a Christian, but the fruit of a Christian is not there. That is the result of the choking by the thorns of care, riches, pleasure, and worldliness in general.

What life there was in the wheat was very sickly. Let me remind certain persons that their spiritual lives are growing weak at this time. Morning prayer this morning, how long did it take? Do not grow red in the face. I will say no more about it. You are not coming out tonight, are you? Half a Sunday is enough worship for you. Would you not like to live in some country place where you did not need to go out to a place of worship even

once? Bible reading, how much do you do of that? Family prayer, is that a delight to you? Why, numbers of so-called Christians have given up family religion altogether. How about week-day services? You are not often at a prayer-meeting. No, the distance is too great! Thursday night service? “Well, well, you see I might come, but there happens to be a lawn tennis party that night.” Will you come in the winter’? “Yes, I would, but then a friend drops in, and we have an evening at bagatelle.” How many there are in this condition! I am not going to judge them, but I remember that an eminent minister used to say, “When weekday services are forsaken, farewell to the life of godliness.” Such people never seem to bathe in their religion, but they give themselves a wetting with the end of the towel; thus they try to look decent, but they are not inwardly cleansed.

As to confessing Christ before men and women, many fall altogether. If you were pushed into a corner, and were asked if you are a Christian, you would say, “Well, I do go to a place of worship,” but you are by no means anxious to own the soft impeachment. Our Salvation Army friends are not ashamed of their religion; why should you be? Our Quaker friends used to wear broad brims, but they are very properly giving up their peculiar garb. I hope it is not to be to you an indication that you may conceal your religion and be as much as possible like the world. Do you hope to be soldiers and yet never wear your regimentals? This is one of the marks of feeble religion.

When it comes to defending the Gospel, where do you see it in this age? I hoped that many would be found among Baptists who would care for the truth; but now I come to the conclusion that it is with many, as with the showman when asked which was Wellington, and which was Bonaparte: “Whichever you please, my little dears. Pay your money, and take your choice!” Free will or free grace, human merit or Christ’s atonement, it does not matter now. New theology or old theology, human speculation or divine revelation — who minds? What do they care whether God’s truth stands or the Devil’s lies? I am weary of these drivellers! The thorns have choked the seed in the pulpits and in the churches as well as in private individuals. Oh, that God would return! Oh, that His Spirit would raise up among us people who believe indeed, and prove the power of their belief!

The fruit of much modern piety is nil. I sat down one day with three or four old Christian men. We had no sooner met than we began to speak of the providential dealings of God with His people. We related instances of answers to prayer, and we spoke of the sovereign grace of God, and His faithfulness to His saints. When we had gone a little forward in the conversation, one remarked how he had enjoyed the talk. "Alas!" said he, "nobody talks about God now. His providence and His readiness to hear prayer are seldom mentioned now. The talk is all about the markets, and the weather, and Home Rule, and Mr. Gladstone, and Disestablishment, but little enough about the Lord Jesus Christ." That witness was true. In old times the Lord's people spoke often one to another, and the Lord stood at the window and listened: — "The Lord hearkened, and heard it." He liked their talk so well that He said He would print it — "A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." Where do you get experimental Christian talk now? The thorns choke holy communion upon the best things.

Fervent prayer! Mighty prayer! Where do you meet with it? Thank God, we have some brothers and sisters here whose prayers could unlock the windows of heaven, or shut them up; but it is not so with many. Go to the prayer-meetings of most of the churches. What poor things! Of course I find in country places that many drop the prayer-meeting during hay-time and harvest. In London they do not drop the prayer-meetings in summer because they are too small to need dropping. They take up the fragment of a prayer-meeting and mend with it the worn-out lecture, so that it becomes neither lecture nor prayer meeting. How can we expect a blessing when we are too lazy to ask for it? Is it not evidence of a dying religion when, to cover their carelessness about meeting for prayer, we even hear ministers doubting the value of prayer-meetings and calling them "religious expedients"?

Where do you meet with intense enjoyment of the things of God? The spiritual life is low when there is little delight in holy service. Oh, for the old Methodistic fire! Oh, to feel our hearts dance at the sound of Jesus' name! Oh, to flame up like beacon fires, and blaze toward heaven with holy ecstasy! It is a sorrowful day when religion goes abroad without wearing her ornaments of joy. When an army has left its flag behind, it has evidently given up all idea of victory.

If there is a declension in spiritual life, we cannot expect to see deeds of holy consecration. Oh, for men and women who bring their alabaster boxes to Jesus! I am glad when I hear this kind of lamentation. "My dear sir, I have not done for the Lord what I ought to have done. I have been a believer now for many years, but I have not given to His cause what I ought to have given; tell me what I can do." There are hopeful signs in such inquiries and therefore they are well, but it would be better to begin early and avoid such regrets.

I would put it to you, my dear hearer, have you been fruitful? Have you been fruitful with your wealth? Have you been fruitful with your talent? Have you been fruitful with your time? What are you doing for Jesus now? Salvation is not by doings, you are saved by grace, but if you are so saved, prove it by your devoted life. Consecrate yourself anew this day wholly to your Master's service. You are not your own, but bought with a price, and if you would not be like these thorn-choked seeds, live while you live, with all-consuming zeal.

"Well," says one, but there are the thorns." I know there are. They were here when our blessed Lord came among us, and they made Him a cruel crown. Are you going to grow more of them? May I urge you to give up cultivating thorns'? They are useless; they come to no good. Whatever the pursuit is, short of the glory of God, it is a thorn and there is no use in it. It will in the end be painful to you as it was to your Lord. A thorn will tear your flesh, aye, tear your heart. Especially when you come to die will these thorns be in your pillow. Even if you die in the Lord, it will grieve your heart to think you did not live more to Jesus. If you live for these things, you will rue the day, for they are like thorns, painful in the getting, painful in the keeping, and painful in the extraction. You who have had a thorn in your hand know what I mean. Worldly cares come with pain, they stay with pain, and they go with pain.

Still, there is a use for thorns. What is that use? First, if you have thorns about you today, make a child's use of them. What does a child do? If he gets a thorn in his finger, he looks at it, and cries. How it smarts! Then he runs off to his mother. That is one of the sweet uses of his adversity, it admits him to his mother at once. She might say, "What are you coming in for? Run about the garden." But he cries, "Please, mother, I've got a thorn

in my finger.” This is quite enough argument to secure him the best attention of the queen of the house. See how tenderly she takes out the little dagger! Let your cares drive you to God. I shall not mind if you have many of them if each one leads you to prayer. If every fret makes you lean more on the Beloved, it will be a benefit. Thus make good use of the thorns.

Another service to which thorns may be put is to make a hedge of them, to keep the goats of worldly pleasure from eating the young shoots of your graces. Let the sorrows of life keep off temptations which else might do you serious mischief.

May we meet in heaven! Oh, may we all meet in heaven! What a congregation I have addressed this morning! I feel overawed as I look at you. From the ends of the earth have many of you come. The Lord bless you! Strangers are here in vast numbers, for the most of our regular hearers are at the seaside. I may never see you again on earth. May we all meet in heaven, where thorns will never grow! May we be gathered by the angels in that day when the Lord shall say, “Gather the wheat into my barn”! Amen. So let it be.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Matthew 13:1-23.  
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 916, 643, 30.

# NO COMPROMISE

## SERMON NO. 2047

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
OCTOBER 7TH, 1888,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father’s house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again.” — ~~GEN~~ Genesis 24:5-8.

GENESIS is both the book of beginnings and the book of dispensations. You know what use Paul makes of Sarah and Hagar, of Esau and Jacob, and the like. Genesis is, all through, a book instructing the reader in the dispensations of God towards man. Paul saith, in a certain place, “which things are an allegory,” by which he did not mean that they were not literal facts, but that, being literal facts, they might also be used instructively as an allegory. So may I say of this chapter. It records what actually was said and done; but at the same time, it bears within it allegorical instruction with regard to heavenly things. The true minister of Christ is like this Eleazar of Damascus; he is sent to find a wife for his Master’s son. His great desire is, that many shall be presented unto Christ in the day of his appearing, as the bride, the Lamb’s wife.

The faithful servant of Abraham, before he started, communed with his master; and this is a lesson to us, who go on our Lord's errands. Let us, before we engage in actual service, see the Master's face, talk with him, and tell to him any difficulties which occur to our minds. Before we get to work, let us know what we are at, and on what footing we stand. Let us hear from our Lord's own mouth what he expects us to do, and how far he will help us in the doing of it. I charge you, my fellow-servants, never to go forth to plead with men for God until you have first pleaded with God for men. Do not attempt to deliver a message which you have not first of all yourself received by his Holy Spirit. Come out of the chamber of fellowship with God into the pulpit of ministry among men, and there will be a freshness and a power about you which none shall be able to resist. Abraham's servant spoke and acted as one who felt bound to do exactly what his master bade him, and to say what his master told him; hence his one anxiety was to know the essence and measure of his commission. During his converse with his master he mentioned one little point about which there might be a hitch; and his master soon removed the difficulty from his mind. It is about that hitch, which has occurred lately on a very large scale, and has upset a good many of my Master's servants, that I am going to speak this morning: may God grant that it may be to the benefit of his church at large!

**I.** Beginning our sermon, we will ask you, first, to THINK OF THE SERVANT'S JOYFUL BUT WEIGHTY ERRAND. It was a joyful errand: the bells of marriage were ringing around him. The marriage of the heir should be a joyful event. It was an honorable thing for the servant to be entrusted with the finding of a wife for his master's son. Yet it was every way a most responsible business, by no means easy of accomplishment. Blunders might very readily occur before he was aware of it; and he needed to have all his wits about him, and something more than his wits, too, for so delicate a matter. He had to journey far, over lands without track or road; he had to seek out a family which he did not know, and to find out of that family a woman whom he did not know, who nevertheless should be the right person to be the wife of his master's son: all this was a great service.

The work this man undertook was a business upon which his master's heart was set. Isaac was now forty years old, and had shown no sign of marrying. He was of a quiet, gentle spirit, and needed a more active spirit



to urge him on. The death of Sarah had deprived him of the solace of his life, which he had found in his mother, and had, no doubt, made him desire tender companionship. Abraham himself was old, and well stricken in years; and he very naturally wished to see the promise beginning to be fulfilled, that in Isaac should his seed be called. Therefore, with great anxiety, which is indicated by his making his servant swear an oath of a most solemn kind, he gave him the commission to go to the old family abode in Mesopotamia, and seek for Isaac a bride from thence. Although that family was not all that could be desired, yet it was the best he knew of; and as some heavenly light lingered there, he hoped to find in that place the best wife for his son. The business was, however, a serious one which he committed to his servant. My brethren, this is nothing compared with the weight which hangs on the true minister of Christ. All the Great Father's heart is set on giving to Christ a church which shall be his beloved for ever. Jesus must not be alone: his church must be his dear companion. The Father would find a bride for the great Bridegroom, a recompense for the Redeemer, a solace for the Savior: therefore he lays it upon all whom he calls to tell out the gospel, that we should seek souls for Jesus, and never rest till hearts are wedded to the Son of God. Oh, for grace to carry out this commission!

This message was the more weighty because of the person for whom the spouse was sought. Isaac was an extraordinary personage; indeed, to the servant he was unique. He was a man born according to promise, not after the flesh, but by the power of God; and you know how in Christ, and in all that are one with Christ, the life comes by the promise and the power of God, and springeth not of man. Isaac was himself the fulfillment of promise, and the heir of the promise. Infinitely glorious is our Lord Jesus as the Son of man! Who shall declare his generation? Where shall be found a helpmeet for him? a soul fit to be espoused unto him? Isaac had been sacrificed; he had been laid upon the altar, and although he did not actually die, his father's hand had unsheathed the knife wherewith to slay him. Abraham in spirit had offered up his son; and you know who he is of whom we preach, and for whom we preach, even Jesus, who has laid down his life a sacrifice for sinners. He has been presented as a whole burnt-offering unto God. Oh! by the wounds, and by the bloody sweat, I ask you where shall we find a heart fit to be wedded to him? How shall we

find men and women who can worthily recompense love so amazing, so divine, as that of him who died the death of the cross? Isaac had also been, in a figure, raised from the dead. To his father he was “as good as dead,” as said the apostle; and he was given back to him from the dead. But our blessed Lord has actually risen from an actual death, and stands before us this day as the Conqueror of death, and the Spoiler of the grave. Who shall be joined to this Conqueror? Who is fit to dwell in glory with this glorious One? One would have thought that every heart would aspire to such happiness, and leap in prospect of such peerless honor, and that none would shrink back except through a sense of great unworthiness. Alas! it is not so, though so it ought to be.

What a weighty errand have we to fulfill to find those who shall be linked for ever in holy union with the Heir of the promise, even the sacrificed and risen One! Isaac was everything to Abraham. Abraham would have said to Isaac, “All that I have is thine.” So is it true of our blessed Lord, whom he hath made Heir of all things; by whom also he made the worlds, that “it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.” What a dignity will be put upon any of you who are married to Christ! To what a height of eminence will you be uplifted by becoming one with Jesus! O preacher, what a work hast thou to do to-day, to find out those to whom thou shalt give the bracelet, and upon whose face thou shalt hang the jewel! To whom shall I say, “Wilt thou give thy heart to my Lord! Wilt thou have Jesus to be thy confidence, thy salvation, thine all in all? Art thou willing to become his that he may be thine?”

Said I not truly that it was a joyful, but a weighty errand, when you think what she must be to whom his master’s son should be espoused? She must, at least, be willing and beautiful. In the day of God’s power, hearts are made willing. There can be no marriage to Jesus without a heart of love. Where shall we find this willing heart? Only where the grace of God has wrought it. Ah, then, I see how I may find beauty, too, among the sons of men! Marred as our nature is by sin, only the Holy Spirit can impart that beauty of holiness which will enable the Lord Jesus to see comeliness in his chosen. Alas! in our hearts there is an aversion to Christ, and an unwillingness to accept of him, and at the same time a terrible unfitness and unworthiness! The Spirit of God implants a love which is of heavenly origin, and renews the heart by a regeneration from above; and then we

seek to be one with Jesus, but not till then. See, then, how our errand calls for the help of God himself.

Think what she will become who is to be married to Isaac? She is to be his delight; his loving friend and companion. She is to be partner of all his wealth; and specially is she to be a partaker in the great covenant promise, which was peculiarly entailed upon Abraham and his family. When a sinner comes to Christ, what does Christ make of him? His delight is in him: he communes with him; he hears his prayer, he accepts his praise; he works in him and with him, and glorifies himself in him. He makes the believing man joint-heir with himself of all that he has, and introduces him into the covenant treasure-house, wherein the riches and glory of God are stored up for his chosen. Ah, dear friends! it is a very small business in the esteem of some to preach the gospel; and yet, if God is with us, ours is more than angels' service. In a humble way you are telling of Jesus to your boys and girls in your classes; and some will despise you as "only Sunday-school teachers"; but your work has a spiritual weight about it unknown to conclaves of senators, and absent from the counsels of emperors. Upon what you say, death, and hell, and worlds unknown are hanging. You are working out the destinies of immortal spirits, turning souls from ruin to glory, from sin to holiness.

*“‘Tis not a work of small import  
Your loving care demands;  
But what might fill an angel's heart,  
And filled the Savior's hands.”*

In carrying out his commission, this servant must spare no exertion. It would be required of him to journey to a great distance, having a general indication of direction, but not knowing the way. He must have divine guidance and protection. When he reached the place, he must exercise great common-sense, and at the same time a trustful dependence upon the goodness and wisdom of God. It would be a wonder of wonders if he ever met the chosen woman, and only the Lord could bring it to pass. He had all the care and the faith required. We have read the story of how he journeyed, and prayed, and pleaded. We should have cried, "Who is sufficient for these things?" but we see that the Lord Jehovah made him sufficient, and his mission was happily carried out. How can we put ourselves into the right position to get at sinners, and win them for Jesus?

How can we learn to speak the right words? How shall we suit our teaching to the condition of their hearts? How shall we adapt ourselves to their feelings, their prejudices, their sorrows, and their temptations? Brethren, we who preach the gospel continually may well cry, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." To seek for pearls at the bottom of the sea is child's play compared with seeking for souls in this wicked London. If God be not with us, we may look our eyes out, and wear our tongues away in vain. Only as the Almighty God shall lead, and guide, and influence, and inspire, can we perform our solemn trust; only by divine help shall we joyfully come back, bringing with us the chosen of the Lord. We are the Bridegroom's friends, and we rejoice greatly in his joy, but we sigh and cry till we have found the chosen hearts in whom he will delight, whom he shall raise to sit with him upon his throne.

**II.** Secondly, I would have you CONSIDER THE REASONABLE FEAR WHICH IS MENTIONED. Abraham's servant said, "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land." This is a very serious, grave, and common difficulty. If the woman be not willing, nothing can be done; force and fraud are out of the question; there must be a true will, or there can be no marriage in this instance. Here was the difficulty: here was a will to be dealt with. Ah, my brethren! this is our difficulty still. Let me describe this difficulty in detail as it appeared to the servant, and appears to us.

She may not believe my report, or be impressed by it. When I come to her, and tell her that I am sent by Abraham, she may look me in the face, and say, "There be many deceivers nowadays." If I tell her that my master's son is surpassingly beautiful and rich, and that he would fain take her to himself, she may answer, "Strange tales and romances are common in these days; but the prudent do not quit their homes." Brethren, in our case this is a sad fact. The great evangelical prophet cried of old, "Who hath believed our report?" We also cry in the same words. Men care not for the report of God's great love to the rebellious sons of men. They do not believe that the infinitely glorious Lord is seeking the love of poor, insignificant man, and to win it has laid down his life. Calvary, with its wealth of mercy, grief, love, and merit, is disregarded. Indeed, we tell a wonderful story, and it may well seem too good to be true; but it is sad indeed that the multitude of men go their ways after trifles, and count

these grand realities to be but dreams. I am bowed down with dismay that my Lord's great love, which led him even to die for men, should hardly be thought worthy of your hearing, much less of your believing. Here is a heavenly marriage, and right royal nuptials placed within your reach; but with a sneer you turn aside, and prefer the witcheries of sin.

There was another difficulty: she was expected to feel a love to one she had never seen. She had only newly heard that there was such a person as Isaac, but yet she must love him enough to leave her kindred, and go to a distant land. This could only be because she recognized the will of Jehovah in the matter. Ah, my dear hearers! all that we tell you is concerning things not seen as yet; and here is our difficulty. You have eyes, and you want to see everything; you have hands, and you want to handle everything; but there is one whom you cannot see as yet, who has won our love because of what we believe concerning him. We can truly say of him, "Whom having not seen, we love: in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." I know that you answer our request thus: "You demand too much of us when you ask us to love a Christ we have never seen." I can only answer, "It is even so: we do ask more of you than we expect to receive." Unless God the Holy Ghost shall work a miracle of grace upon your hearts, you will not be persuaded by us to quit your old associations, and join yourselves to our beloved Lord. And yet, if you did come to him, and love him, he would more than content you; for you would find in him rest unto your souls, and a peace which passeth all understanding.

Abraham's servant may have thought: She may refuse to make so great a change as to quit Mesopotamia for Canaan. She had been born and bred away there in a settled country, and all her associations were with her father's house; and to marry Isaac she must tear herself away. So, too, you cannot have Jesus, and have the world too: you must break with sin to be joined to Jesus. You must come away from the licentious world, the fashionable world, the scientific world, and from the (so-called) religious world. If you become a Christian, you must quit old habits, old motives, old ambitions, old pleasures, old boasts, old modes of thought. All things must become new. You must leave the things you have loved, and seek many of those things which you have hitherto despised. There must come to you as great a change as if you had died, and were made over again. You

answer, "Must I endure all this for One whom I have never seen, and for an inheritance on which I have never set my foot?" It is even so. Although I am grieved that you turn away, I am not in the least surprised, for it is not given to many to see him who is invisible, or to choose the strait and narrow way which leadeth unto life. The man or woman who will follow God's messenger to be married to so strange a Bridegroom is a rare bird.

Moreover, it might be a great difficulty to Rebekah, if she had had any difficulties at all, to think that she must henceforth lead a pilgrim life. She would quit house and farm for tent and gipsy life. Abraham and Isaac found no city to dwell in, but wandered from place to place, dwelling alone, sojourners with God. Their outward mode of life was typical of the way of faith, by which men live in the world, and are not of it. To all intents and purposes Abraham and Isaac were out of the world, and lived on its surface without lasting connection with it. They were the Lord's men, and the Lord was their possession. He set himself apart for them, and they were set apart for him. Rebekah might well have said, "That will never do for me. I cannot outlaw myself. I cannot quit the comforts of a settled abode to ramble over the fields wherever the flocks may require me to roam." It does not strike the most of mankind that it would be a good thing to be in the world, and yet not to be of it. They are no strangers in the world, they long to be admitted more fully into its "society." They are not aliens here with their treasures in heaven, they long to have a good round sum on earth, and find their heaven in enjoying it themselves, and enriching their families. Earthworms as they are, the earth contents them. If any man becomes unworldly, and makes spiritual things his one object, they despise him as a dreamy enthusiast. Many men think that the things of religion are merely meant to be read of, and to be preached about; but that to live for them would be to spend a dreamy, unpractical existence. Yet the spiritual is, after all, the only real: the material is in deepest truth the visionary and unsubstantial. Still, when people turn away because of the hardness of holy warfare, and the spirituality of the believing life, we are not astonished, for we hardly hoped it could be otherwise. Unless the Lord renews the heart, men will always prefer the bird-in-the-hand of this life to the bird-in-the-bush of the life to come.

Moreover, it might be that the woman might not care for the covenant of promise. If she had no regard for Jehovah and his revealed will, she was

not likely to go with the man, and enter upon marriage with Isaac. He was the Heir of the promises, the inheritor of the covenant privileges which the Lord by oath had promised. His chosen would become the mother of that chosen seed in whom God had ordained to bless the world throughout all the ages, even the Messiah, the seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head.

Peradventure the woman might not see the value of the covenant, nor appreciate the glory of the promise. The things we have to preach of, such as life everlasting, union with Christ, resurrection from the dead, reigning with him for ever and ever, seem to the dull hearts of men to be as idle tales. Tell them of a high interest for their money, of large estates to be had for a venture, or of honors to be readily gained, and inventions to be found out, they open all their eyes and their ears, for here is something worth knowing; but the things of God, eternal, immortal, boundless — these are of no importance to them. They could not be induced to go from Ur to Canaan for such trifles as eternal life, and heaven, and God.

So you see our difficulty. Many disbelieve altogether, and others cavil and object. A greater number will not even listen to our story; and of those who do listen, most are careless, and others dally with it, and postpone the serious consideration. Alas! we speak to unwilling ears.

**III.** In the third place, I would ENLARGE UPON HIS VERY NATURAL SUGGESTION. This prudent steward said, "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: Must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?" If she will not come to Isaac, shall Isaac go down to her? This is the suggestion of the present hour: if the world will not come to Jesus, shall Jesus tone down his teachings to the world? In other words, if the world will not rise to the church, shall not the church go down to the world? Instead of bidding men to be converted, and come out from among sinners, and be separate from them, let us join with the ungodly world, enter into union with it, and so pervade it with our influence by allowing it to influence us. Let us have a Christian world.

To this end let us revise our doctrines. Some are old-fashioned, grim, severe, unpopular; let us drop them out. Use the old phrases so as to

please the obstinately orthodox, but give them new meanings so as to win philosophical infidels, who are prowling around. Pare off the edges of unpleasant truths, and moderate the dogmatic tone of infallible revelation: say that Abraham and Moses made mistakes, and that the books which have been so long had in reverence are full of errors. Undermine the old faith, and bring in the new doubt; for the times are altered, and the spirit of the age suggests the abandonment of everything that is too severely righteous, and too surely of God.

The deceitful adulteration of doctrine is attended by a falsification of experience. Men are now told that they were born good, or were made so by their infant baptism, and so that great sentence, "Ye must be born again," is deprived of its force. Repentance is ignored, faith is a drug in the market as compared with "honest doubt," and mourning for sin and communion with God are dispensed with, to make way for entertainments, and Socialism, and politics of varying shades. A new creature in Christ Jesus is looked upon as a sour invention of bigoted Puritans. It is true, with the same breath they extol Oliver Cromwell; but then 1888 is not 1648. What was good and great three hundred years ago is mere cant to-day. That is what "modern thought" is telling us; and under its guidance all religion is being toned down. Spiritual religion is despised, and a fashionable morality is set up in its place. Do yourself up tidily on Sunday; behave yourself; and above all, believe everything except what you read in the Bible, and you will be all right. Be fashionable, and think with those who profess to be scientific — this is the first and great commandment of the modern school; and the second is like unto it — do not be singular, but be as worldly as your neighbors. Thus is Isaac going down into Padan-aram: thus is the church going down to the world.

Men seem to say — It is of no use going on in the old way, fetching out one here and another there from the great mass. We want a quicker way. To wait till people are born again, and become followers of Christ, is a long process: let us abolish the separation between the regenerate and unregenerate. Come into the church, all of you, converted or unconverted. You have good wishes and good resolutions; that will do: don't trouble about more. It is true you do not believe the gospel, but neither do we. You believe something or other. Come along; if you do not believe anything, no matter; your "honest doubt" is better by far than faith.



“But,” say you, “nobody talks so.” Possibly they do not use the same words, but this is the real meaning of the present-day religion; this is the drift of the times. I can justify the broadest statement I have made by the action or by the speech of certain ministers, who are treacherously betraying our holy religion under pretense of adapting it to this progressive age. The new plan is to assimilate the church to the world, and so include a larger area within its bounds. By semi-dramatic performances they make houses of prayer to approximate to the theater; they turn their services into musical displays, and their sermons into political harangues or philosophical essays — in fact, they exchange the temple for the theater, and turn the ministers of God into actors, whose business it is to amuse men. Is it not so, that the Lord’s-day is becoming more and more a day of recreation or of idleness, and the Lord’s house either a joss-house full of idols, or a political club, where there is more enthusiasm for a party than zeal for God? Ah me! the hedges are broken down, the walls are levelled, and to many there is henceforth, no church except as a portion of the world, no God except as an unknowable force by which the laws of nature work.

This, then, is the proposal. In order to win the world, the Lord Jesus must conform himself, his people, and his Word to the world. I will not dwell any longer on so loathsome a proposal.

**IV.** In the fourth place, NOTICE HIS MASTER’S OUTSPOKEN, BELIEVING REPUDIATION OF THE PROPOSAL. He says, shortly and sharply, “Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again.” The Lord Jesus Christ heads that grand emigration party which has come right out from the world. Addressing his disciples, he says, “Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” We are not of the world by birth, not of the world in life, not of the world in object, not of the world in spirit, not of the world in any respect whatever. Jesus, and those who are in him, constitute a new race. The proposal to go back to the world is abhorrent to our best instincts; yea, deadly to our noblest life. A voice from heaven cries, “Bring not my son thither again.” Let not the people whom the Lord brought up out of Egypt return to the house of bondage; but let their children come out, and be separate, and the Lord Jehovah will be a Father unto them.

Notice how Abraham states the question. In effect, he argues it thus: this would be to forego the divine order. “For,” says Abraham, “the Lord God of heaven took me from my father’s house, and from the land of my kindred.” What, then, if he brought Abraham out, is Isaac to return? This cannot be. Hitherto the way of God with his church has been to sever a people from the world to be his elect — a people formed for himself, who shall show forth his praise. Beloved, God’s plan is not altered. He will still go on calling those whom he did predestinate. Do not let us fly in the teeth of that fact, and suppose that we can save men on a more wholesale scale by ignoring the distinction between the dead in sin and the living in Zion. If God had meant to bless the family at Padan-aram by letting his chosen ones dwell among them, why did he call Abraham out at all? If Isaac may do good by dwelling there, why did Abraham leave? If there is no need of a separate church now, what have we been at throughout all these ages? Has the martyr’s blood been shed out of mere folly? Have confessors and reformers been mad when contending for doctrines which, it would seem, are of no great account? Brethren, there are two seeds — the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent — and the difference will be maintained even to the end; neither must we ignore the distinction to please men.

For Isaac to go down to Nahor’s house for a wife would be placing God second to a wife. Abraham begins at once with a reference to Jehovah, “the God of heaven”; for Jehovah was everything to him, and to Isaac also. Isaac would never renounce his walk with the living God that he might find a wife. Yet this apostasy is common enough nowadays. Men and women who profess godliness will quit what they profess to believe in order to get richer wives or husbands for themselves or their children. This mercenary conduct is without excuse. “Better society” is the cry — meaning more wealth and fashion. To the true man God is first — yea, all in all; but God is placed at the fag-end, and everything else is put before him by the base professor. In the name of God I call upon you who are faithful to God and to his truth, to stand fast, whatever you lose, and turn not aside, whatever you might gain. Count the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. We want Abraham’s spirit within us, and we shall have that when we have Abraham’s faith.

Abraham felt that this would be to renounce the covenant promise. See how he puts it: "The God that took me from my father's house sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land." Are they, then, to leave the land, and go back to the place from which the Lord had called them? Brethren, we also are heirs of the promise of things not seen as yet. For the sake of this we walk by faith, and hence we become separate from those around us. We dwell among men as Abraham dwelt among the Canaanites; but we are of a distinct race: we are born with a new birth, live under different laws, and act from different motives. If we go back to the ways of worldlings, and are numbered with them, we have renounced the covenant of our God, the promise is no longer ours, and the eternal heritage is in other hands. Do you not know this? The moment the church says, "I will be as the world," she has doomed herself with the world. When the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took them wives of all which they chose, then the flood came, and swept them all away. So will it again happen should the world take the church into its arms: then shall come some overwhelming judgment, and, it may be, a deluge of devouring fire. The covenant promise and the covenant heritage are no longer ours if we go down to the world and quit our sojourning with the Lord.

Besides, dear friends, no good can come of trying to conform to the world. Suppose the servant's policy could have been adopted, and Isaac had gone down to Nahor's house, what would have been the motive? To spare Rebekah the pain of separating from her friends and the trouble of travelling. If those things could have kept her back, what would she have been worth to Isaac? The test of separation was wholesome, and by no means ought it to be omitted. She is a poor wife who would not take a journey to reach her husband. And all the converts that the church will ever make by softening down its doctrine, and by becoming worldly, will not be worth one bad farthing a gross. When we get them, the next question will be, "How can we get rid of them?" They would be of no earthly use to us. It swelled the number of Israelites when they came out of Egypt that a great number of the lower order of Egyptians came out with them. Yes, but that mixed multitude became the plague of Israel in the wilderness, and we read that "the mixt multitude fell a lusting." The Israelites were bad enough, but it was the mixed multitude that always led

the way in murmuring. Why is there such spiritual death to-day? Why is false doctrine so rampant in the churches? It is because we have ungodly people in the church and in the ministry. Eagerness for numbers, and especially eagerness to include respectable people, has adulterated many churches, and made them lax in doctrine and practice, and fond of silly amusements. These are the people who despise a prayer-meeting, but rush to see “living waxworks” in their schoolrooms. God save us from converts who are made by lowering the standard, and tarnishing the spiritual glory of the church! No, no; if Isaac is to have a wife worthy of him, she will come away from Laban and the rest, and she will not mind a journey on camel-back. True converts are never daunted by truth or holiness — these, in fact, are the things which charm them.

Besides, Abraham felt that there could be no reason for taking Isaac down there, for the Lord would assuredly find him a wife. Abraham said, “He shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.” Are you afraid that preaching the gospel will not win souls? Are you despondent as to success in God’s way? Is this why you pine for clever oratory? Is this why you must have music, and architecture, and flowers, and millinery? After all, is it by might and by power, and not by the Spirit of God? It is even so in the opinion of many. Brethren beloved, there are many things which I might allow to other worshippers which I have denied myself in conducting the worship of this congregation. I have long worked out before your very eyes the experiment of the unaided attractiveness of the gospel of Jesus. Our service is severely plain. No man ever comes hither to gratify his eye with art, or his ear with music. I have set before you, these many years, nothing but Christ crucified, and the simplicity of the gospel; yet where will you find such a crowd as this gathered together this morning? Where will you find such a multitude as this meeting, Sabbath after Sabbath, for five-and-thirty years? I have shown you nothing but the cross, the cross without the flowers of oratory, the cross without the blue lights of superstition or excitement, the cross without diamonds of ecclesiastical rank, the cross without the buttresses of a boastful science. It is abundantly sufficient to attract men first to itself, and afterwards to eternal life! In this house we have proved successfully, these many years, this great truth, that the gospel plainly preached will gain an audience, convert sinners, and build up and sustain a

church. We beseech the people of God to mark that there is no need to try doubtful expedients and questionable methods. God will save by the gospel still: only let it be the gospel in its purity. This grand old sword will cleave a man's chine, and split a rock in halves. How is it that it does so little of its old conquering work? I will tell you. Do you see this scabbard of artistic work, so wonderfully elaborated? Full many keep the sword in this scabbard, and therefore its edge never gets to its work. Pull off that scabbard. Fling that fine sheath to Hades, and then see how, in the Lord's hands, that glorious two-handed sword will mow down fields of men as mowers level the grass with their scythes. There is no need to go down to Egypt for help. To invite the devil to help Christ is shameful. Please God, we shall see prosperity yet, when the church of God is resolved never to seek it except in God's own way.

**V.** And now, fifthly, observe HIS RIGHTEOUS ABSOLUTION OF HIS SERVANT. "If the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again."

When we lie a-dying, if we have faithfully preached the gospel, our conscience will not accuse us for having kept closely to it: we shall not mourn that we did not play the fool or the politician in order to increase our congregation. Oh, no! our Master will give us full absolution, even if few be gathered in, so long as we have been true to him. "If the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath; only bring not my son thither again." Do not try the dodges which debase religion. Keep to the simple gospel; and if the people are not converted by it, you will be clear. My dear hearers, how much I long to see you saved! But I would not belie my Lord, even to win your souls, if they could be so won. The true servant of God is responsible for diligence and faithfulness; but he is not responsible for success or non-success. Results are in God's hands. If that dear child in your class is not converted, yet if you have set before him the gospel of Jesus Christ with loving, prayerful earnestness, you shall not be without your reward. If I preach from my very soul the grand truth that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will save my hearers, and if I persuade and entreat them to believe in Jesus unto eternal life; if they will not do so, their blood will lie upon their own heads. When I go back to my Master, if I have faithfully told out his message of free grace and dying love, I shall be clear. I have often

prayed that I might be able to say at the last what George Fox could so truly say: "I am clear, I am clear!" It is my highest ambition to be clear of the blood of all men. I have preached God's truth, so far as I know it, and I have not been ashamed of its peculiarities. That I might not stultify my testimony I have cut myself clear of those who err from the faith, and even from those who associate with them. What more can I do to be honest with you? If, after all, men will not have Christ, and his gospel, and his rule, it is their own concern. If Rebekah had not come to Isaac she would have lost her place in the holy line. My beloved hearer, will you have Jesus Christ or not? He has come into the world to save sinners, and he casts out none. Will you accept him? Will you trust him? "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Will you believe him? Will you be baptized into his name? If so, salvation is yours; but if not, he himself hath said it, "He that believeth not shall be damned." Oh, do not expose yourselves to that damnation! Or, if you are set upon it; then, when the great white throne shall be seen in yonder skies, and the day of wrath has come, do me the justice to acknowledge that I bade you flee to Jesus, and that I did not amuse you with novel theories. I have brought neither flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, nor any other kind of music to please your ears, but I have set Christ crucified before you, and bidden you believe and live. If you refuse to accept the substitution of Christ, you have refused your own mercies. Clear me in that day of all complicity with the novel inventions of deluded men. As for my Lord, I pray of him grace to be faithful to the end, both to his truth, and to your souls. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Genesis 24.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 166, 928, 884.

# A PARADOX

## SERMON NO. 2050

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
NOVEMBER 4TH, 1888,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“When I am weak, then am I strong.” — ~~421~~2 Corinthians 12:10.*

The expression is paradoxical, and seems somewhat singular; yet it was the experience of the apostle Paul, a man of calm spirit, by no means fanciful, a wise man, and far removed from a fanatic. It was the experience of one who was led of the Spirit of God, and therefore it was a gracious experience: the experience of one who was a father in Israel, who could safely bid us to be imitators of him, even as he imitated the Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore it was a safe experience. If we are weak, so was Paul; and if, like him, we are strong in our weakness, we shall be in the best of company. If the same things be seen in us which were wrought in the apostle of the Gentiles, we may join with him in glorying in infirmities, because the power of Christ doth rest upon us, and we may count ourselves happy that with such a saint we can cry, “When I am weak, then am I strong.”

**I.** Perhaps I can expound the text best if I first TURN IT THE OTHER WAY UP, and use it as a warning.

When I am strong, then am I weak. Perhaps, while thinking of the text thus turned inside out, we shall be getting light upon it to be used when we view it with the right side outwards, and see that when we are weak, then we are strong.

I am quite sure that some people think themselves very strong, and are not so. Their proud consciousness of fancied strength is the indication of a terrible weakness. We have among us certain persons who think that they

can do all that is needful for their own salvation whenever they please to do so. They can perform all sorts of good works, or at least quite enough to carry them to heaven. Their first idea is that they are to be saved by their own doings; and they really expect to be so saved. They may admit that they have a few faults and flaws in their character; but these are so trifling as to be hardly worth mentioning, and God Almighty is too merciful to be very particular. Their lives have been excellent, their tempers amiable, their manners courteous, their spirit generous, and they quite believe that by keeping on at the same pace they will win the prize: if they do not, who will? The ship of their character is in fine condition; they have no leaks which the pumps cannot keep down; their sails are not rent, and they hope to sail into the haven of peace with a glorious cargo of merit, having an abundant entrance, and hearing a loud, "Well done!" Ah, my friend! that consciousness of legal strength is a mere delusion, and it will have to be taken out of you. There is no going to heaven that way — by self and the works of self. Your error is a common one, but it is fatal. I have seen many epitaphs of persons, placed by the mistaken kindness of friends upon their tombstones, which I felt sure would have been sufficient to shut them out of heaven if they had been true. These departed worthies do not appear to have been sinners at all: their virtues were superlative, their faults non-existent. Such wonderful people would appear from their epitaphs to have flown up to the gates of heaven upon the wings of their own virtues, and to have entered there without a passport of mercy, as burgesses by their own right of the New Jerusalem. I wonder how they would behave themselves in heaven, if they were really admitted there! All the rest are singing, "We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"; but these needed no washing, and so they would be likely to strike up a little song by themselves, and sing, "Our robes never needed washing; we kept them white as snow." What a discord that would create in the music of the skies! What a division of character and feeling would be found among celestials! I cannot see how there could be any harmony of sentiment amongst sinners saved by grace and righteous ones who owed nothing to mercy, nothing to the atoning sacrifice.

No, my strong and virtuous hearer, you are under a grave delusion. There is a great similarity between your talk and the talk of that religious



individual who went up to the temple in our Savior's days, and, standing before the thrice-holy God, dared to say, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." He was not justified that day, nor will you be. A poor tax-gatherer, despised by himself, and an off-cast from his own people, stood in the temple at the same time, and all that he dared to say was, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This unworthy sinner when to his house justified, while the other worthy person was not accepted. If you think yourselves strong enough to procure heaven by your own efforts, you are ignorantly insulting the cross of Christ, for you seem to insinuate that your virtues can avail you without Jesus. If you really mean this, there is no more venom of rebellion against God in your self-righteousness than in the outward vice of those who make no pretence to godliness. For you to put your works in the place of Jesus is a blasphemy against the Savior's blood and righteousness. Why needed Christ to die if men could save themselves? Why need he bleed upon the cross if your merits will suffice to gain you a place among the blessed? There is a fatal weakness in the claim of that man who thinks himself strong enough to force his own passage to the throne of God; that weakness lies in the pride which insults the Crucified, the disloyalty which prefers itself to the royal Savior.

***"Perish the virtue, as it ought — abhorred,  
And the fool with it who insults his Lord."***

Listen to me a moment, and quit your fancied strength: you, my hearer, cannot keep the law of God, for you have already broken it. How can you preserve a crystal vase entire when you have already dashed it to atoms? You must now be saved by the merits and the strength of another, or not at all; for your own merit is out of the question, through past failure. That strength of yours, upon which you dote so much, is perfect weakness. May the Lord show you this, and make you faint at heart on that account; for then you shall be strong, with real and saving strength! Now your imaginary strength is making you really weak, and that boasted merit of yours is shutting you out from true righteousness. He that is strong in the notion of merit is weak even to utter folly before the God of truth.

"Yes," we hear you reply, "there is a gospel way of salvation. We know that there is, for you preach it continually. You tell us that men must repent, and believe the gospel; that they must be renewed in the spirit of

their minds, and must both overcome sin, and follow after holiness.” Yes, I do say all that; but what do you say to it? Is it really so that you find here a ground for your own strength? Do you say, “I feel that I can repent whenever I please, and believe in Jesus when I choose?” Ah! then I must assure you that when you are strong in that way, you are weak. I never yet knew anybody repent who gloried in his power to repent; I never yet knew a man heart-broken for sin who boasted that he could break his own heart when and where he pleased. “What!” cries one, “surely I can believe in Jesus Christ when I please!” I have not denied that statement, have I? But I tell you that your notion of power to believe is your weakness; and I would rather by half hear you cry, with deep solemnity, “Oh, that God would give me faith! Lord, help my unbelief!” Your sense of inability to believe in Christ would be a far better token for good, in my judgment, than your present flippant talk about believing when you like. Men who are in earnest talk not so: whatever their strength may be, they find it little enough in the hour of need. I beg to assure you that I have never known a man believe in Jesus who trusted that he could so believe; for his trust in his own believing kept him from trusting to Jesus; but I have known many a poor, struggling soul lie at the cross-foot, and say, “Lord, help me to look to Jesus, and live;” and God has helped him to give that look in which there is eternal life. While he has been praying, his prayer, yes, his weeping prayer, has had in it that very look to Jesus for which he was pleading. His sense of inability to believe has made him look to Jesus for believing, and he has found it in him.

You say that you can turn your heart towards God whenever you please. I am not going into any dispute with you about your assertion, nor the doctrine, which is supposed to support you in your profession of strength; but I will say this, that your idea of having personal strength, with which to purify and renew your own heart — your idea that you can create in yourself a right spirit — your idea that you can raise yourself from your death in sin — is to me a prophecy of much evil for yourself. where self is conspicuous, I see an omen of mischief, I see no good in this fine opinion of yourself; but if I heard you cry, “Create in me a clean heart, O God” — if I heard you say, “Lord, quicken me out of my death in sin” — if I saw you lying down before the Most High, and praying, “Turn me, and I shall be turned” — I should have a far brighter hope of you. In

your weakness you would become strong; but in your present strength, I am sure I see a great weakness, which is likely to be your ruin. O dear hearts, your best friend does not lie within your own doors. Your hope for better things shines yonder at the right hand of God, where the living Savior has all power given to him in heaven and earth. Sinner, if you grow no sweeter flowers than the dunghill of your own nature can nourish, you will die amid poisonous weeds. If you never drink of better water than the filthy well of your own heart will yield, you will perish of thirst, or of a deadly draught. Another, and a better helper than one born in your house, must come this way. Help must be laid upon one that is mighty, exalted of the Lord out of the people, and endowed with divine power and Godhead, for only such a Savior, infinitely good and great, can save a soul so lost as yours. When you get down, down, down, into utter weakness, then you will be strong, because then you will rest upon the Lord's salvation; but as you are strong in your thoughts of yourself, you are kept from Jesus, and are weakness itself.

So far I have spoken by way of warning to unconverted people.

I desire now to say a word to those who profess to be Christians, and, let us hope, are so; but they are, in a measure, erring in the same way as those to whom I have spoken. They are remarkably strong: at least in their own esteem they are very Samsons, although others fear that the Philistines will capture them. By this token may they know their own weakness — even by this, that they think themselves strong.

First, many are wonderfully strong as to knowledge. They know almost everything. If in any department they are a little short, they make up for it by knowing so much more in the other direction. If they are too narrow here, they overlap there. They are knowing men, and need no man to tell them so. They are instructed in the faith from pole to pole: they know both that which is afar off, and that which is nigh. An argument is a pleasure to them. They go into company where the eternal verities are denied, and feel a delight in taking sides. They will sit where the vital simplicities of God's word are set up like marks for boys to throw at; and they like the amusement, for it exercises their knowing faculty, and gives them a chance of showing their mental power. They are not children, but quite able to think for themselves. They are not credulous, but amazingly

clear-headed and cultured. I have noticed these fine gentlemen have been the first to deny the faith, and to fall into all manner of heresies. Do you wonder? Those who are so very sure are always the most uncertain. I could instance some that had such confidence in themselves that they would have argued with the very fiend of hell on any question, for they felt that not even Satanic craft could conquer them; but at this present moment the prince of darkness holds them in his power. They hold no controversy with the devil now, for they are very largely agreed with him in assailing the gospel of God's grace. They have gone entirely over to the denial of everything that is gracious and holy and scriptural, and the main cause of their apostasy is their own invincible self-confidence. They were so strong that they became weaker than others. O brethren, when we are very wise in our own esteem, we are bordering upon fools, even if we have not already entered into that company. When we tremblingly sit at Jesus' feet, to learn everything afresh, and fresh from him; when we shudder at anything that questions his Deity, or lowers his sacrifice; when we shut up a book and cast it from us, because we feel that it pollutes us with unbelief — then are we wise and strong. When the Word of the Lord is enough, then are we in the way of wisdom and strength. The man of one book is proverbially a terrible mon; but the man of ten thousand books, who can baffle all adversaries and foil all foes, shall soon lie wounded on the plain, if he be not slain outright. Let us take heed unto ourselves, that we fall not through being headstrong, or strong in the head, which is much the same thing.

Again, I have noticed some professedly Christian people wonderfully strong through experience. Their experience has been very extensive, and the knowledge it has brought them they consider to be specially profound, and, consequently, they are not afraid of temptation, for they feel that they are too wise to be entrapped. They are so experienced now, that things which young people ought not to think of, they can do with impunity — so they foolishly dream. They can go just so far, and then stop, for they are fitted with the patent brakes of prudence. They are such good mountain climbers that they can stand on the edge of a precipice, and look over, and even hang over, without fear of their ever being giddy and falling over. Of course they would not advise other people to go quite so far as they may safely go; but then, what is temptation to other men is no

temptation to them. Their vessel is so tight and trim, and they understand navigation so perfectly, that they rather like a tempest than not, just to show how well their vessel can behave in a storm. Ah me! When you next read the list of wrecks, you may expect to see the name of their ship among the castaways. Old birds may not be caught with chaff, but they can be shot with a gun. No one is out of danger, and no one is more in danger than the man who is carnally secure. Those who feel that their experience, be it what it may, only teaches them that the farther they can keep from temptation the better, these are in a better state. When experience drives us to pray with emphasis the prayer "Lead us not into temptation," then it is working aright. In the idea of strength and wisdom lurks an awfully perilous weakness; but in a sense of personal weakness dwells a real strength. If you are extremely jealous, conscientious, and watchful, many will tell you how weak you are; but you are, in reality, a strong man, because of your fear to encounter evil influences: in that fear lies one essential element of holy strength. While he that rather braves temptation, because he feels so strong, shall find, it may be to his everlasting sorrow, how great his weakness is; he that shuns the appearance of evil, because of conscious weakness, shall find therein his security and strength. Oh, let none of us, because we are getting gray, suppose that we are vulnerable to sin! Let us not dream that because we have been church-members so many years, or even because we have sustained a long and useful ministry, we are therefore beyond gun-shot of the enemy, or without necessity to seek daily strength for daily duty. My brethren, we cannot perform the smallest duty aright apart from the help of God; neither can we be secure against even the grossest sin, apart from the perpetual guard of him that keepeth Israel. If we, in our self-conceit, write ourselves down among the mightiest, and forget our entire dependence upon heavenly grace, we may be left to prove, by unhappy experience, that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Let us note another point. I have known certain Christian people who thought themselves singularly strong in the matter of wisdom and prudence. They have been gifted with clear insight and a measure of shrewdness, and have, therefore, felt that their judgment on most subjects was that of an umpire. Have you ever noticed that the raw material of a

very grossly foolish person is a cautious individual? The cunning are the readiest dupes when craft is busy in taking its prey. So, too, a wise man is needed if there is to be exhibited the worst form of folly. If we were called upon to select a man who, as to his life as a whole, perpetrated the greatest folly, we should mention Solomon. Yet he was the wisest of man. Yes, the cream of wisdom, when curdled, makes the worst of folly. Was ever man so insanely enthusiastic in vain pursuits as this master of all knowledge? Then, brethren, whenever we feel sure of our own superior intelligence, let us suspect ourselves of weakness. Let the same fear come upon us when we feel sure about our way, so sure that we think we need not pray about it, or in any manner wait for divine direction. Beware of those matters in which you think you cannot err. Men who have been wise in great difficulties have blundered fearfully where all was simple. The Israelites thought that the men who came to them begging for a league of brotherhood could not deceive them. It must be safe to be on good terms with these interesting strangers. Why, look, their shoes are well-nigh worn from their feet, and patched and clouted to the last degree! Their clothes, which we doubt not were new when they left their distant homes, are now threadbare, and their biscuit, which they took fresh from the oven, is stale with age. It is evident, upon the face of it, that they must have come from a very remote part of the world, and therefore a treaty with them will not interfere with the divine command. There can be no need to pray about a case so clear. Thus the Gibeonites overreached them, as we also shall be overreached when we are so exceeding sure of our course. Brethren, let us not be wise as to dispense with our heavenly Counsellor and Guide. Would not that be the height of madness? It is a salutary thing to feel that your case requires you to trust the helm of your ship with the divine Pilot. It is even a blessed thing to feel that you are shut up to faith, and must by absolute trust in God throw the responsibility of your action upon him. I will give you an instance. Abraham, the father of the faithful, is placed in a peculiar position. God has commanded him to take his son Isaac, and offer him for a sacrifice. Here is a terrible puzzle. Here was enough to stagger any human mind. Surely it could not be right for a father to slay his son! How could it be wise to kill the son in whom all the promises of God were vested? The more you think of the case from a father's standpoint, the more it will perplex you. Abraham could not make any thing out of it by his judgment, but he met it all by faith. All that he

could say to Isaac was, "My son, God will provide himself a Lamb." He was thus saying to himself, "The Lord will get me out of this difficulty." He had no wisdom with which to conjecture how the affair would end: he had to cease from guessing, and just trust in his God. Abraham made no mistake in this. Oh that we could do the same! Observe that same Abraham when he goes down to Egypt. His wife is exceedingly beautiful, and he fears that the king of Egypt will kill him in order to obtain his wife; what will he do? I can see a great many ways in which he might have warded off that evil. He was not called upon to go to Egypt at all, if he thereby risked his wife's honor; or, if he must go, he should have gone boldly, acknowledging his wife, and trusting both her and himself with the Lord. Instead of that, the patriarch begins by inducing Sarah to join with him in equivocation. "Say thou art my sister." She was in some sense his sister; but it was using a word in a double sense for a deceitful purpose, and it was a pitiful thing for Abraham to do. Nor was it a prudent scheme after all: in fact it was the cause of the very trouble which it sought to prevent. Sarah would not have been taken away from Abraham at all if Pharaoh had known that she was his wife; so that the wise was snared by his own craftiness. The Lord graciously delivered him, but in that very act left a root of bitterness behind to be his future plague. Pharaoh gave to him women- servants, and I doubt not among the rest was Hagar, who became the object of sin, and the source of sorrow to the household. In the fancied strength of Abraham, by which he emulated the craft of other Orientals, he displayed his weakness; but in the other case, where no wit or wisdom could assist him, he cast himself upon the Lord, and in his weakness he behaved like the grand man that he really was. Brothers, let us confess ourselves fools, that we may be wise; for otherwise we shall fall into that other condition, of professing ourselves wise, and becoming fools. Let us ignore our wisdom, even if we have any. God alone is wise: he that trusteth either his own heart or head is a fool. Lean not to thine own understanding, but lean wholly upon the Lord; so shalt thou be established.

Further, dear friends, we shall often find that our strength will lie in patience — in extreme weakness which yields itself up to the will of God without the power or will to murmur. We sang in our hymn just now —

*“And when it seems no other chance or change  
From grief can set me free,  
Hope finds its strength in helplessness,  
And, patient, waits on thee.”*

I am sure that in reference to power, either to do or to suffer rightly, we are not strong when we compliment ourselves upon our ability; and we are strong when, under a sense of absolute inability, we depend wholly upon God. That sermon preached in the glory of our oratory turned out to be mere husks for swine; while that discourse which we delivered in weakness, with a humble hope that God would use it, proved to be royal meat for the Lord's chosen. That work which you performed in the vigour of your unquestioned talent came to nothing, while that quiet act which you washed with your tears, and perfumed with your prayers, will live and yield you sheaves. Creature strength brings forth nothing which has life in it: only the seed which the Creator puts into the hand of our weakness will produce a harvest. It is well to be nothing: it is better still to be “less than nothing.” We ought to dread a sense of capacity, for it will render us incapable; but a sense of utter incapacity apart from God is a fit preparation for being used by the Lord.

*“Unto them that have no might he increaseth strength.”*

So it is in bearing as well as acting. If we say concerning sickness, “I shall never be impatient. I can bear it like a stoic.” What if that? You will then have done no more than many have done before you, with no great gain to themselves or to others. But if, bowing your head before the Lord, you wait his sovereign will, and say, “Lord help me. If thy left hand shall smite me, let thy right hand sustain me. I am willing to drink this bitter cup, saying, ‘Not as I will, but as thou wilt.’ Lord, help me!” — you shall bear up triumphantly, and come out of the furnace refined, to the praise and the glory of your God. When you fancy that you are strong to suffer, you will fail; but in conscious weakness you will be enabled to play the man.

I have now done with the text, as I have turned it upside down. May God bless it to any here who feel high and mighty, by causing it to put them in their proper place.



**II.** Now, let us take our text THE RIGHT WAY UPWARDS. “When I am weak, then am I strong.” “When” and “then” are the two pivots of the text — the hinges upon which it turns.

“When I am weak.” What does that mean? It means when the believer is consciously weak, when he painfully feels, and distinctly recognizes that he is weak, then he is strong. In truth, we are always weak, whether we know it or not; but when we not only believe this to be the fact, but see it to be the fact — then it is that we are strong. When it is forced home upon us, that we are less than nothing and vanity — when our very soul echoes and re-echoes that word, “Without me ye can do nothing.” — then it is that we are strong.

When he is growingly weak. Yes, for he sees his own weakness more and more clearly as he advances: as he grows stronger in faith he is much more conscious of the weakness of the flesh. I talked about my weakness from this platform five-and- twenty years ago; but I stand here and tremble under it now to a far greater degree than I did in my younger and more vigorous time. I knew it three-and-thirty years ago, when I first spoke to you, but I did not know it as I know it now. I was then weak, and I owned it: but I am now weak, and groan about it almost involuntarily. Yes, and I sometimes sing because of my weakness, learning to glory in my infirmities because the power of Christ doth rest upon me. When we are growingly weak, when we become weaker and weaker, when we seem to faint into a deeper swoon than ever as to our own strength, till death is written upon every power that we once thought we had, and we feel that we can do absolutely nothing apart from the Holy Spirit, then we are strong indeed.

We are strong, too, when we feel painfully weak. It is well when we mourn because we are so weak, and cry out to ourselves, “My weakness, my weakness, woe unto me! When I would do good, evil is present with me. When I would rise to heaven, the body of this death detains me. I would do great things for God, but I have no might. Alas for my weakness!” At such a time we are really rising, and are bringing most glory to God. These are growing pains — agonies such as none know but the truly and growingly spiritual. A painful weakness is strength. It may seem a paradox, but it is true.

We are strong when we are contritely weak. When we confess that much of our weakness is our fault — a weakness which we ought to have overcome — even then we have in that weakness a real strength. The sort of weakness that makes a man say, “I cannot be any stronger, I am doing my best,” is not strength but folly; but that weakness which makes you lament your failures and deplore your shortcomings, has in it a holy stimulus and force. That weakness which makes you dissatisfied with all you are and all you do, is goading you on to better and stronger things. If you feel that even when most earnest you have not prayed as you could wish, there is evidently strength in your desires, and your desires are prayers. If after any service you pour forth showers of penitential tears because the service was imperfect, there is evidently a strong soul of obedience within you. When you can neither repent, nor believe, nor love as you wish to do, you are repenting, believing, and loving with a strength which is more true than apparent. It is the will with which we act which is the strength of the action; and when the will is so powerful that it makes us mourn because we cannot find how to perform its bidding, then are we strong according to the divine measurement of strength. Contrite weakness is spiritual strength.

When a man is thoroughly weak — not only partially, but altogether weak — then is he strong. When apart from the Lord Jesus, he is utter weakness, and nothing more — then it is that he is strong. Let me persuade you to make a full confession of weakness to the Lord. Say, “Lord, I cannot do what I ought to do: I cannot do what I want to do: I cannot do what I used to do: I cannot do what other people do: I cannot do what I mean to do: I cannot do what I am sure I shall do: I cannot do what I feel impelled to do; and over this sinful weakness I mourn.” Then add, “Lord, I long to serve thee perfectly, yet I cannot do it. Unless thou help me I can do nothing aright. There will be no good in my actions, my words, my feelings, or my desires, unless thou continue to fill me with thine own holy energy. Lord, help me! Lord, help me!” Brother, you are strong while you plead in that fashion. You can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you; and he will strengthen you, now that you are emptied of self. How true it is, “When I am weak, then am I strong!”

I have brought out the “when.” Now lend me your ears and hearts for just a minute, while I bring out the “then.” “Then am I strong.” When is that?

Why, a man is strong when he is consciously weak, because now he has reached the truth. He really is weak; and if he does not know that he is so, he is under the influence of a falsehood. Now a lie is a thing of weakness. Lying strength is all fluff and foam: a mere appearance, a mockery, a delusion. Nothing hinders from getting the reality like contentment with a mere appearance. The true heart is heartily sick of shows and shams, and it cries, "Lord, help me to get rid of these shadows! Help me to come at the truth! Help me to deal with realities!" When you are made to feel your utter weakness you are on sure ground of truth — unpleasant truth, no doubt, yet sure truth. You are now on safe ground touching fundamentals, and making sure work. What you now do will be soundly done. All the while that we keep building on a sandy made-up foundation, we are piling up that which will, in all probability, come down even faster than we put it up. While the rotten rubbish remains on the spot, you cannot do anything worth doing; but if that accumulation can be carted away, there will seem to be a great hole, but you will get down to the real bottom, and get a foundation; and then what you build will be worth putting up, because it will stand. Therefore, a man becomes strong when he is consciously weak, because he is on the truth, and is not being flattered by false hopes.

Next, he will be strong because he will only go with a commission to support him. He will not be eager to run without being sent. He says within himself, when he proposes a service to himself, "No, I am too weak to undertake anything of my own head." He will wait for a call. This is not the kind of man that will climb up into a pulpit, and from a dizzy brain pour out nonsense. He will not crave to lead, for he feels that he needs much help even to follow. He feels himself too weak to set up for a master in Israel. This is not the kind of man that will venture into argument with sceptics for the fun or for the glory of the thing. Oh, no; he is too weak for that. He says, "If I am called to defend the faith, I will do it in God's strength, hoping that it will be given me in the same hour what I shall speak. If I am called to preach, I will preach, and nobody shall stop me; for the Lord will be with my mouth. But, you see, until the man is conscious of his own weakness, he will run without being sent; and there is nobody so weak as that man. No one so weak as the man who has no commission from God, and no promise of help from him. Such a man will

be thinking of this, and thinking of that, and running for this, that, and the other, because he has a lot of waste energy which he wants to use somewhere or somehow. Could we once see him consciously weak we should hear him say, "Here am I, send me!" in answer to the question, "Whom shall I send?" Then he would not go a warfare at his own charges, but he would draw upon the all-sufficiency of God, and find himself equal to every emergency.

The man who is consciously weak is strong, next, because of the holy caution that he will be sure to use. He will be on his guard, because he does not feel able to cope with adversaries. He will ask for a convoy for his little barque, for he is aware of pirates. If this weak man has to pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, depend upon it he will carry in his hand the weapon of All-prayer, like a drawn sword. The man that has strength goes hurrying on over hedge and ditch, and soon comes into mischief; but the consciously weak pilgrim keeps to the high-road, and travels carefully; and hence he is strong. Fear is a notably good housekeeper: she may not keep a luxurious table, but she always locks the doors at night, and takes care of all under her charge. Holy caution begets prudence; and prudence, by fostering vigour, and crying for heavenly aid, becomes strength.

Moreover, when a man is weak, then is he strong, because he is sure to pray, and prayer is power. The man who laments his weakness is sure to cry to the strong for strength. The more his weakness presses on him, the more he will pray. While he can do without his God he will do without his God; but when his own weakness becomes utter and entire, and he is ready to perish, then he turns unto his Lord, and is made strong. The utterly weak cry out unto God as nobody else does. He is too weak to play at praying: he groans, he sighs, he weeps. In his abject weakness he prevails, as Jacob did. He wrestled all night; but now at last the angel has touched the hollow of his thigh, and made his sinew shrink, and he cannot wrestle any longer. What will he do now? He falls; and as he falls he grasps his antagonist, and holds him fast, crying, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." As much to say, "I cannot wrestle with thee, I cannot try another fall; but I can and will hold thee fast. The dead weight of my weakness makes me hold thee as an anchor holds a ship. I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

The weaker a man is in himself the stronger he is in prayer, if he makes use of his weakness as an appealing argument — "Lord, if I were strong, thou mightest leave me. Do not leave me, for I am weakness itself. I am the feeblest child in all thy family, leave me not, neither forsake me. If thou leavest any, leave not thy poor dying infant, that can hardly wail out its griefs." Weakness, as a plea with God in prayer, becomes a source of strength.

When we are weak we are strong, again, because then we are driven away from self to God. All strength is in God, and it is well to come to the one solitary storehouse and source of might. There is no power apart from God. As long as you and I look to the creature, we are looking to a cracked, broken cistern, that holds no water; but when we know that it is broken, and that there is not a drop of water in it, then we hasten to the great fountain and well-head. While we rest in any measure upon self, or the creature, we are standing with one foot on the sand; but when we get the right away from human nature because we are too weak to have the least reliance upon self whatever, then we have both feet on the rock, and this is safe standing. If thou believest in the living God, and if all thine own existence is by believing, thou livest at a mighty rate. But if thou believest in God in a measure, and if, at the same time, thou trustest thyself in a measure, thou art living at a dying rate, and half the joy which is possible to thee is lost. Thou art taking in bread with one hand, and poison with the other: thou art feeding thy soul with substance and with shadow, and that makes a sorry mixture. When the shadow is clean taken away, and thou hast nothing but the substance, then art thou a strong man, fed upon substantial meat.

Last of all, dear friends, I believe that, when a man is weak, he becomes strong to a large extent, because his weakness compels him to concentrate all his faculties.

A sense of weakness brings out all the forces of a resolute spirit, and leads him to call in all the energy within his reach. When I have preached to you in extreme weakness, as I have often done, when I have afterwards read the sermon, I have been much more satisfied with it than I have been with others in which I felt more pleasure at the time.


God helps us most when we most need his help; and, besides that, the man himself is, by his weakness, forced to use himself right up. When a man feels himself to be rather a large vessel, he puts in the tap somewhere near the top, and only a small supply flows out to the people; but when he is, in his own feelings, like a poor little cask with only a small supply in it, he puts the tap right down at the bottom, and permits all that is in the barrel to flow forth. Many a poor, weak brother, who says all the little that he knows, give forth more instruction than the learned divine who only favors his people with a small portion of his vast stores. When a man, in serving God, spends himself to the last farthing, he will often far more enrich his hearers than the man of ten talents who uses his resources with a prudent parsimony. Dear brother, it will often be a good thing for you to feel, “Now, God helping me, I must do my very utmost at this time. I have so little ability that every faculty within me must be wide awake, and serve God at its best.” Thus your weakness will arouse you, and set you on fire, and, by the blessing of God, it will be the means of gaining you strength.

Very well, then, let us pick up our tools and go to our work rejoicing, feeling — Well, I may be weaker, or I may be stronger in myself, but my strength is in my God. If I should ever become stronger, then I must pray for a deeper sense of weakness, lest I become weak through my strength. And if I should ever become weaker than I am, then I must hope and believe that I am really becoming stronger in the Lord. Whether I am weak or strong, what matters it? He who never fails and never changes will perfect his strength in my weakness, and this is glory to me. Amen.

# SHOES OF IRON, AND STRENGTH SUFFICIENT: A NEW YEAR'S PROMISE

SERMON NO. 2062

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
JANUARY 6TH, 1889,  
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON  
ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 29TH, 1888.

“And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” —  Deuteronomy 33:24-25.

I ONCE heard an old minister say that he thought the blessing of Asher was peculiarly the blessing of ministers; and his eyes twinkled as he added, “At any rate, they are usually blessed with children, and it is a great blessing for them if they are acceptable to their brethren, and if they are so truly anointed that they even dip their foot in oil.” Well, well, I pray that all of us who preach the gospel may enjoy this triplet of blessings in the highest sense. If our quiver is not full of children according to the flesh, yet may we have many born unto God through our ministry. May we be blessed by being made spiritual fathers to very many, who shall be brought by us to receive life, pardon, peace, and holiness, through our Lord Jesus. What is the use of our life if it be not so? To what end have we preached unless we see souls born into the family of grace? My inmost soul longs to see all my hearers born anew: this would be my greatest joy, my highest blessedness. Ask for me the blessing of Asher — “Let Asher be blessed with children”; and may the Lord make my spiritual offspring to be as the sands upon the sea-shore.

It is a great blessing from the Lord when our speech is sweet to the ears of saints — when we have something to bring forth which our brethren in

Christ can accept, and which comes to them with a peculiar preciousness and power, so that they can receive it, and feel that it is thoroughly acceptable to them. We do not wish to be acceptable to the worldly wise, nor to the error-hunters of the day; but we are very anxious to be pleasant to the Lord's own children — our brethren in Christ. They have a holy taste whereby they discern spiritual meats, and we would bring forth for food that which they will account to be nourishing and savory. Every minister prays to be "acceptable to his brethren."

And what could we do without the third blessing, namely that of unction? "Let him dip his foot in oil." Oh, for an anointing of the Holy Spirit, not only upon the head with which we think, but upon the foot with which we move! We would have our daily walk and conversation gracious and useful. We wish that, wherever we go, we may leave behind us the print of divine grace. I was asking concerning a preacher what kind of man he was, and the simple, humble cottager, answered me, "Well, sir, he is this kind of man: if he comes to see you, you know that he has been." We must not only have oil in the lamps of our public ministry, but oil in the vessels of our private study. We need the holy oil everywhere, upon every garment, even down to our skirts. I know that there are mockers who scoff at the very mention of unction; but I pray that to myself and my brethren the promise may be fulfilled, "He shall dip his foot in oil." Such a man, anointed with fresh oil, holds an unquestioned office, enjoys an unfailing freshness, and exercises an effectual influence. Wherever he goes you see his footprints, for his foot has been dipped in oil.

Well, now, if these three blessings be good for ministers, they are equally good for all sorts of workers. You in the school, you who visit tract districts, you who manage mothers' meetings, and you who in any shape or way endeavor to make Christ known, may you have the threefold blessing! The Lord give you many spiritual children: may you be blessed with them, and never be without additions to their number! The Lord make you acceptable to those among whom you labor; and the Lord grant you always to go forth in his strength, anointed with his Spirit!

That is the first part of our text, and I am not going to say any more about it, as the second part is that to which I shall call your especial attention.



May the Holy Spirit make the promise exceeding sweet to you, and grant you a full understanding of it.

“Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.”

There are two things in the text — shoes and strength. We will talk about these two, hoping to possess them both.

**I.** “**THY SHOES SHALL BE IRON AND BRASS.**” That is a very great promise, and I fear that I shall not be able to bring out all its meaning in one discourse.

I find that the passage has several translations; and, though I think that which we have now before us is by far the best, yet I cannot help mentioning the others, for I think they are instructive. These interpretations may serve me as divisions in opening up the meaning. I take it as a rule that the Lord’s promises are true in every sense which they will fairly bear. A generous man will allow the widest interpretation of his words, and so will the infinitely gracious God.

This promise meant that Asher should have treasures under his feet — that there should, in fact, be mines of iron and copper within the boundaries of the tribe. Metals enrich nations, and help their advancement in many ways. Tribes that possess minerals are thereby made rich, whatever metals those may be; but such useful metals as iron and copper would prove of the utmost service to the people of that time, if they knew how to use them. Is there any spiritual promise at all in this! Asher is made rich and iron and copper lying beneath his feet. Are saints ever made rich with treasures under their feet? Undoubtedly they are. The Word of God has mines in it. Even the surface of it is rich, and it brings forth food for us; but it is with Scripture as Job saith it is with the earth: “As for the earth, out of it cometh bread: and under it is turned up as it were fire. The stones of it are the place of sapphires: and it hath dust of gold.” There are treasures upon the surface of the Word which we may pick up very readily: even the casual reader will find himself able to understand the simplicities and elements of the gospel of God; but the Word of God yields most to the digger. He that can study hard, and press into the inner meaning — he is the man that shall be enriched with riches current in heavenly places. Every Bible student here will know that God has put

under his feet great treasures of precious teaching, and he will by meditation sink shafts into the deep places of revelation. I wish we gave more time to our Bibles. We waste too much time upon the pretentious, poverty-stricken literature of the age; and some, even Christian people, are more taken up with works of fiction than they are with this great Book of everlasting fact. We should prosper much more in heavenly husbandry if we would “dig deep while sluggards sleep.” Remember that God has given to us to have treasures under our feet; but do not so despise his gifts as to leave the mines of revelation unexplored.

You will find these treasures, not only in the Word of God, but everywhere in the providence of God, if you will consider the ways of the Lord, and believe that God is everywhere at work, He that looks for a providence will not be long without seeing one. All events are full of teaching to the man that has but grace and wit to interpret them. “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.” There shall be treasures under your feet if your feet keep to the ways of truth. A rich land is the country along which believers travel to their rest: its stones are iron, and out of its bowels thou mayest dig brass. “Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right.”

The Revised Version has it, “Thy bars shall be iron and brass;” and certainly the original text bears that meaning. “Thy bars shall be iron and brass:” there shall be protection around him. The city gates shall be kept fast against the enemy, so as to preserve the citizens. The slaughtering foe shall not be able to intrude, because, instead of the common wooden bar, which might be sufficient in more peaceful times, there shall be given bars of metal, not easily cut in sunder or removed. Herein I see a spiritual blessing for us also. What a mercy it is, when God strengthens our gates and secures the bars thereof, so that, when the enemy comes, he is not able to enter or to molest us! Peace from all assaults, safety under all alarms, shutting in from all attacks — this is a priceless boon. Happy people who have God for their protector! Blessed are they who rest in the sure promises and faithfulness of God, for they may laugh their enemies to scorn. O brethren, how safe are they whose trust is in the living God and in his covenant and promise! Personally I know what this means. I have rested as calmly in the center of the battle as ever I have reposed in the

deepest calm: with all against me I am as quiet in soul as when everyone called himself my friend. It is true — “Thy bars shall be iron and brass.”

Still, I like the Old Version best, and the original certainly bears it, “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass.” The Revised Version puts this in the margin He shall have protection for his feet. The chief objection that has been raised to this is that it would be a very unusual thing for shoes to be made of iron and brass. Such a thing is not heard of anywhere else in Scripture, neither is it according to Oriental custom. For that reason I judge that the interpretation is the more likely to be correct, since the protection which God gives to his people is unusual. No other feet shall wear so singular a covering; but those who are made strong in the Lord shall be able to wear shoes of iron, and the Lord shall give them sandals of brass. As Og, the King of Bashan, was of the race of the giants, and “his bedstead was a bedstead of iron,” so shall the Lord’s champions wear shoes of iron. Theirs are no common equipments, for they are no common people. God’s people are a peculiar people, and everything about them is peculiar. Even if the poetry of the passage would not bear to run upon all fours, there is no reason why it should, since it only relates to shoes. We may be quite content to take the notion of iron and brazen shoes with all its strangeness, and even let the strangeness be a commendation of it. You have peculiar difficulties, you are a peculiar people, you traverse a peculiar road, you have a peculiar God to trust in, and you may, therefore, find peculiar consolation in a peculiar promise: “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass.”

*With shoes of iron and of brass,  
O’er burning marl thy feet shall pass,  
Tread dragons down, from fear set free;  
For as thy day thy strength shall be.*

But what does this mean — “thy shoes shall be iron and brass”? Are there not several meanings? Does it not mean that our feet, tender and unprotected by nature, shall receive protection — protection from God? Our feebleness and necessity shall call upon God’s grace and skill, and he will provide for us, and give to us exactly what we, by reason of our feebleness, so much need.

We want to have shoes of iron and brass, first, to travel with. We are pilgrims. We journey along a road which has not been smoothed by a steam-roller, but remains rough and rugged as the path to an Alpine

summit. We push on through a wilderness where there is no way. Sometimes we traverse a dreary road, comparable too a burning sand. At other times sharp trials afflict us as if they cut our feet with flints. Our journey is a maze, a labyrinth: the Lord leads us up and down in the wilderness, and sometimes we seem further from Canaan than ever. Seldom does our march take us through gardens: often it leads us through deserts. We are always travelling, never long in one stay. Sometimes the fiery cloudy pillar rests for a little, but it is only for a little. "Forward!" is our watchword. We have no abiding city here. We pitch our tent by the wells and palms of Elim, but we strike it in the morning, when the silver bugle sounds, "Up, and away!" and so we march to Marah, or to the place of the fiery serpents. Ever onward; ever forward; ever moving! This is our lot. Be it so. Our equipment betokens it: we have appropriate shoes for this perpetual journey. We are not shod with the skins of beasts, but with metals which will endure all wear and tear. Is it not written, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass"? However long the way, these shoes will last to the end.

Perhaps I address some friend whose way is especially rough. You seem to be more tried than anybody else. You reckon yourself to be more familiar with sorrow than anyone you know: affliction has marked you for its own. I pray you take home this promise to yourself by faith: the Lord saith to thee, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass." This special route of yours, which is beset with so many difficulties — your God has prepared you for it. You are shod as none but the Lord's chosen are shod. If your way is singular, so are your shoes. You shall be able to traverse this thorny road — to journey along it with profit to yourself, and with glory to God. For your travelling days you are well fitted, for your shoes are iron and brass.

*"If the sorrows of thy case  
Seem peculiar still to thee,  
God has promised needful grace,  
'As thy days, thy strength shall be.'"*

Shoes of iron remind us of military array — they are meant to fight with. Brethren, we are soldiers as well as pilgrims. These shoes are meant for trampling upon enemies. All sorts of deadly things lie in our way, and it is by the help of these shoes that the promise is made good. "Thou shalt

tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.” Are we not often too much like the young man Jether, who was bidden by his father to slay Zebah and Zalmunna, but he was afraid. We tremble to put our foot upon the neck of the enemy; we fancy that if we should attempt it, we should be guilty of presumption. Let us have done with this false humility, for thus we dishonor the Lord’s promise: “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass.” Better far to say, “Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.” Thus we may say without fear, for assuredly “The Lord shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly.”

“O my soul, thou has trodden down strength,” said the holy woman of old, when the adversaries of Israel had been routed. Thus can our exultant spirits also take up the chant. I also can say, “O my soul, thou has trodden down strength.” Yes, believer, with thy foot thou has crushed thy foe, even as thy Lord, who came on purpose that he might break with his foot, even with his bruised heel, the head of our serpent adversary. Be not afraid, therefore, in the day of conflict, to push onward against the foe. Do not be afraid to seize the victory which Christ has already secured for thee. “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass” thou shalt trample down thy foe, and march unharmed to victory.

What a blessing it is when we get self under our feet! We shall have good use for iron shoes if we keep him there. What a mercy it is when you get a sinful habit under your feet! You will need have shoes of brass to keep it there. What a mercy it is when some temptation that you have long struggled with at last falls to the ground, and you can set your foot upon it! You need to have both of your shoes strengthened with iron, and hardened with brass, that you may bruise this spiritual enemy, and crush out its life. Feet shod with sound metal of integrity and firmness will be none too strong in this evil world, where so many, like serpents, are ready to bite at our heels. Only so shod shall we win the victory.

See, the Lord promises that we shall have shoes suitable alike for travelling and for trampling upon enemies!

Next, we have fit shoes for climbing. One interpreter thinks that the sole of the shoe was to be studded with iron or copper nails. Certainly, those who climb would not like to go with the smooth soles which suit us in our

parlours and drawing-rooms. There are many instances where a rough tip of iron, or a strong nail in the heel of the shoe, has checked the slipping mountaineer when gliding over a shelving rock, and there he has stayed on the very brink of death. Our spiritual life is an upward climb, with constant danger of a fall. It is a great mercy to have shoes of iron and brass in our spiritual climbings, that should our feet be almost gone, we may find foothold before we are utterly cast down. We ought to climb: the higher our spiritual life the better. It is written of the believer, "He shall dwell on high." We ought not to be satisfied till we reach the highest places of knowledge, experience, and practice. High doctrine is glorious doctrine, high experience is blessed experience, high holiness is heavenly living. Many souls always keep in the plains: the simple elements are enough for them; and, thank God, they are enough for salvation and for comfort. But if you want the richest delight and the highest degree of grace, climb the hills and roam among the mysteries of God, the sublimer revelations of his divine will. Especially climb into the doctrines of grace: be not afraid of electing love, of special redemption, of the covenant, and all that is contained in it. Be not afraid to climb high, for if thy feet be dipped in the oil of grace, they shall also be so shod that they shall not slip. Trust in God, and you shall be as Mount Zion, which can never be removed. Your shoes shall be iron and brass, for lofty thought and clear knowledge, if you commit your mind to the instruction of the Lord. Receiving nothing except as you find it in the Word, but in a childlike spirit receiving everything that you find there, you shall stand upon your high places. Your feet shall be like hinds' feet, and your place of abode shall be above the mists and clouds of earth's wretched atmosphere of doubt.

Rise, also, to the highest graces and the noblest virtues. As is the food we feed on, such should our actions be. Let us love, for God is love, and as dear children we must be imitators of him in all gentleness, tenderness, and forgiveness. Climb to the heights of self-denial, the summits of consecration. Be as near heaven as is possible for those who dwell on earth. Have you not the shoes to climb with? Wherefore tarry down below?

I will not press this longer upon you, for I hope that your hearts aspire to climb up where your Lord reveals himself in clearer light; but, lest you should be at all afraid of the climbing as the aged man is afraid of that

which is high, I would arouse you to a holy bravery, since God has not given you shoes of iron and brass merely to trip over the plains. He means you to climb; your equipments prove it. Will you be as the children of Ephraim, who, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle? Will you be shod with iron, and melt like wax under a little heat of opposition?

Once more. These shoes are for travelling, for trampling, for climbing; they are also made of iron and brass for perseverance. You would not need such shoes for a little bit of a run — for a trip up the street and back again. Since the Lord has shod you in this fashion, it is a warning to you that the way is long and weary, and the end is not by-and-by. The Lord has furnished you with shoes that will not wear out. “Old shoes and clouted” were good enough for Gibeonites, but they are not fit for Israelites. The Lord does not mean that you should be arrayed as beggars, or become lame through worn-out shoes. The sacred canticle, in one of its verses, saith, “How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince’s daughter!” The princes of the heavenly household shall be shod according to their rank and this shall be the case at the end of their journey as surely as at the beginning. Whether Israel traversed sand or rock, the camp never halted because the people had become lame; for the Lord had said “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass.” It is a good pair of shoes that lasts a man for forty years; yet there are some of us who can testify that God’s grace has furnished us with spiritual shoes of that kind. I can speak of nearly that length of time since I knew the Lord, and I bear my unhesitating witness that I have found the grace of God all-sufficient, and his promises most sure and steadfast.

If we are allowed to live till we touch the borders of a century, or if we even fulfill our hundred years, these shoes would never be too old. These are the sort of shoes that Enoch wore; and was it not for more than three hundred years that he walked with God? He was always walking, but his shoes of iron and brass were never worn out. It matters not, dear friend, how severe may be your trials and troubles, or how long may be your pilgrimage through this wilderness, God, who gives these extraordinary shoes, such as no other has ever fashioned, and such as men are not accustomed to wear, has in this provided you against the utmost of endurance, the extremity of suffering. “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass”

— does not this symbol signify the best, the strongest, the most lasting, and the most fitting provision for a pilgrimage of trial? Thy shoes shall last as long as thou shalt last. Thou shalt find them as good as new when thou art about to lie down on thy last bed, to be gathered to thy fathers. “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass.”

I may be addressing some here that are very low in spirit: they fear that they shall not hold on their way, they are ready to halt, yea, ready to lie down in despair. I trust the way will hold you on when you can hardly hold on your way. May you hear the ring of your iron sandals, and be ashamed of cowardice. They should be iron men to whom God has given iron shoes. I would encourage you to go forward in the way, for you are, by God’s grace, made fit for travelling. You are not bare-footed, nor badly shod. You ought to go forward bravely, after your heavenly Father has put such shoes as these upon your feet. You are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and you may trip lightly on your way; and again I say, though that way should be a very long one, you need not think that your provision for the way will fail you. Even to hoar hairs the Lord will be with you. He has made, and he will bear; even he will carry you. Your last days shall be better than your first days. Yea, you shall go from strength to strength through his abounding and faithful love.

I find great difficulty in speaking tonight, because of some failure of my voice; but the divine promise is so sweet that even when poorly uttered it has a music all its own. For fear my voice should quite fail me, I will hasten on to say a few words upon the second point. We have examined the shoes, now let us consider the strength.

## **II. “AS THY DAYS, SO SHALL THY STRENGTH BE.”**

This provision is meant to meet weakness. The words carry a tacit hint to us that we have no strength of our own, but have need of strength from above. Our proud hearts need such a hint; for often we poor creatures begin to rely upon ourselves. Although we are weak as water, we get the notion that our own wit, or our own experience, may now suffice us, though once they might not have done so. But our best powers will not suffice us now, any more than in our youth. If we begin to rest in ourselves it will not be long before we find out our folly. The Lord will not let his people depend upon themselves: they may make the attempt, but,



as sure as they are his people, he will empty them from vessel to vessel, and make them know that their fullness dwells in Christ, and not in themselves. Remember that, if you have a sense of weakness, you have only a sense of the truth. You are as weak as you think you are; you certainly do not exaggerate your own helplessness. The Savior has said "Without me, ye can do nothing"; and that is the full extent of what you can do. The Lord promises you strength, which he would have no need to promise you if you had it naturally apart from him. But he promises to give it, and therein he assures you that you need it. Come down from your self-esteem: stoop from the notion of your own natural ability: divest yourself of the foolish idea that you can do anything in and of yourself, and come down to the strong for strength, and ask your Lord to fulfill this promise in your experience, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

The strength which is here promised is to abide through days. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Not for today only, but for tomorrow, and for every day as every day shall come. The longest and the shortest day, the brightest and the darkest day, the wedding and the funeral day, shall each have its strength measured out, till there shall be no more days. The Lord will portion out to his saints their support even as their days follow each other.

*"Days of trial, days of grief,  
In succession thou may'st see;  
This is still thy sweet relief,  
'As thy day, thy strength shall be.'"*

This strength is to be given daily We shall never have two days' grace at a time.

*"Day by day the manna fell:  
Oh, to learn this lesson well,  
'Day by day' the promise reads:  
Daily strength for daily needs!"*

If I get strength enough to get through this sermon, I shall be satisfied for the present. I do not want strength to get through next Sabbath morning's sermon till that Sabbath morning comes. If I can weather the present storm, I shall not just now require the strength to outlive the storms of all the year 1889. What should I do with this reserve force if I had it? Where would you store away your extra grace? You would put it in the lumber-

room of your pride, where it would breed worms, and become an offense. A storage of what you call “grace” would turn into self-sufficiency. “As thy days, so shall thy strength be”: this secures you a day’s burden and a day’s help, a day’s sorrow and a day’s comfort. After all, what more do we want? If a man has a meal, let him give thanks for it: he does not want two meals at once. If a man has enough for the day, he certainly is not yet in want for tomorrow. He cannot eat tomorrow’s food today; or, if he did, it would injure his health, and be no comfort to him. Let us narrow our vision as to the necessities of daily life, not looking so far ahead as to compress into today more evil than naturally belongs to it; for “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Our strength is to be given to us daily.

And then the text seems to say clearly that it will be given to us proportionately, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” A day of little service, little strength; a day of little suffering, little strength; but in a tremendous day — a day that needs thee to play the Samson — thou shalt have Samson’s strength. A day of deep waters in which thou shalt need to swim, shall be a day in which thou shalt ride the billows like a sea-bird. Do you not think that this might almost tempt us to wish for days of great trial, in order that we might receive great grace? If we are always to go smoothly, and to receive but little grace in consequence, we shall never rise to the great things of the divine life. We shall be dwarfs, and none shall say, “There were giants in those days.” We may not wish to be always children, with boyish tasks and childish duties; it is right we should grow, and that in consequence we should shoulder burdens from which youthful backs are exempt. Who would wish to be always a little child? Great grace will be sent to us to meet our great necessities. And is not that a most desirable thing? I remember that for a long season the Lord was very gracious to me in the matter of funds for the extensive works which I have been called upon to originate and superintend, and I felt very grateful for the ease which I enjoyed; yet it crossed my mind that I was learning less of God than in more trying seasons, and I trembled. Years gone by there were considerable necessities which did not appear to be met at once, and I went with them to God in prayer, and I trusted him, and he supplied my needs in such a wonderful way that I seemed to have the closest intercourse with him. I could most plainly see his hand stretched out to help me. I could see him working for me as gloriously as if he wrought

miracles. These were glorious days with me! I cannot tell you what holy wonder often filled my soul when the Lord interposed on behalf of the Orphanage or the College. The record reads so charmingly that unbelievers would never accept it as true. Then God made me by grace like one who steps from the summit of one mountain to another: I stepped across the valleys, leaving the deep places far below. So in my easy seasons I thought to myself, "Everything comes in regularly and abundantly. I am like a little child walking along a smooth lawn. This is but a common, ordinary state of affairs, in which even a man of no faith could pursue his way. I do not see so much of God, though assuredly I ought to see him as clearly now as ever." I did not wish for necessities, but I remembered how the Lord glorified himself in them, and therefore I half desired them. The regular blessing day by day, almost without need of special prayer, does not constrain you to look to God so vividly as when you gaze down into the deep, dark abyss of want, and feel, "If he does not help me now, I shall soon be in dire distress." This forces forth the living prayer." Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses." Our great necessities bring God so very near to us, so manifest to our consciousness, that they are an unspeakable blessing. So I did not ask to have a time of need; I hope that I shall never be so foolish as that; but when I found a time of need hurrying up, as I soon did, I felt a special delight in it — I took pleasure in my necessities. My heart cried," Now I shall see my Lord; now I shall see him again. Now I shall get a hold of that great arm, and hang upon it, and I shall see how the Lord will deliver me in time of need." I did thus lay hold upon my Lord again, and I found him still God All- sufficient, for which I bless his name. In proportion as he sends the trial he sends the help. Be not, therefore, afraid of great trial: on the contrary, look for it, and when it comes, say to yourselves, "Now for great grace. Now for a special manifestation of the faithfulness of God."

Mark, again, that strength will be given to us in all forms. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Our days vary, our trials change; our service varies, too. Our lives are far from being monotonous: they are musical with many notes and tones. Our present state is like chequered work: or, say, as a mosaic of many colors. But the strength that God gives varies with the occasion. He can bestow physical strength, and mental strength, and moral strength, and spiritual strength. He gives strength just where the

strength is needed, and of that peculiar kind which the trial demands. We have no need to fear because we feel weak in a certain direction: if we need strength in that special quarter, the strength will come there. "But if I am tried," says one, "in a certain way, I shall fail." No, you will not. "As your days, so shall your strength be." "I am horrified," says one, "at the thought of having to pass through the ordeal of a surgical operation." Do not be horrified at it; for though at the present moment you may be quite unfit for the trial, you will be quite ready for it when it comes. Have you never been in great danger and found yourself cool and calm beyond anything you could have expected? It has been so with me, and I have learned from my experience, not to measure what I shall be, in a trying hour, by what I happen to be just now. The Lord will take care to fit us for our future, and, as our days, so shall our strength be.

I find that some persons read this passage thus — when our days grow many, and we come to the end, yet our strength shall be equal to what it was in the days of our youth. We shall, according to this, find our strength continuing as our days continue. It is a cheering meaning, certainly. The children of God do find that, spiritually, their strength is renewed day by day. The outer man decayeth, that is nature: but the inward man is renewed day by day, that is grace. As thy days are, so shall thy strength continue to be. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Though days come one after another, so shall strength come with them; there shall be such a continuity of perpetual renewal that the heart shall be strong even to the end of life, and the old man shall know no inward decay.

An hour or so ago, I stood by what will certainly be the death-bed of one of our best friends, and I was cheered and comforted when I heard him so blessedly speaking both of the present with its pain, and of the future with its near descent into the vale of death. He said, "I have no doubt as to my eternal bliss. I have had no doubt — no, not a shadow of doubt — of my interest in Christ through my long illness. In fact, I have felt a perfect rest of mind about it all. And," he added, "this is nothing more than ought to be, with us who listen to the glorious gospel, for we live on good spiritual meat. Sound doctrine should make us strong in the Lord. I have not been a hearer of yours for thirty years, and heard of covenant love and

faithfulness, to die with a trembling hope. I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." Thus, dear friends, shall we also be supported, for the brother of whom I speak is a simple-minded man, who makes no pretensions to learning, but is one of our own selves. It will be a great privilege to find that when death's days come — the days of sickness, and decline, and weakness, yet still our strength remains the same. It will be glorious to go from strength to strength, and even in the day of utter physical prostration to find the spirit leaping for joy, in anticipation of the time when it shall be free from the cumbering clay, and shall stretch its wings and fly aloft to yonder world of joy. Yes, as our days our strength shall be.

Come, child of God, be peaceful, be happy in the prospect of the future. Do more, be joyous, and show your joy. You are out of harm's reach, for Christ has you in his hand. You shall never be staggered nor overcome, for the Lord is your strength and your song, and he has become your salvation. This text is a royal banquet for you. Here are fat things full of marrow. Eat abundantly, O beloved. Feel your spirit renewed by the Holy Spirit. Be prepared for whatever is yet to come; for such a word as this, not from me, but from the Lord himself, may gird up your loins for another march towards Canaan; "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

I am sorry, very sorry, for those among you who have no portion and lot in such a promise as this. Whatever you may have in this world, you are very poor in losing such a promise as this. You are shoeless, or if you have some wooden sabot, it will soon be worn out. You will never be able to travel to heaven in any shoes that mortal men can make for you. You need to go to the great Father, who alone can say, "Put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." I am sorry for you in your present condition, for you have no strength but your own, and that is a poor piece of weakness. You are troubled even now: what will you do in the swellings of Jordan? The common footmen of daily life have wearied you: what will you do when you have to contend with horses? O souls, what will you do when you are ushered into the presence of the dread mysteries of another world? O sirs, you are without strength; but is not that a grand verse, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly"? Ungodly as you are, clutch at such a word as that. "Without strength" as you are, yet

lay hold upon the Lord's strength. It is for those who have no strength that Christ came into the world. It is for the ungodly that he laid down his life. Come, and trust him. Let him become your strength and your righteousness from this time forth; and may he manifest himself to you in a special and gracious way; and unto his name shall be praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~1871~~ Psalm 37.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 686, 89 (Part II), 46 (vers. 1.)

**LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON BELOVED READERS,** — To you, one and all, may the New Year be fruitful of blessings. I wish you the text of this sermon as a benediction, so far as it is applicable to you. Specially may your feet be shod with the iron and brass which are promised you, and this will be better than the glass slippers of fortune, or the silver sandals of wealth. For myself, I beg your kind remembrance when you have the ear of "the King." I need restored strength, for I am well, but weak; and for another year of service I need that the right hand of the Lord may be laid upon me, and that he should say to me, "Be strong: fear not." He that has supplied might to our feebleness for so many years will not fail us now. Week by week the loaf will be set before you in this sermon, and we shall together bless the Lord of the feast.

With all the good wishes of the season, in sincerity and truth,

I am, your weekly visitor,

**C. H. SPURGEON.**

*Mentone, Jan 1st, 1889.*

# TWO ESSENTIAL THINGS

## SERMON NO. 2073

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 3RD, 1889,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” — ~~400~~ Acts 20:21*

THIS was the practical drift of Paul's teaching at Ephesus, and everywhere else. He kept back nothing which was profitable to them; and the main profit he expected them to derive from his teaching the whole counsel of God was this, that they should have “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” This was the great aim of the apostle. I pray that it may be so with all of us who are teachers of the Word: may we never be satisfied if we interest, please, or dazzle; but may we long for the immediate production, by the Spirit of God, of true repentance and faith. Old Mr. Dodd, one of the quaintest of the Puritans, was called by some people, “Old Mr. Faith and Repentance,” because he was always insisting upon these two things. Philip Henry, remarking upon his name, writes somewhat to this effect — “As for Mr. Dodd's abundant preaching repentance and faith, I admire him for it; for if I die in the pulpit, I desire to die preaching repentance and faith; and if I die out of the pulpit, I desire to die practising repentance and faith.” Some one remarked to Mr. Richard Cecil, that he had preached very largely upon faith; but that good clergyman assured him that if he could rise from his dying bed, and preach again, he would dwell still more upon that subject. No themes can exceed in importance repentance and faith, and these need to be brought very frequently before the minds of our congregations.

Paul testified concerning “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”; by which I understand that, as an ambassador for Christ, he assured the people that through repentance and faith they would receive salvation. He taught in God's name mercy through the atoning sacrifice to all who would quit their sin and follow the Lord Jesus.

With many tears he added his own personal testimony to his official statement. He could truly say, “I have repented, and I do repent”; and he could add, “but I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior; I am resting upon the one foundation, trusting alone in the Crucified.” His official testimony, with its solemnity, and his personal testimony, with its pathetic earnestness, made up a very weighty witness-bearing on the behalf of these two points — repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved friends, we cannot at this time do without either of these any more than could the Greeks and Jews. They are essential to salvation. Some things may be, but these must be. Certain things are needful to the well-being of a Christian, but these things are essential to the very being of a Christian. If you have not repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, you have no part nor lot in this matter. Repentance and faith must go together to complete each other. I compare them to a door and its post. Repentance is the door which shuts out sin, but faith is the post upon which its hinges are fixed. A door without a door-post to hang upon is not a door at all; while a door-post without the door hanging to it is of no value whatever. What God hath joined together let no man put asunder; and these two he has made inseparable — repentance and faith. I desire to preach in such a way that you shall see and feel that repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ are the two things which you must have; but even then I fail, unless you obtain them. May the Holy Spirit plant both these precious things in our hearts; and if they are already planted there, may he nourish them and bring them to much greater perfection.

**I.** Let me observe, in the first place, that THERE IS A REPENTANCE WHICH IS NOT TOWARD GOD. Discriminate this morning. Paul did not merely preach repentance, but repentance toward God; and there is a repentance which is fatally faulty, because it is not toward God.

In some there is a repentance of sin which is produced by a sense of shame. The evil-doers are found out, and indignant words are spoken about them: they are ashamed, and so far they are repentant, because they have dishonored themselves. If they had not been found out, in all probability they would have continued comfortably in the sin, and even



have gone further on in it. They are grieved at having been discovered; and they are sorry, very sorry, because they are judged and condemned by their fellows. It is not the evil which troubles them, but the dragging of it to light. It is said that among Orientals it is not considered wrong to lie, but it is considered a very great fault to lie so blunderingly as to be caught at it. Many who profess regret for having done wrong are not sorry for the sin itself, but they are affected by the opinion of their fellow-men, and by the remarks that are made concerning their offense, and so they hang their heads. Truly, it is something in their favor that they can blush; it is a mercy that they have so much sense left as to be afraid of the observation of their fellows; for some have lost even this sense of shame. But shame is not evangelical repentance; and a man may go to hell with a blush on his face as surely as if he had the brazen forehead of a shameless woman. Do not mistake a little natural fluttering of the heart and blushing of the face, on account of being found out in sin, for true repentance.

Some, again, have a repentance which consists in grief because of the painful consequences of sin. The man has been a spendthrift, a gambler, a profligate, and his money is gone; and now he repents that he has played the fool. Another has been indulging the passions of his corrupt nature, and he finds himself suffering for it, and therefore he repents of his wickedness. There are many cases that I need not instance here, in which sin comes home very quickly to men. Certain sins bear fruit speedily: their harvest is reaped soon after the seed is sown. Then a man says he is sorry, and he gives up the sin for a time; not because he dislikes it, but because he sees that it is ruining him: as sailors in a storm cast overboard the cargo of the ship, not because they are weary of it, but because the vessel will go to the bottom if they retain it. This is regret for consequences, not sorrow for sin. Ah, look at the drunkard, how penitent he is in the morning! "Who hath woe? who hath redness of the eyes?" But he will get a hair of the dog's tail that bit him, he will be at his cups again before long. He repents of the headache, and not of the drink. The dog will return to his vomit. There is no repentance which only consists of being sorry because one is smarting under the consequences of sin. Every murderer regrets his crime when he hears the hammers going that knock the scaffold together for his hanging. This is not the repentance which the Spirit of God works in a soul; it is only such a repentance as a dog may have when he has stolen

meat, and is whipped for his pains. It is repentance of so low a sort that it can never be acceptable in the sight of God.

Some, again, exhibit a repentance which consists entirely of horror at the future punishment of sin. This fear is healthful in many ways, and we can by no means dispense with it. I do not wonder that a man who has lived a liar, a forger, and a perjurer, should, in the hour of his discovery, put an end to his life. If he accepts modern theology, he has escaped, by this means, from the hand of justice: the little pretense of punishment which deceivers predict for the next world no man need be afraid to risk rather than subject himself to a felon's fate. According to current teaching, it will be all the same with all men in the long run, for there is to be a universal restitution; and therefore the suicide does but rationally leap from pursuit and punishment into a state where all will be made happy for him by-and-by, even if he does not find it altogether heaven at first. He escapes from punishment in this life, and whatever inconvenience there may be for him in the next life he will soon get over it, for it is said to be so trivial that those who keep to Scripture lines, and speak the dread truth therein revealed, are barbarians or fools. Many men do, no doubt, repent truly through being aroused by fear of death, and judgment, and the wrath to come. But if this fear goes no further than a selfish desire to escape punishment, no reliance can be placed upon its moral effect. If they could be assured that no punishment would follow, such persons would continue in sin, and not only be content to live in it, but be delighted to have it so. Beloved, true repentance is sorrow for the sin itself: it has not only a dread of the death which is the wages of sin, but of the sin which earns the wages. If you have no repentance for the sin itself, it is in vain that you should stand and tremble because of judgment to come. If judgment to come drives you, by its terrors, to escape from sin, you will have to bless God that you ever heard of those terrors, and that there were men found honest enough to speak plainly of them; but, I pray you, do not be satisfied with the mere fear of punishment, for it is of little worth. The evil itself you must lament, and your daily cry must be, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

Another kind of repentance may be rather better than any we have spoken of, but still it is not repentance toward God. It is a very good counterfeit; but it is not the genuine article. I refer to a sense of the unworthiness of an

ill life. I have known persons, upon a review of their past, rise above the grovelling level of absolute carelessness, and they have begun to enjoy some apprehension of the beauty of virtue, the nobleness of usefulness, and the meanness of a life of selfish pleasure. A few of those who have no spiritual life, have, nevertheless, keen moral perceptions, and they are repentant when they see that they have lost the opportunity of distinguishing themselves by noble lives. They regret that their story will never be quoted among the examples of good men, who have left "footprints on the sands of time." Musing upon their position in reference to society and history, they wish that they could blot out the past, and write more worthy lines upon the page of life. Now, this is hopeful; but it is not sufficient. We are glad when men are under influences which promise amendment; but if a man stops at a mere apprehension of the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice, what is there in it? This is not repentance toward God; it may not be repentance at all in any practical sense. Men have been known to practice the vices they denounced, and avoid the virtues they admired; human sentiment has not force enough to break the fetters of evil. Repentance toward God is the only thing which can effectually cut the cable which holds a man to the fatal shores of evil.

Once more, there is a repentance which is partial. Men sometimes wake up to the notice of certain great blots in their lives. They cannot forget that black night: they dare not tell what was then done. They cannot forget the villainous act which ruined another, nor that base lie which blasted a reputation. They recall the hour when the inward fires of passion, like those of a volcano, poured the lava of sin adown their lives. At the remembrance of one gross iniquity, they feel a measure of regret when their better selves are to the front. But repentance toward God is repentance of sin as sin, and of rebellion against law as rebellion against God. The man who only repents of this and that glaring offense, has not repented of sin at all. I remember the story of Thomas Olivers, the famous cobbler convert, who was a loose-living man till he was renewed by grace through the preaching of Mr. Wesley, and became a mighty preacher, and the author of that glorious hymn, "The God of Abraham Praise." This man, before conversion, was much in the habit of contracting debts, but could not be brought to pay them. When he received grace, he was convinced that he had no right to remain in debt. He says, "I felt as great

sorrow and confusion as if I had stolen every sum I owed.” Now, he was not repentant for this one debt, or that other debt, but for being in debt at all, and, therefore, having a little coming to him from the estate of a relative, he bought a horse, and rode from town to town, paying everybody to whom he was indebted. Before he had finished his pilgrimage, he had paid seventy debts, principal and interest, and had been compelled to sell his horse, saddle, and bridle, to do it. During this eventful journey he rode many miles to pay a single sixpence: it was only a sixpence, but the principle was the same, whether the debt was sixpence or a hundred pounds. Now, as he that hates debt will try to clear himself of every sixpence, so he that repents of sin, repents of it in every shape. No sin is spared by the true penitent. He abhors all sin. Brethren, we must not imitate Saul, who spared Agag and the best of the sheep. He had been told to destroy all, but he must needs spare some. Agag must be hewn in pieces, and the least objectionable of sin, if such there be, must be at once destroyed. Grace spares no sin. “Oh,” saith one man, “I can give up every sin except one pleasure. This I reserve: is it not a little one?” Nay, nay; in the name of truth and sincerity, make no reserve. Repentance is a besom which sweeps the house from garret to cellar. Though no man is free from the commission of sin, yet every converted man is free from the love of sin. Every renewed heart is anxious to be free from even a speck of evil. When sin’s power is felt within, we do not welcome it, but we cry out against it, as Paul did when he said, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” We cannot bear sin: when it is near us, we feel like a wretch chained to a rotting carcass; we groan to be free from the hateful thing. Yes, repentance vows that the enemy shall be turned out, bag and baggage; and neither Sanballat, nor any of his trumpety, shall have a chamber or a closet within the heart which has become the temple of God.

**II.** I have said enough to show that there is a repentance which is not toward God; and now, secondly, let us observe that EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE IS REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD. Lay stress on the words, “toward God.” True repentance looks toward God. When the prodigal son went back to his home, he did not say, “I will arise, and go to my brother; for I have grieved my brother by leaving him to serve alone.” Neither did he say, “I will arise and go to the servants, for they were very kind to me.

The dear old nurse that brought me up is broken-hearted at my conduct.” “No,” he said, “I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” Our Lord’s picture of a returning sinner is thus drawn in very clear colors, as a return to the Father, a repentance toward God. You are bound to make humble apology and ample compensation to everybody you have wronged; you are bound to make every acknowledgment and confession to all whom you have slandered or misrepresented: this is right and just, and must not be forgotten. Still, the essence of your repentance must be “toward God”; for the essence of your wrong is toward God. I will endeavor to show you this. A boy is rebellious against his father. The father has told him such a thing is to be done, and he determines that he will not do it. His father has forbidden him certain things, and he therefore defiantly does them. His father is much grieved, talks with him, and endeavors to bring him to repentance. Suppose the boy were to reply, “Father, I feel sorry for what I have done, because it has vexed my brother.” Such a speech would be impertinence, and not penitence. Suppose he said, “Father, I will also confess that I am sorry for what I have done, because it has deprived me of a good deal of pleasure.” That also would be a selfish and impudent speech, and show great contempt for his father’s authority. Before he can be forgiven and restored to favor, he must confess the wrong done in disobeying his father’s law. He must lament that he has broken the rule of the household; and he must promise to do so no more. There can be no restoration of that child to his proper place in the family till he has said, “Father, I have sinned.” He is stubborn, unhumbled, and rebellious till he comes to that point. All the repentance that he feels about the matter which does not go toward his father, misses the mark: in fact, it may even be an impudent aggravation of his rebellion against his father’s rule that he is willing to own his wrong toward others, but will not confess the wrong he has done to the one chiefly concerned.

O sinner, you must repent before God, or you do not repent at all; for here is the essence of repentance. The man repenting sees that he has neglected God. What though I have never been a thief nor an adulterer; yet God made me, and I am his creature, and if throughout twenty, thirty, or forty years I have never served him, I have all that while robbed him of what he

had a right to expect from me. Did God make you, and has he kept the breath in your nostrils, and has he kindly supplied your wants till now, and all these years has he had nothing from you? Would you have kept a horse or a cow all this time, and have had nothing from it? Would you keep a dog if it had never fawned upon you? never noticed your call? Yet all these years God has thus preserved you in being, and blessed you with great mercies, and you have made no response. Hear how the Lord cries, “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me!” This is where the sin lies.

Further than that, the true penitent sees that he has misrepresented God. When he has suffered a little affliction, he has thought God was cruel and unjust. The heathen misrepresent God by worshipping idols: we misrepresent God by our murmurings, our complainings, and our thought that there is pleasure in sin, and weariness in the divine service. Have you not spoken of God as if he were the cause of your misery, when you have brought it all upon yourself? You talk about him as if he were unjust, when it is you that are unjust and evil.

The penitent man sees that the greatest offense of all his offenses is that he has offended God. Many of you think nothing of merely offending God: you think much more of offending man. If I call you “sinners” you do not repel the charge; but if I called you “criminals” you would rise in indignation, and deny the accusation. A criminal, in the usual sense of the term, is one who has offended his fellow-man: a sinner is one who has wronged his God. You do not mind being called sinners, because you think little of grieving God; but to be called criminals, or offenders against the laws of man, annoys you; for you think far more of man than of God. Yet, in honest judgment, it were better, infinitely better, to break every human law, if this could be done without breaking the divine law, than to disobey the least of the commands of God. Knowest thou not, O man, that thou hast lived in rebellion against God? Thou hast done the things he bids thee not to do, and thou hast left undone the things which he commands thee to do. This is what thou hast to feel and to confess with sorrow; and without this there can be no repentance.

Near the vital heart of repentance, right in its core, is a sense of the meanness of our conduct toward God. Especially our ingratitude to him, after all his favor and mercy. This it is that troubles the truly penitent

heart most: that God should love so much, and should have such a wretched return. Ingratitude, the worst of ills, makes sin exceeding sinful. Sorrow for having so ill requited the Lord is a spiritual grace. A tear of such repentance is a diamond of the first water, precious in the sight of the Lord.

True repentance is also toward God in this respect, that it judges itself by God. We do not repent because we are not so good as a friend whom we admire, but because we are not holy as the Lord. God's perfect law is the transcript of his own perfect character, and sin is any want of conformity to the law and to the character of God. Judge yourselves by your fellow-men, and you may be self-content; but measure yourselves by the perfect holiness of the Lord God, and oh, how you must despise yourself! There is no deep repentance until our standard is the standard of perfect rectitude, till our judgment of self is formed by a comparison with the divine character. When we behold the perfection of the thrice holy Jehovah, and then look at ourselves, we cry with Job, "Mine eyes seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

To sum up: evangelical repentance is repentance of sin as sin: not of this sin nor of that, but of the whole mass. We repent of the sin of our nature as well as of the sin of our practice. We bemoan sin within us and without us. We repent of sin itself as being an insult to God. Anything short of this is a mere surface repentance, and not a repentance which reaches to the bottom of the mischief. Repentance of the evil act, and not of the evil heart, is like men pumping water out of a leaky vessel, but forgetting to stop the leak. Some would dam up the stream, but leave the fountain still flowing; they would remove the eruption from the skin, but leave the disease in the flesh. All that is done by way of amendment without a bemoaning of sin because of its being rebellion against God will fall short of the mark. When you repent of sin as against God, you have laid the axe at the root of the tree. He that repents of sin as sin against God, is no longer sporting with the evil, but has come to stern business with it; now he will be led to change his life, and to be a new man: now, also, will he be driven to cry to God for mercy, and in consequence he will be drawn to trust in Jesus. He will now feel that he cannot help himself, and he will look to the strong for strength. I can help myself toward my fellow-man, and I can improve myself up to his standard; but I cannot help myself

toward God, and cannot wash myself clean before his eye; therefore I fly to him to purge me with hyssop, and make me whiter than snow. O gracious Spirit, turn our eyes Godward, and then fill them with penitential tears.

**III.** Thirdly, I am going to throw in a bit of my own. I confess that it does not rise to the glorious fullness of the text, but I use it as a stepping-stone for feeble footsteps. I thus apologize as I say — **THOSE WHO HAVE EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE ARE PERMITTED TO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST.** Paul says that he testified of “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”; and, therefore, where there is repentance, faith is allowable. O penitent sinner, you may believe in the Savior! While you are laboring under your present sense of guilt, while you are loathing and abhorring yourself, while you are burdened and heavy laden with fears, while you are crushed with sorrow as you lie before the Lord, you may now trust the Lord Jesus Christ. Before you have any quiet of conscience, before any relief comes to your heart, before hope shines in your spirit; now in your direct distress, when you are ready to perish, you may at once exercise faith in him who came to seek and to save that which was lost. There is no law against faith. No decree of heaven forbids a sinner to believe and live.

You may pluck up courage to believe when you remember this — first, that though you have offended God (and this is the great point that troubles you) that God, whom you have offended, has himself provided an atonement. The sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ is practically a substitution presented by God himself. The Offended dies to set the offender free. God himself suffers the penalty of his law, that he may justly forgive; and that, though Judge of all, he may yet righteously exercise his fatherly love in the putting away of sin. When you are looking to God with tears in your eyes, remember it is the same God who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this offended God, “so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Recollect, also, that this atonement was presented for the guilty: in fact, there could be no atonement where there was no guilt. It would be superfluous to make expiation where there had been no fault. For man, as a sinner, Christ died. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all



acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." I pray you, then, the more deeply you feel your sinnership, the more clearly perceive that the sacrifice of Calvary was for you. For sinners the cross was lifted high, and for sinners the eternal Son of God poured out his soul unto death. Oh that my hearers, who mourn over sin, could see this, and rejoice in the divine method of putting sin out of the way!

But, remember, you must, with your repentance, come to God with faith in his dear Son. I have said that you may do so; but I apologize for so saying, for it is only half the truth. God commands you to believe. The same God that says, "Thou shalt not steal," is that God who says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This is his commandment, that you believe on Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. Faith is not left to your option, you are commanded to accept the witness of God. "Believe and live," has all the force of a divine statute. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Therefore, if thou art already a rebel, do not go on rebelling by refusing to believe in the Lord's own testimony.

Remember that there can be no reconciliation made between you and God unless you believe in Jesus Christ, whom he has given as a Savior, and commissioned to that end. Not believing in Jesus is caviling at God's way of salvation, quarrelling with his message of love. Will you do this? You have done wrong enough by fighting against Jehovah's law, are you going to fight against his gospel? Without faith it is impossible to please him; will you continue to displease him? Disbelief in Christ is on your part casting a new dishonor upon God, and thus it is a perseverance in rebellion of the most aggravated form. By refusing his unspeakable gift, you do, as it were, put your finger into the very eye of God. To refuse the Son is to blaspheme the Father. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." Come, poor soul, be encouraged. Clearly, if you have repentance toward God, you are allowed to believe in Jesus. Upon the drops of your repentance the sun of mercy is shining; what a rainbow of hope is thus made!

Do not hesitate. You would fain be washed, for you mourn your defilement; yonder is the cleansing fount! You are pained with the malady of sin; there stands the healing Savior, cast yourself at his feet! No

embargo is laid upon your believing. God has not even in secret said to you, "Seek ye my face in vain." Come, I pray you, and fear not.

We testify to you "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." But that faith must be toward the Lord Jesus Christ. You must look to Jesus, to the substitute, to the sacrifice, to the mediator, to the Son of God. "No man cometh unto the Father," saith Jesus, "but by me." No faith in God will save the sinner except it is faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. To attempt to come to God without the appointed Mediator, is again to insult him by refusing his method of reconciliation. Do not so, but let your repentance toward God be accompanied with faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; you are warranted in thus believing.

**IV.** And now I come to my last point. Oh that I might be helped by the Holy Ghost! Here I come back to the text, and get on sure ground. EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE IS LINKED TO FAITH, AND FAITH IS LINKED TO REPENTANCE. We testify not only of repentance toward God, but of faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance and faith are born of the same Spirit of God. I do not know which comes first; but I fall back on my well-worn image of a wheel — when the cart starts, which spoke of the wheel moves first? I do not know. Repentance and faith come together. Perhaps I may say that repentance is like Leah, for it is "tender eyed"; and faith is like Rachel, fairer to look upon. But you cannot take Rachel to yourself unless you will have Leah also; for it is according to the rule of the gospel that so it should be. The Old Testament, with its law of repentance, must be bound up in one volume with the New Testament of the gospel of faith. These two, like Naomi and Ruth, say to each other, "Where thou dwellest I will dwell." There are two stars called the Gemini, which are always together: faith and repentance are the Twins of the spiritual heavens. What if I liken them to the two valves of the heart? They must be both in action, or the soul cannot live. They are born together, and they must live together.

Repentance is the result of an unperceived faith. When a man repents of sin, he does inwardly believe, in a measure, although he may not think so. There is such a thing as latent faith: although it yields the man no conscious comfort, it may be doing something even better for him; for it may be working in him truthfulness of heart, purity of spirit, and

abhorrence of evil. No true repentance is quite apart from faith. The solid of faith is held in solution in the liquid of repentance. It is clear that no man can repent toward God unless he believes in God. He could never feel grief at having offended God, if he did not believe that God is good. To the dark cloud of repentance there is a silver lining of faith; yet, at the first, the awakened soul does not know this, and therefore laments that he cannot believe; whereas, his very repentance is grounded upon a measure of faith.

Repentance is also greatly increased as faith grows. I fear that some people fancy that they repented when they were first converted, and that, therefore, they have done with repentance. But it is not so: the higher the faith, the deeper the repentance. The saint most ripe for heaven is the most aware of his own shortcomings. As long as we are here, and grace is an active exercise, our consciousness of our unworthiness will grow upon us. When you have grown too big for repentance, depend upon it you have grown too proud for faith. They that say they have ceased to repent confess that they have departed from Christ. Repentance and faith will grow each one as the other grows: the more you know the weight of sin, the more will you lean upon Jesus, and the more will you know his power to uphold. When repentance measures a cubit, faith will measure a cubit also.

Repentance also increases faith. Beloved, we never believe in Christ to the full till we get a clear view of our need of him; and that is the fruit of repentance. When we hate sin more we shall love Christ more, and trust him more. The more self sinks, the more Christ rises: like the two scales of balance, one must go down that the other may go up: self must sink in repentance that Christ may rise by faith.

Moreover, repentance salts faith and sweetens it, and faith does the same to repentance. Faith, if there could be true faith without repentance, would be like the flowers without the dew, like the sunshine without shade, and like hills without valleys. If faith be the cluster, repentance is the juice of the grape. Faith is dry, like the fleece on the threshing-floor, receptive and retentive; but when heaven visits it with fullness, it drips with repentance. If a man professes faith, and has no sense of personal unworthiness, and no grief for sin, he becomes a man of the letter, sound in the head, and very apt to prove his doctrine orthodox by apostolic blows and knocks. But when you add to this the mollifying effects of true repentance, he becomes

lowly, and humble, and easily to be entreated. When a man repents as much as he believes, he is as patient in his own quarrel as he is valiant in “the quarrel of the covenant.” He holds his own sinnership as firmly as he holds the Lord’s Saviorship, and he frequents the Valley of Humiliation as much as the hills of Assurance.

If there could be such a thing as a man who was a believer without repentance, he would be much too big for his boots, and there would be no bearing him. If he were always saying, “Yes, I know I am saved; I have a full assurance that I am saved”; and yet had no sense of personal sin, how loudly he would crow! But, O dear friends, while we mourn our sins, we are not puffed up by the privileges which faith receives. An old Puritan says, that when a saint is made beautiful with rich graces, as the peacock with many-coloured feathers, let him not be vain, but let him recollect the black feet of his inbred sin, and the harsh voice of his many shortcomings. Repentance will never allow faith to strut, even if it had a mind to do so. Faith cheers repentance, and repentance sobers faith. The two go well together. Faith looks to the throne, and repentance loves the cross. When faith looks most rightly to the Second Advent, repentance forbids its forgetting the First Advent. When faith is tempted to climb into presumption, repentance calls it back to sit at Jesus’ feet. Never try to separate these dear companions, which minister more sweetly to one another than I have time to tell. That conversion which is all joy and lacks sorrow for sin, is very questionable. I will not believe in that faith which has no repentance with it, any more than I would believe in that repentance which left a man without faith in Jesus. Like the two cherubs which stood gazing down upon the mercy-seat, so stand these two inseparable graces, and none must dare to remove the one or the other.

I have almost done; but the thought strikes me, Will these good people go home, and remember about repentance and faith? Have I so talked that they will think of me rather than of the points in hand? I hope it is not so. I do pray you, throw away all that I may have said apart from the subject; cast it off as so much chaff, and keep only the wheat. Remember, “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Let each one ask himself, Have I a repentance which leads to faith? Have I a faith which joins hands with repentance? This is the way to weave an ark of bulrushes for your infant assurance: twist these two together,

repentance and faith. Yet trust neither repentance nor faith; but repent toward God, and have faith toward the Lord Jesus. Mind you do this; for there is a sad aptitude in many hearers to forget the essential point, and think of our stories and illustrations rather than of the practical duty which we would enforce. A celebrated minister, who has long ago gone home, was once taken ill, and his wife requested him to go and consult an eminent physician. He went to this physician, who welcomed him very heartily. "I am right glad to see you, sir," said he; "I have heard you preach, and have been greatly profited by you, and therefore I have often wished to have half an hour's chat with you. If I can do anything for you, I am sure I will." The minister stated his case. The doctor said, "Oh, it is a very simple matter; you have only to take such and such a drug, and you will soon be right." The patient was about to go, thinking that he must not occupy the physician's time; but he pressed him to stay, and they entered into pleasant conversation. The minister went home to his wife, and told her with joy what a delightful man the doctor had proved to be. He said, "I do not know that I ever had a more delightful talk. The good man is eloquent, and witty, and gracious." The wife replied, "But what remedy did he prescribe?" "Dear!" said the minister, "I quite forget what he told me on that point." "What!" she said, "did you go to a physician for advice, and have you come away without a remedy?" "It quite slipped my mind," he said: "the doctor talked so pleasantly that his prescription has quite gone out of my head." Now, if I have talked to you so that this will happen, I shall be very sorry. Come, let my last word be a repetition of the gospel remedy for sin. Here it is. Trust in the precious blood of Christ, and make full confession of your sin, heartily forsaking it. You must receive Christ by faith, and you must loathe every evil way. Repentance and faith must look to the water and the blood from the side of Jesus for cleansing from the power and guilt of sin. Pray God that you may, by both these priceless graces, receive at once the merit of your Savior unto eternal salvation. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~4217~~ Acts 20:17-27;  
~~4510~~ Psalm 51.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 34 (Ver. 1), 579, 51 (Ver. 2).

# A FREE GRACE PROMISE

## SERMON NO. 2082

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 5TH, 1888.**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,**

**DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 11TH, 1888.**

***“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call  
on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.” — ~~VER~~ Joel 2:32.***

VENGEANCE was in full career. The armies of divine justice had been called forth for war: “They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war.” They had invaded and devastated the land, and turned the land from being like the garden of Eden into a desolate wilderness. All faces gathered blackness: the people were “much pained” The sun itself was dim, the moon was dark, and the stars withdrew themselves: the earth quaked, and the heavens trembled. At such a dreadful time, when we might least have expected it, between the peals of thunder and the flashes of lightning, was heard this gentle word, “It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.” Let us carefully read the passage: “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.” In the worst times that can ever happen, there is still salvation for men. When day turns to night, and life becomes death, and the staff of life is broken, and the hope of man has fled, there still remains in God, in the person of his dear Son, deliverance to all those who will call upon the name of the Lord. We do not know what is to happen: reading the roll of the future, we prophesy dark things; but still this light shall always shine between the rifts of the cloud-wrack: “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.”

This passage was selected by the apostle at Pentecost to be set in its place as a sort of morning star of gospel times. When the Spirit was poured out upon the servants and the handmaids, and sons and daughters began to prophesy, it was clear that the wondrous time had come, which had been foretold so long before. Then Peter, as he preached his memorable sermon, told the people, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved”; thus giving a fuller and yet more evangelical meaning to the word “delivered.” “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered” from sin, death and hell — shall, in fact, be so delivered as to be, in divine language, “saved” — saved from the guilt, the penalty, the power of sin, saved from the wrath to come. These gospel times are still the happy days in which “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” In the Year of Grace we have reached a day and an hour in which “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” To you at this moment is this salvation sent. The dispensation of immediate acceptance proclaimed at Pentecost has never ceased: its fullness of blessing has grown rather than diminished. The sacred promise stands in all its certainty, fullness, and freeness: it has lost none of all its breadth and length: “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

I have nothing to do to-night but to tell you over again the old, old story of infinite mercy come to meet infinite sin — of free grace come to lead free will into a better line of things — of God himself appearing to undo man’s ruin wrought by man, and to lift him up by a great deliverance. May the Holy Spirit graciously aid me while I shall talk to you very simply, thus:

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**I.** First, THERE IS SOMETHING ALWAYS WANTED. That something is deliverance, or “salvation.” It is always wanted. It is the requisite of man, wherever man is found. As long as there are men on the face of the earth, there will always be a need of salvation. I could wish that some of you had the instructive schooling which I received last Tuesday, when I was sitting to see enquirers. I had a very happy time in seeing a very large number of persons who had joyfully put their trust in Christ; but among them were some who could not trust — poor hearts, conscious of sin, though they did not think they were. These seemed bound hand and foot, shut up in the prison of despair, and darkened in heart. I tell you, I felt dismayed as they baffled me: I felt a fool as they refused to be comforted. I could do

nothing for them so far as argument and persuasion were concerned. I could pray with them: I could also set them praying, and they did pray: but they were cases in which, unless the arm of God were revealed, I was as powerless with them as when a man stands weeping over the body of his dead wife, and would restore her to life even at the cost of his own life, and yet he could produce neither hearing nor motion. Dear friends, while we mingle only with those who are saved, we forget how much need there is still of a divine salvation. If we could go through London, into its dens and slums, we should think very differently of human need from what we do when we simply come from our own quiet domestic circle, and step into our pew and hear a sermon. The world is still sick and dying. The world is still corrupting and rotting. The world is a ship in which the water is rising fast, and the vessel is going down into the deep of destruction. God's salvation is wanted as much to-day as when the spirit preached it in Noah's day to the spirits in prison. God must step in, and bring deliverance, or there remains no hope.

Some want deliverance from present trouble. If you are in this need to-night through very sore distress, I invite you to take my text as your guide, and believe that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." Depend upon it, in any form of distress, physical, mental, or whatever it may be, prayer is wonderfully available. "Call upon me," says God, "in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." If you are so down at the heel that your foot is on the bare pavement; if you have come to this place in bodily sickness, and feel as if you should die on the seat in which you sit; if there be no physician to help you, and no friend to stretch out a generous hand, call upon God, I beseech you. You have come to the end of men; you are now at the beginning of God. See whether your Maker will forget you. See whether the great, generous heart of God does not still beat tenderly towards the sorrowful and the afflicted. If I saw you lying wounded on a battle-field, bleeding to death, I would say, "Call upon God." If I knew that you had not a house to go to, but must walk these streets all night, I would say, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." I will take the text in the broadest sense, and bid you, nay, command you, to test your good and gracious God in the day of your calamity.



This is true whenever you come into a position of deep personal distress, even though it should not be of a physical kind. When you do not know how to act, but are bewildered and at your wits' end, when wave of trouble has followed wave of trouble till you are like the sailor in the storm who reels to and fro, and staggers like a drunken man; if now you cannot help yourself, because your spirit sinks and your mind fails, call upon God, call upon God, call upon God! Lost child in the wood, with the night fog thickening about you, ready to lie down and die, call upon your Father! Call upon God, thou distracted one; for "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." In the last great day when all secrets are known, it will seem ridiculous that ever persons took to writing tales and romances; for the real stories of what God has done for those who cry to him are infinitely more surprising. If men and women could but tell in simple, natural language how God has come to their rescue in the hour of imminent distress, they would set the harps of heaven a-ringing with new melodies, and the hearts of saints on earth a-glowing with new love to God for his wonderful kindness to the children of men. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness! Oh that we could abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness to ourselves in the night of our weeping!

The text holds good concerning deliverance from future troubles. What is to happen in the amazing future we do not know. Some try to startle and alarm you with prophecies of what will soon happen; concerning whom I would warn you to be well upon your guard. Take small heed of what they say. Whatever is to happen according to the Word of God — if the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood — if God shall show great wonders in the heavens, and the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke, yet remember that though you will then assuredly want deliverance, deliverance will still be near at hand. The text seems put in a startling connection in order to advise us that when the worst and most terrible convulsions shall occur, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." The star Wormwood may fall, but we shall be saved if we call upon the name of the Lord. Plagues may be poured out, trumpets may sound, and judgments may follow one another as quickly as the plagues of Egypt, but "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." When the need of deliverance shall apparently increase,

the abundance of salvation shall increase with it. Fear not the direst of all wars, the bitterest of all famines, the deadliest of all plagues; for still, if we call upon the Lord, he is pledged to deliver us. This word of promise meets the most terrible of possibilities with a sure salvation.

Yes, and when you come to die, when to you the sun has turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, this text ensures deliverance in the last dread hour. Call upon the name of the Lord, and you shall be saved. Amid the pains of death, and the gloom of departure, you shall enjoy a glorious visitation, which shall turn darkness into light, and sorrow into joy. When you wake up amid the realities of the eternal future there will be nothing for you to dread in resurrection, or in judgment, or in the yawning mouth of hell. If you have called upon the name of the Lord, you shall still be delivered. Though the unpardoned are thrust down to the depth of woe, and the righteous scarcely are saved, yet you who have called upon the name of the Lord must be delivered. Stands the promise firm, whatever may be hidden in the great roll of the future; God cannot deny himself, he will deliver those who call upon his name.

What is wanted, then, is salvation; and I do think, beloved brethren, that you and I who preach the Word, and long to save souls, must very often go over this grand old truth about salvation to the guilty, deliverance to all who call upon the name of the Lord. Sometimes we talk to friends about the higher life, about attaining to very high degrees of sanctity; and all this is very proper and very good; but still the great fundamental truth is, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” We urge our friends to be sound in doctrine, and to know what they do know, and to understand the revealed will of God; and very proper is this also; but still, first and foremost, this is the elementary, all-important truth — “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” To this old foundation truth we come back for comfort. I sometimes rejoice in God, and joy in the God of my salvation, and spread my wings and mount up into communion with the heavenlies; but still there are other seasons when I hide my head in darkness, and then I am very glad of such a broad, gracious promise as this, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” I find that my sweetest, happiest, safest state, is just as a poor, guilty, helpless sinner, to call upon the name of the Lord, and take mercy at his hands as one who deserves nothing but his wrath, while I dare

hang the weight of my soul on such a sure promise as this, “Whosoever shall can on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Get where you may, however high your experience; be what you may, however great your usefulness, you will always want to come back to the same ground upon which the poorest and weakest of hearts must stand, and claim to be saved by almighty grace, through simply calling upon the name of the Lord.

Thus have I said enough upon what is always wanted — this deliverance, this salvation.

**II.** Now, secondly, let us attentively observe THE WAY IN WHICH THIS DELIVERANCE IS TO BE HAD. Help us, blessed Spirit, in this our meditation. It is to be had, according to the text, by calling upon the name of the Lord.

Is not the most obvious sense of this language, prayer? Are we not brought to the Lord by a prayer which trusts in God — by a prayer which asks God to give the deliverance that is needed, and expects to have it from the Lord, as a gift of grace ? It amounts to much the same thing as that other word, “Believe and live”; for how shall they call on him of whom they have not heard? And if they have heard, yet vain is their calling if they have not believed as well as heard. But to “call on the name of the Lord,” is briefly to pray a believing prayer; to cry to God for his help, and to leave yourself in his hands. This is very simple, is it not? There is no cumbersome machinery here, nothing complex and mysterious. No priestly help is wanted, except the help of that great High Priest, who intercedes for us within the veil. A poor, broken heart pours its distress into the ear of God, and calls upon him to fulfil his promise of help in the time of need — that is all. Thank God, nothing more is mentioned in our text. The promise is — “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

What a suitable way of salvation it is to those who feel that they can do nothing! Ah, dear hearts! if we had to preach to them a very difficult and elaborate salvation, they would perish. They have not the mind, some of them, to follow our directions if they were at all intricate; and they have not enough hope to venture upon anything that looks at all difficult. But if it be true that “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be

saved,” this method is simple and available, and they catch at it. He can pray to God who can do nothing else. Thank God, he need not want to do anything else; for if he can call for help, he gets deliverance, and, in that deliverance, he gets all that he will ever want between this place and heaven. He has called upon the name of the Lord, and all that is deficient in him will be supplied for time and for eternity. He will be delivered, not only now, but throughout all the future of his life, until he sees the face of God in glory everlasting.

The text, however, contains within it a measure of specific instruction: the prayer must be to the true God. “Whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be saved.” There is something distinctive here; for one would call on Baal, another would call on Ashtaroth, and a fourth on Moloch; but these would not be saved. The promise is special: “Whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be saved.” You know that triune name, “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost “ — call upon it. You know how the name of Jehovah is set forth most conspicuously in the person of the Lord Jesus — call upon him. Call upon the true God. Call upon no idol, call on no Virgin Mary, no saint, dead or living. Call on no image. Call on no impression of your mind! Call upon the living God — call upon him who reveals himself in the Bible — call upon him who manifests himself in the person of his dear Son; for whosoever shall call upon this God shall be saved. You may call upon the idols, but these will not hear you: “Ears have they, but they hear not. Eyes have they, but they see not.” You may not call upon men, for they are all sinners like yourselves. Priests cannot help their most zealous admirers; but, “Whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be saved.” Mind, then, it is not the mere repetition of a prayer as a sort of charm, or a piece of religious witchcraft, but you must make a direct address to God, an appeal to the Most High to help you in your time of need. In presenting true prayer to the true God you shall be delivered.

Moreover, the prayer should be intelligently presented. We read, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord.” Now, by the word “name” we understand the person, the character of the Lord. The more, then, you know about the Lord, and the better you know his name, the more intelligently will you call upon that name. If you know his power, you will call upon that power to help you. If you know his mercy, you

will call upon him in his grace to save you. If you know his wisdom, you feel that he knows your difficulties, and can help you through them. If you understand his immutability, you will call upon him, as the same God who has saved other sinners, to come and save you. It will be well, therefore, for you to study the Scriptures much, and to pray the Lord to manifest himself to you that you may know him; since, in proportion to your acquaintance with him, will you with greater confidence be able to call upon his name. But, little as you may know, call on him according to the little you do know. Cast yourself upon him, whether your trouble to-night be external or internal; but especially if it be internal, if it be the trouble of sin, if it be the burden of guilt, if it be a load of horror and fear because of wrath to come, call upon the name of the Lord, for you shall be delivered. There stands his promise. It is not, “He may be delivered,” but he “shall be.” Note well the everlasting “shall” of God — irrevocable, unalterable, unquestionable, irresistible. His promise stands eternally the same. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This way of salvation, by calling upon the name of the Lord, glorifies God. He asks nothing of you but that you ask everything of him. You are the beggar, and he is the benefactor. You are in the trouble, and he is the Deliverer. All you have to do is to trust him, and beg of him. This is easy enough. This puts the matter into the hands of the Lord, and takes it out of your hands. Do you not like the plan? Put it in practice immediately! It will prove itself gloriously effectual.

Dear friends, I speak to some whom I know to be now present, who are under severe trial. You dare not look up. You seem to be given up; at any rate you have given yourself up; and yet, I pray you, call upon the name of the Lord. You cannot perish praying; no one has ever done so. If you could perish praying, you would be a new wonder in the universe. A praying soul in hell is an utter impossibility. A man calling on God and rejected of God! — the supposition is not to be endured. “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” God himself must lie, he must quit his nature, forfeit his claim to mercy, destroy his character of love, if he were to let a poor sinner call upon his name, and yet refuse to hear him. There will come a day, but that is not now — there will come a day in the next state when he will say, “I called, but ye refused” ; but it is

not so now. While there is life there is hope. “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart,” but call upon God at once; for this warrant of grace runneth through all the regions of mortality, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

I recollect a time when, if I had heard a sermon on this subject, putting it plainly to me, I should have leaped into comfort and light in a single moment. Is it not such a time with you? I thought, I must do something, I must be something, I must in some way prepare myself for the mercy of God. I did not know that a calling upon God, a trusting myself in his hand, an invocation of his sacred name, would bring me to Christ, the Savior. But so it stands, and happy, indeed, was I when I found it out. Heaven is given away. Salvation may be had for the asking. I hope that many a captive heart here will at once leap to loose his chains, and cry, “It is even so. If God has said it, it must be true. There it is in his own Word. I have called upon him, and I must be delivered.”

**III.** Now I come to notice, in the third place, THE PEOPLE TO WHOM THIS PROMISE AND THIS DELIVERANCE WILL BE GIVEN. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered.”

According to the connection, the people had been greatly afflicted — afflicted beyond all precedent, afflicted to the very brink of despair; but the Lord said, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Go down to the hospital. You may select, if you please, the hospital which deals with the effects of vice. In that house of misery you may stand at each bed and say, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” You may then hasten every door of every cell, yes, even at the grating of the condemned cell, if there lie men and women there given up to death, and you may with safety say to each one, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered.”

I know what the Pharisees will say — “If you preach this, men will go on in sin.” It has always been so, that the great mercy of God has been turned by some into a reason for continuing in sin; but God (and this is the wonder of it) has never restricted his mercy because of that. It must have been a terrible provocation of Almighty grace when men have perverted his mercy into an excuse for sin, but the Lord has never even taken the

edges off from his mercy because men have misused it: he has still made it stand out bright and clear: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Still he cries, “Turn and live.” “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Undimmed is that brave sun that shineth on the foulest dunghills of vice. Trust Christ, and live. Call upon the name of the Lord, and you shall be pardoned; yea, you shall be rescued from the bondage of your sin, and be made a new creature, a child of God, a member of the family of his grace. The most afflicted, and the most afflicted by sin, are met with by this gracious promise, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Yes, but there were some, according to Joel, who had the Spirit of God poured out upon them. What about them? Were they saved by that ? Oh no! Those who had the Spirit of God so that they dreamed dreams and saw visions, yet had to come to the palace of mercy by this same gate of believing prayer — “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Ah, poor souls! you say, to yourselves, “if we were deacons of churches, if we were pastors, oh, then we should be saved!” You do not know anything about it: church officers are no more saved by their office than you are by being without office. We owe nothing to our official position in this matter of salvation: in fact, we may owe our damnation to our official standing unless we look well to our ways. We have no preference over you plain folks. I do assure you, I am quite happy to take your hand, whoever you may be, and come to Christ on the same footing as yourself.

*“Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling.”*

Often, when I have been cheering up a poor sinner, and urging him to believe in Christ, I have thought, “Well, if he will not drink this cup of comfort, I will even drink it up myself.” I assure you, I need it as much as those to whom I carry it. I have been as big a sinner as any of you, and therefore I take the promise to myself. The divine cordial shall not be lost: I will accept it. I came to Jesus as I was, weary, and worn, and faint, and sick, and full of sin, and I trusted him on my own account, and found

peace — peace on the same ground as my text sets before all of you. If I drink of this consolation, you may drink it too. The miracle of this cup is that fifty may drink, and yet it is just as full as ever. There is no restriction in the word “Whosoever.” You maidens that have the Spirit of God upon you, and you old men that dream, it is neither the Spirit of God nor the dreaming that will save you; but your calling on the sacred name. It is, “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Also, there were some upon whom the Spirit of God did not fall. They did not speak with tongues, nor prophesy the future, nor work miracles; but though they did none of these marvels, yet it stood true to them — “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” What though no supernatural gift was bestowed, though they saw no vision and could not speak with tongues, they called upon the name of the Lord, and they were saved. There is the same way of salvation for the little as well as for the great, for the poorest and most obscure as well as for those that are strong in faith, and lead the hosts of God to the battle.

But some were terribly afraid. I should think that a good many must have been sadly alarmed when there were in the earth blood and fire and pillars of smoke, the sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood: but, afraid as they were, if they called upon the name of the Lord, they were delivered. Now, Mrs. Much-afraid, what do you say to that? Mr. Ready-to-halt, did I hear your crutches sounding in the aisle just now, or was it an umbrella? Never mind, if you call upon the name of the Lord, you shall be saved. You that are so feeble in mind, so weak, so wounded that you hardly dare to trust, still it is written for your sakes also, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

“Ah!” says another, “but I am worse than that. I have no good feelings. I would give all that I have to own a broken heart. I wish I could even feel despair, but I am hard as a stone.” I have been told that sorrowful story many times, and it almost always happens that those who most mourn their want of feeling are those who feel most acutely. Their hearts are like hell-hardened steel, so they say; but it is not true. But if it were true, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Do you think that the Lord wants you to give yourself a new heart first, and that then he will save you? My dear soul, you are saved when you have a new



heart, and you do not want him to save you then, since you are saved. "Oh, but I must get good feelings!" Must you? Where are you going for them? Are you to rake the dunghill of your depraved nature to find good feelings there? Come without any good feeling. Come just as you are. Come, you that are like a frozen iceberg, that have nothing about you whatever, but that which chills and repels; come and call upon the name of the Lord, and you shall be saved. "Wonders of grace to God belong." It is not a small gospel that he has sent us to preach to small sinners, but ours is a great gospel for great sinners. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

"Ah, well!" says one, "I cannot think it is meant for me, for I am nobody." Nobody, are you there? I have a great love for nobodies. I am worried with somebodies, and the worst somebody in the world is my own somebody. How I wish I could always turn my own somebody out, and keep company with none but nobodies! Then I should make Jesus everybody. Nobody, where are you? You are the very person that I am sent to look after. If there is nothing of you, there shall be all the more of Christ. If you are not only empty, but cracked and broken; if you are done for, destroyed, ruined, utterly crushed and broken, to you is this word of salvation sent: — "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

I have set the gate wide open. If it were the wrong track, all the sheep would go through; but as it is the right road, I may set the gate open as long as I will, but yet the sheep will shun it, unless thou, Great Shepherd, shall go around the field to-night, and lead them in. Take up in thine own arms some sheep that thou hast purchased long ago with thy dear heart's blood — take him upon thy gracious shoulders, rejoicing as thou doest it, and place him within the field where the good pasture grows.

**IV.** I want you to dwell for a minute upon THE BLESSING ITSELF.

"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." I need not say much about it because I have already expounded it. It is a very good rule, when a man makes you a promise, to understand it in the narrowest sense. It is fair to him that you should do so. Let him interpret it liberally, if he pleases; but he is actually bound to give you no more than the bare terms of his promise will imply.

Now, it is a rule which all God's people may well practice, always to understand God's promises in the largest possible sense. If the words will bear a bigger construction than at the first sight they naturally suggest to you, you may put the larger construction upon them. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think." God never draws a line in his promise, that he may go barely up to it; but it is with the great God as it was with his dear Son, who, though he was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet spent the greater part of his time in Galilee, which was called, "Galilee of the Gentiles"; and went to the very verge of Canaan to find out a Canaanitish woman, that he might give her a blessing. Thou mayest put the biggest and most liberal sense, then, on such a text as this, for Peter did so. The New Testament is wont to give a broader sense to Old Testament words; and it does so most rightly, for God loves us to treat his words with the breadth of faith.

Come, then, if you are the subject of the judgments of God; if you believe that God's hand has visited you on account of sin, call upon him, and he will deliver you both from the judgment, and from the guilt that brought the judgment — from the sin, and from that which follows the sin. He will help you to escape. Try him now, I pray you.

And if your case should be different: if you are a child of God and you are in trouble, and that trouble eats into your spirit, and causes you daily wear of spirit and tear of heart — call upon the Lord. He can take away from you the fret and the trouble too. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." You may have to bear the trouble, but it shall be so transformed as to be rather a blessing than an evil, and you shall fall in love with your cross, since the nature of it has been changed.

If sin be the great cause of your present trouble, and that sin has brought you into bondage to evil habits, if you have been a drunkard and do not know how to learn sobriety, if you have been unchaste and have become entangled in vicious connections; call upon God, and he can break you away from the sin, and set you free from all its entanglements. He can cut you loose to-night with the great sword of his grace, and make you a free man. I tell you that, though you should be like a poor sheep between the jaws of a lion, ready to be devoured immediately by the monster, God can come and pluck you out from between the lion's jaws. The prey shall be

taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive shall be delivered. Only call upon the name of the Lord! Call upon the name of the Lord, and you shall be delivered.

Yes, and I repeat what I said just now. If you have come under the power of disease, if you are near to die, if already death has written his name legibly upon your body, and you are afraid of death and hell; yet call upon the name of the Lord, and you shall be delivered at this last moment. Even now, when the pit gapes wide for you, and like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, you are ready to go down alive into it, call upon the name of the Lord and you shall be delivered.

If I were telling you what I had made up, or hammered out of my own brain, I could not expect you to believe me; but, as this Book is inspired, and as Joel spoke in the name of God, and as the apostles spoke in the name of Jehovah, this is the very truth of the God that made the heavens and the earth. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered."

**V.** In conclusion, I must remind you of one mournful thought. Let me warn you OF THE SADLY COMMON NEGLECT OF THIS BLESSING. You would think that everybody would call upon the name of the Lord; but read the text, "For in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said." It shall be there as the Lord hath said. Will they not have it then? Notice! "And in the remnant whom the Lord shall call." It seems to shrivel me up altogether, that word "remnant." What! Will they not come? Are they madmen? Will they not come? No, only a remnant; and even that remnant will not call upon the name of the Lord until first God calls them by his grace. This is almost as great a wonder as the love which so graciously invites them. Could even devils behave worse? If they were invited to call upon God, and be saved, would they refuse?

Unhappy business! The way is plain, but "few there be that find it." After all the preaching, and all the invitation, and the illimitable breadth of the promise, yet all that are saved are contained "in the remnant whom the Lord shall call." Is not our text a generous invitation; the setting open of the door, yea, the lifting of the door from off its hinges, that it never might be shut? And yet "broad is the gate, and wide is the way that leadeth to

destruction, and many there be that go in thereat.” There they come, streams of them, hurrying impatiently, rushing down to death and hell — yes, eagerly panting, hurrying, dashing against one another to descend to that awful gulf from which there is no return! No missionaries are wanted, no ministers are needed to plead with men to go to hell. No books of persuasion are wanted to urge them to rush onward to eternal ruin. They hurry to be lost: they are eager to be destroyed. As when the wild bisons of the prairie hasten onward in their madness, until they come to a great gulf, and then rush down headlong, a cataract of life leaping to death, so is it with the sons of men! They choose their own delusions, and covet their own damnations, and that without end. This is all that sovereign mercy rescues after all — a remnant, and that remnant only because the arm of the Lord is revealed, and a miraculous power exerted upon their wills. This is the misery of it, that the guilty are not willing to be parted from their sins. They will not seek that which alone is their life, their joy, their salvation. They prefer hell to heaven, sin to holiness. Never spake the Master a word which observation more clearly proves than when he said, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” You will attend your chapels, but you will not call on the Lord. Jesus cries, “Ye search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me; but ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” You will do anything rather than come to Jesus. You stop short of calling upon him. O my dear hearers, do not let it be so with you! Many of you are saved; I beseech you intercede for those who are not saved. Oh, that the unconverted among you may be moved to pray. Before you leave this place, breathe an earnest prayer to God, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner. Lord, I need to be saved. Save me. I call upon thy name.” Join with me in prayer at this moment, I entreat you. Join with me while I put words into your mouths, and speak them on your behalf — “Lord, I am guilty. I deserve thy wrath. Lord I cannot save myself. Lord, I would have a new heart and a right spirit, but what can I do? Lord, I can do nothing, come and work in me to will and to do of thy good pleasure.

*“Thou alone hast power, I know,  
To save a wretch like me;  
To whom, or whither should I go  
If I should turn from thee?”*

But I now do from my very soul call upon thy name. Trembling, yet believing, I cast myself wholly upon thee, O Lord. I trust the blood and righteousness of thy dear Son; I trust thy mercy, and thy love, and thy power, as they are revealed in him. I dare to lay hold upon this word of thine, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Lord, save me to-night, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  JOEL 2:11-32.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK" — 282, 544, 275.

# THE WITHERED FIG TREE

## SERMON NO. 2107

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
SEPTEMBER 29TH, 1889,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there. Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!”

—  Matthew 21:17-20.

THIS is a miracle and a parable. We have books upon the miracles, we have an equal number of volumes upon the parables: into which of these volumes shall we place this story? I would answer, put it in both. It is a singular miracle, and it is a striking parable. It is an acted parable, in which our Lord gives us an object-lesson. He gets truth before men's eyes, in this instance, that the lesson may make a deeper impression upon the mind and heart. I would lay great stress upon the remark that this is a parable; for, if you do not look upon it in that light, you may misunderstand it. We are not of those who come to the Word of God with the cool impertinence of the critic, thinking ourselves wiser than the Book, and therefore able to judge it. We believe that the Holy Spirit is greater than man's spirit, and that our Lord and Master was a better judge of what is right and good than any of us can be. Our place is at his feet: we are not cavillers, but followers. Whatever Jesus does and says, we regard with deepest reverence; our chief desire is to learn as much as we can from it. We see great mysteries in his simplest actions, and profound teaching about his

plainest words. When he speaks or acts, we are like Moses at the bush, and feel that we stand on holy ground.

Flippant persons have spoken of the story before us in a very foolish manner. They have represented it as though our Lord, being hungered, thought only of his necessity, and, expecting to be refreshed by a few green figs went up to the tree in error. Finding no fruit upon the tree, it being a season when he had no right to expect that there would be any, he was vexed, and uttered a malediction against a tree, as though it had been a responsible agent. This view of the case results from the folly of the observer: it is not the truth. Our Lord desired to teach his disciples concerning the doom of Jerusalem. The reception given him in Jerusalem was full of promise, but it would come to nothing. Their loud hosannas would change to, "Crucify Him!"

When Jerusalem was to be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar a former time, the prophets had not only spoken, but they had used instructive signs. If you turn to the Book of Ezekiel, you will there see the record of many signs and symbols which set forth the coming woe. These tokens excited curiosity, secured consideration, and brought home the prophetic warnings to the homes and hearts of the common people. Again, the judgments of God were at the gates of the guilty city. Words — the words of Jesus — had been wasted; and even tears — tears of the Savior — had been spilt in vain; it was time that the sign should be given — the sign of condemnation. Ezekiel had said, "All the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, and have dried up the green tree"; and herein was suggested the very image which was employed by our Lord. He saw a fig tree, by a freak of nature, covered with leaves at a time when, in the ordinary course of things, it should not have been so. Our Lord saw that this was a fine object lesson for him, and therefore he took his disciples to see if there were figs as well as leaves. When he found none, he bade the fig tree remain for ever fruitless, and immediately it began to wither. Our Lord would have used the fig tree to excellent purpose had he ordered it to be used a fuel to warm cold hands, but he did better when he used it to warm cold hearts. No wrong was done to any man; it was a tree on the waste, and utterly worthless. No pain was inflicted; no anger was felt. In the object-lesson, the Lord simply said to the fig tree, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever"; and it withered away. In this our Lord taught

a great lesson to all ages at a small expense. The withering of a tree has been the quickening of many a soul; and if it had not been so, it was no loss to any that a tree should wither when it had proved itself barren. A great teacher may do far more than destroy a tree, if he can thereby give demonstrations of truth, and scatter seeds of virtue. It is the veriest idleness of criticism to find fault with our Lord Jesus for a piece of fine poetic instruction, for which, had it been spoken by any other teacher, the most lavish praise would have been awarded by these very critics.

The blighted fig tree was a singularly apt simile of the Jewish state. The nation had promised great things to God. When all the other nations were like trees without leaves, making no profession of allegiance to the true God, the Jewish nation was covered with the leafage of abundant religious profession. Scribes, pharisees, priests and elders of the people were all sticklers for the letter of the law, and boaster of being worshippers of the one God, and strict observers of all his laws. Their constant cry was, "The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these." "We have Abraham to our Father" was frequently on their lips. They were a fig tree in full leaf. But there was no fruit upon them; for the people were neither holy, nor just, nor true, nor faithful towards God, nor loving to their neighbor. The Jewish church was a mass of glittering profession, unsupported by spiritual life. Our Lord had looked into the temple, and had found the house of prayer to be a den of thieves. He condemned the Jewish church to remain a lifeless, fruitless thing; and it was so. The synagogue remained open; but its teaching became a dead form. Israel had no influence upon the age. The Jewish race became, for centuries, a withered tree: it had nothing but profession when Christ came, and that profession proved powerless to save even the holy city. Christ did not destroy the religious organization of the Jews: he left them as they were; but they withered away from the root, till the Roman came, and with the axes of his legions cleared away the fruitless trunk.

What a lesson is this to nations! Nations may make a profession, a loud profession, of religion, and yet may fail to exhibit that righteousness which exalteth a nation. Nations may be adorned with all the leafage of civilization, and art, and progress, and religion; but if there be no inner life of godliness, and no fruit unto righteousness, they will stand for a while, and then wither away.



What a lesson this is to churches! There have been churches which have stood prominent in numbers and in influence; but faith, and love, and holiness have not been maintained, and the Holy Ghost has left them to the vain show of a fruitless profession; and there stand those churches, with the trunk of organization, and widely-extended branches, but they are dead, and every year they become more and more decayed. Brethren, such churches we have even among Nonconformists at this hour. May it never be so with this church! We may have numbers of people coming to hear the Word, and a considerable body of men and women professing to be converted; but unless vital godliness is in their midst, what are congregations and churches? We might have a valued ministry, but what would this be without the Spirit of God? We might have large subscriptions, and many outward efforts; but what of these without the spirit of prayer, the spirit of faith, the spirit of grace and consecration? I dread lest we should ever come to be like a tree, precocious with a superlative profession, but yet worthless in the sight of the Lord, because the secret life of piety, and vital union to Christ, are gone. Better that the axe clear away every vestige of the tree than that it stand out against the sky an open lie, a mockery, a delusion.

This is the lesson of the text; but I do not want you to consider it only in the gross, in its relation to nations and churches; but my heart's desire is that we may learn the lesson in detail, and take it home each one to his own heart. May the Lord himself speak to each one of us this morning personally! In preparing the sermon, I have had great searchings of heart, and I pray that the hearing of it may produce the same results. May we tremble, lest, having a profession of godliness, we should wear it conspicuously, and yet should lack the fruitbearing which alone can warrant such a profession. The name of saintship, if it be not justified by sanctity, is an offense to honest men, and much more to a holy God. A pronounced and forward avowal of Christianity without a Christian life at the back of it is a lie, abhorrent to God and man, an offense against truth, a dishonor to religion, and the forerunner of a withering curse.

May the Holy Spirit help me to preach very solemnly and powerfully at this time!

Our first observation is this — There are in the world cases of forward, but fruitless, profession; our second observation will be this — These will be inspected by King Jesus; and our third remark will be — The result of that inspection will be very terrible. Help us, O Holy Spirit!

**I.** First, then, THERE ARE IN THE WORLD CASES OF FORWARD, BUT FRUITLESS, PROFESSION.

The cases to which we refer are not so very rare. They far excel their fellow-men. Their promise is very loud, and their exterior very impressive. They look like fruitful trees; you expect many baskets of the best figs from them. They impress us by their talk, they overpower us by their manners. We envy them, and lash ourselves. This last might not harm us; but to envy hypocrites can never be otherwise than injurious in the long run; for, when their hypocrisy is discovered, we are apt to despise religion as well as the pretenders to it. Do you not know persons who are in appearance everything and in reality nothing? O dark thought! may we not ourselves be such persons? See the man, he is strong in faith, even to presumption; he is joyous in hope, even to levity; he is loving in spirit, even to utter indifference about truth! How very glib he is in talk! How deep he is in theological speculation! Yet he has never entered the kingdom by the new birth. He has never been taught of God. The gospel has come to him in word only. He is a stranger to the work of the Holy Ghost. Are there not such persons? Are there not persons who are defenders of orthodoxy and yet are heterodox in their own conduct? Do we not know men and women whose lives deny what their lips profess? We are sure it is so. All vineyards have had in them fig trees covered with leaves, which have been conspicuous from the foliage of their profession, and yet have brought forth no fruit unto the Lord.

Such persons seem to defy the seasons. It was not the time of figs, yet was this fig tree covered with those leaves which usually betokened ripe figs. I suppose you all know what I have often seen for myself — the fig tree puts forth its fruit before its leaves. Early in the year you see green knobs put forth at the end and points of the branches, and these, as they swell, turn out to be green figs. The leaves come forward afterwards, and by the time the tree is fully covered with leaves, the figs are ready for eating. When a fig tree is in full leaf, you expect to find figs upon it; and if

you do not, it will bear no figs for that season. This tree put forth leaves abundantly before its season, and therein excelled all other fig trees. Yes, but it was a freak of nature, and not a healthy result of true growth. Such freaks of nature occur in forests and in vineyards; and their like may be met with in the moral and spiritual world. Certain men and women seem far in advance of those round about them, and astonish us by their special virtues. They are better than the best; more excellent than the most excellent — at least in appearance. They are so zealous that they are not chilled by the surrounding world: their great souls create a summer for themselves. The backwardness of saints, and the wickedness of sinners, do not hinder them; they are too vigorous to be affected by their surroundings. They are very superior persons, covered with virtues, as this fig tree with leaves.

Observe, that they overleap the ordinary rule of growth. As I have told you, the rule is, first the fig, and afterwards the fig leaves; but we have seen persons who make a profession before they have produced the slightest fruit to justify it. I like to see our young friends, when they believe in Christ, proving their faith by holiness at home, by godliness abroad, and then coming forward and confessing their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That looks to be the sober and normal way of proceeding, for a man first to be, and then to profess to be; first to be lighted, and then to shine; first to repent and believe, and then to confess his repentance and his faith in the Scriptural way, by baptism into Christ. But these people think it unnecessary to attend to the trifle of heart-work — they dare to omit the most vital part of the matter. They attend a revival meeting, and they declare themselves saved, though they have not been renewed in heart, and possess neither repentance nor faith. They come forward to avow a mere emotion. They have nothing better than a resolve; but they flourish it as if it were the deed itself. Quick as thought, the convert sets up to be a teacher. Without test or trial of his brand-new virtues, he holds himself forth as an example to others. Now, I do not object to the rapidity of the conversion; on the contrary, I admire it, if it be true; but I cannot judge till I see the fruit and evidence in the life. If the change of conduct is distinct and true, I care not how quickly the work is done; but we must see the change. There is a heat which leads to fermentation, and a fermentation which breeds sourness and corruption. O dear friends, never think you

may skip the fruit and come at once to the leaf. Be not like a builder who should say, "It is all nonsense to spend labor and material on works underground. Foundations are never seen; I can run up a house in no time; four walls and a roof will not take long." Yes; but how long will such a house last? Is it worthwhile building a house without foundations? If you omit the foundation, why not omit the house altogether? Is there not a tendency, especially in these days, when men are either skeptical or fanatical, to cultivate a mushroom godliness, which comes up in a night and perishes in a night? Will it not be ruinous if conviction of sin is slighted, repentance slurred, faith imitated, the new birth counterfeited, and godliness feigned? Beloved, this will never do. We must have figs before leaves, acts before declarations, faith before baptism, union to Christ before union with the church. You cannot leap over the processes of nature, neither may you omit the processes of grace, lest haply your foliage without fruit become a curse without cure.

These people usually catch the eye of others. According to Mark, our Lord saw this tree "afar off." The other trees were not in leaf, and consequently, when he began to go up the hill toward Jerusalem, he saw this one tree quite a long way before he reached it. A fig tree dressed in its vesture of lovely green would be a striking object, and would be observable at a distance. It stood, also, near the track from Bethany to the city gate. It stood where every wayfarer would observe it, and probably speak with wonder of its singular leafage for the season. Persons whose religion is false are frequently prominent, because they have not grace enough to be modest and retiring. They seek the highest room, aspire to office, and push themselves into leadership. They do not walk in secret with God, they have little concern about private godliness, and so they are all the more eager to be seen of men. this is both their weakness and their peril. Though least of all able to bear the wear and tear of publicity, they are covetous for it, and are, therefore, all the more watched. This is the evil of the whole matter; for it makes their spiritual failure to be known by so many, and their sin brings all the greater dishonor upon the name of the Lord, whom they profess to serve. Better far to be fruitless in a corner of a wood than on the public way which leads to the temple.

Such people not only catch the eye, but they often attract the company of good men. Who blames us for drawing near to a tree which is in leaf long

before its fellows? Is it not right to cultivate the acquaintance of the eminently good? Our Savior and his disciples went up to the leafy fig tree: not merely did it win their eye, but it drew them to itself. Have we not been fascinated by the charming conduct of one who seemed to be a brother in the Lord, more devout than usual, fearing God above many? Like Jehu, he has said, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord;" and we have been glad enough to ride in the chariot with him: he seemed so godly, so generous, so humble, so useful, that we looked up to him, and wished that we were more worthy to be associated with him. Young converts and seekers are naturally apt to do this; and hence it is a sad calamity when their confidence turns out to have been misplaced.

Whenever we see any standing out prominently, and making a bold profession, what should be our thoughts about them? I answer, do not judge them; do not fall into habitual mistrust. Your Lord did not stand at a distance and say, "That tree is worthless." No, he went up to it, with his disciples, and carefully inspected it. These prominent persons may be wonders of divine grace: let us hope and pray that they may be. Let the Lord and his love be magnified in them! God has his fig trees that bear figs in winter; God has his saints who are filled with good works when the love of others has waxed cold. The Lord raises some up to be as standards for the truth, rallying points in the battle. The Lord can make young men mature, and new converts useful. It has been said, by way of proverbial expression, that "some men are born with beards." The Lord can give great grace, so as to make spiritual growth rapid and yet solid. He does this so often that we have no right to doubt but what the prominent brother before us is one of these growths of grace. Unless we are forced to see with bitter regret that there are no marks of grace, no evidences of faith, let us hope for the best, and be glad at the sight of God's grace. If we are inclined to be suspicious, let us turn the point of that sword towards our own bosoms. Self-suspicion will be healthy; suspicion of others may be cruel. We are not judges; and even if we are, we had better keep to our own court, and sit on our own judgment-seat, dispensing the law within the little kingdom of our own selves.

Where those who are prominent turn out to be all they profess to be, they are a great blessing. It would have been well if that morning there had been figs upon that fig tree. It would have been a great refreshment to the Savior

if he had been fed by the green fruit. When the Lord makes the first in position to be first in holiness, it is a blessing to the church, to the family, and to the neighborhood; indeed, it may prove to be a blessing to the whole world. We ought, therefore, to pray the Lord to water with his own hand those trees which he has planted; or, in other words, to uphold by his grace those men of his right hand whom he has made strong for himself.

But when we take the text and lay it home to our own hearts, we need not be so gentle with it as in the cases of others. We have, many of us, for long years been like this fig-tree, as to prominence and profession. And in this matter, so far, there is nothing of which to be ashamed. Yet it is evidently to ourselves that the parable speaks; for we have stood in open avowal and distinct service by the wayside, and we have been seen “afar off.” Certain of us have made a very bold profession, and we are not ashamed to repeat that profession before men and angels. Hence the enquiry: Are we truthful in it? What if we should turn out to be contending for a faith in which we have no share? What if in us there should be none of the life of love, and consequently our profession should be “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal”? What if there should be talk, and no work; doctrine, and no practice? What if we are without holiness? Then we shall never see the Lord. Whatever terrible aspect this parable-miracle may have, it bears upon many of us. I, the preacher, feel how much it bears upon me. In that spirit have I thought it over, anxiously trusting that every deacon and every elder of this church, and every member and every worker among you, may have great searchings of heart. May every minister of Christ who may have dropped in here this morning, say to himself, “Yes, I have been like that fig tree in prominence and in profession; God grant that I be not like it in being devoid of fruit!”

**II.** It is time that we remembered the solemn truth of our second head:  
THESE WILL BE INSPECTED BY KING JESUS.

He will draw nigh to them, and when he comes up to them he will look for fruit. The first Adam came to the fig tree for leaves, but the Second Adam looks for figs. He searches our character through and through, to see whether there is any real faith, any true love, any living hope, any joy which is the fruit of the Spirit, any patience, any self-denial, any fervor in prayer, any walking with God, any indwelling of the Holy Spirit; and if he

does not see these things, he is not satisfied with chapel-going, church-going, prayer meetings, communions, sermons, Bible readings; for all these may be no more than leafage. If our Lord does not see the fruit of the Spirit upon us, he is not satisfied with us, and his inspection will lead to severe measures. Notice that what Jesus looks for is not your words, not your resolves, not your avowals, but your sincerity, your inward faith, your being indeed wrought upon by the Spirit of God to bring forth fruits meet for his kingdom.

Our Lord has a right to expect fruit when he looks for it. When he went up to that fig tree he had a right to expect fruit; because the fruit, according to nature, comes before the leaf. If, then, the leaf has come, there should be fruit. True, it was not the time of figs; but then, if it was not the time of figs, it certainly was not the season for leaves, for the figs are first. This tree, by putting forth leaves, which are the signs and tokens of ripe figs, virtually advertised itself as bearing fruit. So, however bad the times may be, some of us profess that we will not follow the times, but will follow the one immutable truth. As Christians, we confess that we are redeemed from among men, and have been delivered from this perverse generation. Christ may not expect fruit of men who acknowledge the world and its changing ages as their supreme guide; but he may well look for it from the believer in his own Word. He looks for fruit from the preacher, from the Sunday-school teacher, from the church-officer, from the sister who conducts a Bible class, from that brother who has a band of young men around him, to whom he is a guide in the gospel. He does expect it of all who submit to his gospel rule. As Christ had a right to expect fruit of a leaf-bearing fig tree, so he has a right to expect great things from those who avow themselves his trustful followers. Ah me! how this fact should move the preacher with trembling! Should it not affect full many of you in the same manner?

Fruit is what the Lord earnestly desires. The Savior, when he came under the fig tree, did not desire leaves; for we read that he hungered, and human hunger cannot be removed by leaves of a fig tree. He desired to eat a fig or two; and he longs to have fruit from us also. He hungers for our holiness: he longs that his joy may be in us, that our joy may be full. He comes up to each of you who are members of his church, and especially to each of you who are leaders of his people, and he looks to see in you the things in

which his soul is well pleased. He would see in us love to himself, love to our fellow-men, strong faith in revelation, earnest contention for the once delivered faith, importunate pleading in prayer, and careful living in every part of our course. He expects from us actions such as are according to the law of God and the mind of the Spirit of God; and if he does not see these, he does not receive his due. What did he die for but to make his people holy? What did he give himself for but that he might sanctify unto himself a people zealous of good works? What is the reward of the bloody sweat and the five wounds and the death agony, but that by all these we should be bought with a price? We rob him of his reward if we do not glorify him, and therefore the Spirit of God is grieved at our conduct if we do not show forth his praises by our godly and zealous lives.

And mark here, that when Christ comes to a soul he surveys it with keen discernment. He is not mocked. It is not possible to deceive him. I have thought that to be a fig which turned out to be only a leaf was a mistake; but our Lord makes no such mistake. Neither will he overlook the little figs, just breaking forth. He knows the fruit of the Spirit in whatever stage it may be. He never mistakes fluent expression for hearty possession, nor real grace for mere emotion. Beloved, you are in good hands as to the trial of your condition when the Lord Jesus comes to deal with you. Your fellow-men are quick in their judgments, and they may be either censorious, or partial; but the King gives forth a righteous sentence. He knows just where we are, and what we are; and he judges not after the appearance, but according to truth. Oh, that our prayer might this morning rise to heaven: "Jesus, Master, come and cast thy searching eyes upon me, and judge whether I am living unto thee or not! Give me to see myself as thou seest me, that I may have my errors corrected, and my graces nourished. Lord, make me to be indeed what I profess to be; and if I am not so already, convince me of my false state, and begin a true work in my soul. If I am thine, and am right in thy sight, grant me a kind, assuring word to sink my fears again, and I will gladly rejoice in thee as the God of my salvation."

**III.** I come, thirdly, by the help of the Spirit of God, to consider the truth, that THE RESULT OF THE COMING OF CHRIST TO THE FORWARD, BUT FRUITLESS, PROFESSOR WILL BE VERY TERRIBLE.



The searcher finds nothing but leaves where fruit might have been expected. Nothing but leaves means nothing but lies. Is that a harsh expression? If I profess faith, and have no faith, is not that a lie? If I profess repentance, and have not repented, is not that a lie? If I unite with the people of the living God, and yet have no fear of God in my heart, is not that a lie? If I come to the communion-table, and partake of the bread and wine, and yet never discern the Lord's body, is not that a lie? If I profess to defend the doctrines of grace, and yet am not assured of the truth of them, is not that a lie? If I have never felt my depravity; if I have never been effectually called, never known my election of God, never rested in the redeeming blood, and have never been renewed by the Spirit, is not my defense of the doctrines of grace a lie? If there is nothing but leaves, there is nothing but lies, and the Savior sees that it is so. All the verdure of green leaf to him without fruit is but so much deceit. Profession without grace is the funeral pageantry of a dead soul. Religion without holiness is the light which comes from rotten wood — the phosphorescence of decay: I speak dread words, but how can I speak less dreadfully than I do? If you and I have but a name to live, and are dead, what a state we are in! Ours is something worse than corruption: it is the corruption of corruption. To profess religion and live in sin, is to sprinkle rose-water upon a dunghill, and leave it a dunghill still. To give a spirit an angel's name when it bears the devil's character, is almost to sin against the Holy Ghost. If we remain unconverted, of what use can it be to have our name written among the godly?

Our Lord discovered that there was no fruit, and that was a dreadful thing; but, next, he condemned the tree. Was it not right that he should condemn it? Did he curse it? It was already a curse. It was calculated to tantalize the hungry, and take them out of their way to deceive them. God will not have the poor and needy made a jest of. An empty profession is a practical curse; and should it not receive the censure of the Lord of truth? The tree was of no use where it was: it ministered to no man's refreshment. So, the barren professor occupies a position in which he ought to be a blessing, but, in truth, an evil influence streams forth from him. If he has not the grace of God in him, he is utterly useless, and in all probability he is a curse: he is an Achan in the camp, grieving the Lord, and causing him to refuse success to his people.

Our Lord did, however, use the fig tree for a good purpose when he caused it to wither away; for it became, henceforth, a beacon and a warning to all others who put forth vain pretenses. So, when the ungodly man, who has exhibited a flourishing profession, is allowed to fade away in his ways, some moral effect is produced upon others: they are compelled to see the peril of an unsound profession; and if they are wise, they will no longer be guilty of it. Would God it might be so in every case whenever a notable religionist withers away!

After that, when the Savior had condemned it, he pronounced sentence upon it; and what was the sentence? It was simply, "As you were." It was nothing more than a confirmation of its state. This tree has borne no fruit, it shall never bear fruit. If a man chooses to be without the grace of God, and yet to make a profession of having it, it is only just that the great Judge should say, "Continue without grace." When the great Judge at last shall speak to those who depart from God, he will simply say to them, "Depart!" Throughout life they always were departing, and after death their character is stamped with perpetuity. If you choose to be graceless, to be graceless shall be your doom. "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." May the Lord Jesus never have to sentence any of you in this way; but may he turn us, that we may be turned, and work in us eternal life to his praise and glory!

Then there came a change over the tree. It began at once to wither. I do not know whether the disciples saw a quiver run through it at once; but on the next morning when they passed that way, according to Mark, it had dried up from the roots. Not only did the leaves hang down, like streamers when there is no wind; not only did the bark seem to have lost every token of vitality; but the whole fabric was blighted fatally. Have you ever seen a fig tree with its strange, weird branches? It is a very extraordinary sight when bare of leaves. In this case I see its skeleton arms! It is twice dead, dead from the very roots. Thus have I seen the fair professor undergo a blight. He has looked like a thing that has felt the breath of a furnace, and has had its moisture dried up. The man is no longer himself: his glory and his beauty are hopelessly gone. No axe was lifted; no fire was kindled; a word did it, and the tree withered from the root. So, without thunderbolt or pestilence, the once brave professor is stricken as with the judgment of Cain. It is an awful fate. Better far to have the vine-dresser come to you

with the axe in his hand, and strike you with the head of it, and say to you, "Tree, thou must bear fruit, or be hewn down." Such a warning would be terrible, but it would be infinitely better than to be left in one's place untouched, quietly to wither to destruction.

Now I have delivered my heavy burden, laying it far more upon myself than upon any one of you; for I stand more prominent than you; I have made a louder profession than most of you; and if I have not his grace in me, then I shall stand before the multitude that have seen me in my greenness, and shall wither away to the very roots, a terrible example of what God doth with those who bear no fruit to his glory.

But now I desire to conclude with tenderer words. Let no man say, "This is very hard." Brother, it is not hard, is it, that if we profess a thing we should be expected to be true to it? Besides, I pray you not to think that anything my Lord can do is hard. He is all gentleness and tenderness. The only thing he ever did destroy was this fig tree. He destroyed no men, as Elias did when he brought fire from heaven upon them; nor as Elisha did when the bears came out of the wood. It is only a barren tree that he causes to wither away. He is all love and tenderness: he does not want to wither you, nor will he, if you be but true. The very least he may expect is that you be true to what you profess. Are you rebellious because he asks you not to play the hypocrite? If you begin to kick against his admonition, it will look as if you were yourself untrue at heart. Instead of that, come and bow humbly at his feet, and say, "Lord, if anything in this solemn truth bears upon me, I beseech thee so to apply it to my conscience that I may feel its power, and flee to thee for salvation." Many men are converted in this way — these hard but honest things drive them from false refuges, and bring them to be true to Christ and to their own souls.

"But," saith one, "I know what I will do; I will never make any profession; I will bear no leaves." My friend, that also is a sullen, rebellious spirit. Instead of talking so, you should say, Lord, I do not ask thee to take away my leaves, but let me have fruit. The fruit is not likely to ripen well without leaves; leaves are essential to the health of the tree, and the health of the tree is essential to the ripening of the fruit. Open confession of faith is good, and must not be refused. Lord, I would not drop a leaf.

*“I’m not ashamed to own my Lord,  
Or to defend his cause;  
Maintain the honor of his word,  
The glory of his cross.”*

Lord, I do not want to be set away in a corner; I am satisfied to stand where men may see my good works, and glorify my Father who is in heaven. I do not ask to be observed; but I am not ashamed to be observed; only, Lord, make me fit for observation. If a commander said to a soldier, “Stand firm, but mind you have your cartridges ready, so that you may not lift an empty gun;” suppose that soldier answered, “I cannot be so particular. I would rather run to the rear.” Would that be a fit reply? Coward! because your captain warns you that you must not be a sham, you would therefore, run off altogether! Surely, you are of an evil sort. You are not truly one of the Lord’s, if you cannot bear his rebuke. Let not these solemn truths drive us away, but let them draw us on to say, “Lord, I pray thee, help me to make my calling and election sure. I beseech thee, help me to bring forth the expected fruit. Thy grace can do it.”

I would suggest to everyone here to cry to the Lord to make us conscious of our natural barrenness. Gracious ones, may the Lord make us mourn our comparative barrenness, even if we do bear some fruit. To feel quite satisfied with yourself is perilous: to feel that you are holy, and indeed that you are perfect, is to be on the brink of the pit of pride. If you hold your head so high, I am afraid you will strike it against the top of the doorway. If you walk on stilts, I fear you will fall. It is a safer thing to feel, “Lord, I do serve thee, and I am no deceiver. I do love thee; thou hast wrought the works of the Spirit in me. But alas! I am not what I want to be, I am not what I ought to be. I aspire to holiness: help me to attain it. Lord, I would lie in the very dust before thee to think that after being digged about and dinged, as I have been, I should bear such little fruit. I feel myself less than nothing. My cry is, ‘God be merciful to me.’ If I had done all, I should still have been an unprofitable servant; but having done so little, Lord, where shall I hide my guilty head?”

Lastly, when you have made this confession, and the good Lord has heard you, there is one emblem in Scripture I should like you to copy. Suppose this morning you feel so dry and dead and barren, that you cannot serve God as you would, nor even pray for more grace, as you wish to do. Then

you are something like these twelve rods. They are very dead and dry, for they have been held in the hands of twelve chiefs, who have used them as their official staves. These twelve rods are to be laid before the Lord. This one is Aaron's rod; but it is quite as dead and dry as any of the rest. The whole twelve are laid in the place where the Lord dwelleth. We see them next morning. Eleven are dry rods still; but see this rod of Aaron! What has happened? It was dry as death. See, it has budded! This is wonderful! But look, it has blossomed! There are almond flowers upon it. You know they are rosy pink and white. This is marvelous! But look again, it has brought forth almonds! Here, you have them! See these green fruits, which look like peaches. Take off the flesh, and here is an almond whose shell you may break and find the kernel. The heavenly power has come upon the dry stick, and it has budded and blossomed, and even brought forth almonds. Fruit-bearing is the proof of life and favor. Lord, take these poor sticks this morning, and make them bud. Lord, here we are, in a bundle, perform that ancient miracle in a thousand of us. Make us bud and blossom, and bear fruit! Come with divine power, and turn this congregation from a fagot into a grove. Oh, that our blessed Lord may get a fig from some dry stick this morning! at least, such a fig as this, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" there is sweetness in that fig as this, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." Here is another, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" — that is a whole basketful of the first ripe figs, and the Lord rejoices in their sweetness. Come Holy Spirit, produce fruit in us this day, through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen, and Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~4112~~ Matthew 21:12-32.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 100 (Ver. 1), 652, 645.

# PERSEVERANCE IN HOLINESS

## SERMON NO. 2108

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
OCTOBER 6TH, 1889,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” —

 Jeremiah 32:40.

LAST Sabbath morning we were called to deep searching of heart.\* It was a very painful discourse to the preacher, and it was not less so to many of his hearers. Some of us will never forget that fig tree, covered with untimely leaves, which yielded no fruit, and was condemned to stand a beacon to the unfruitful of all ages. I felt that I was in the surgery, using the knife: I felt great tenderness, and the operation was grievous to my soul. When the winnowing fan was used to chase away the chaff, some of the wheat felt that it was none too heavy: the wind stirred it in its place, so as to make it fear that it would be carried into the fire. To-day, I trust we shall see that, despite all sifting, not one true grain shall be lost.

May the King himself come near and feast his saints to-day! May the Comforter who convinced of sin now come to cheer us with the promise! We noticed concerning the fig tree, that it was confirmed in its barrenness: it had borne no fruit, though it made large professions of doing so, and it was made to abide as it was. Let us consider another form of confirmation: not the curse of continuance in the rooted habit of evil; but the blessing of perseverance in a settled way of grace. May the Lord show us how he establishes his saints in righteousness, and makes the works which he has begun in them to abide, and remain, and even to go onward towards perfection, so that they shall not be ashamed in the day of his appearing!

We will go to our text at once. In the world there are men and women towards whom God stands in covenant relationship. Mixed up with these myriads of God-forgetting, or even God-defying people, there are a number of covenanted ones, who think of God, know God, trust God, and are even in league with God. God has made with them a covenant. It is a wonder of mercy that Jehovah should enter into covenant with men; but he has done so. God has pledged himself to his people, and they have, in return, through his grace, pledged themselves to God. These are heaven's Covenanters, in bonds of amity, alliance, and even union with the Lord their God. This covenant shall stand when the mountains shall depart and the hills shall be removed: it is not a thing of passing time; but, like its Author, it is everlasting. Happy people who are joined unto the Lord by an eternal bond!

These covenanted ones may be known by certain marks and evidences. It is most important that we should know that we ourselves belong to them. They are a people, according to the text, to whom God is doing good. Friend, do you perceive that he is doing good to you? Has the Lord dealt graciously with you? Has he appeared to you, and said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee"? Do all things work together for good for you? I mean, for your spiritual good? your lasting good? Have you received the greatest good by the renewal of the Holy Spirit? Has he given Christ to you? Has he made you hate evil and cleave to that which is good? If these good gifts have been bestowed on you, he has done you good; for these gifts are the outcome of the covenant, and are sure guarantees that it stands fast between God and your soul.

These people are known by having the fear of God in their hearts. Judge ye, whether it be so in your own case. This is the covenant promise — "I will put my fear in their hearts." Do you fear the Lord? Do you reverence Jehovah, our God? Do you desire to please the Lord? Do you please him? Do you desire to be like him? Are you like him in some humble degree? Do you feel ashamed when you see how sadly you come short; and does this make you hunger and thirst after righteousness? Is the gracious presence of God your heaven below? Is it all the heaven you desire above? If so, this fear of God in your heart is the seal of the covenant to you. Towards you God has thoughts of love which shall never change.

This leads us to a close consideration of our text. We notice in it, first, the everlasting covenant: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them." Secondly, we reverently perceive the unchanging God of the covenant: "I will not turn away from them, to do them good." Thirdly, we see with joy the persevering people in that covenant: "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." I am sure I shall not find language suitable to such a theme as this; but I am cheered with the reflection that, however poor and simple my words may be, the matter of which I speak is in itself enough for the delight of all true believers. When you have an abundance of solid food wherewith to make a meal, you need not fret, even though you miss the tasteful adornments of the table. Hungry men are not eager for a display of plate or of damask; nor even for a show of flowers bedecking the table. They are best satisfied with solid food. In my subject there is meat fit for kings: however badly I may carve it, you who have appetites will not fail to feed thereon. May the Holy Spirit make it so!

**I.** First, here is THE EVERLASTING COVENANT: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them."

In the previous chapter, in the thirty-first verse, this covenant is called "a new covenant"; and it is new in contrast with the former one which the Lord made with Israel when he brought them out of Egypt. It is new as to the principle upon which it is based. The Lord had said unto his people, that if they would keep his laws and walk in his statutes, he would bless them. He set before them a long line of blessings, rich and full: all these would be their portion if they would hearken to the Lord and obey his law. Truly Jehovah was a husband to them, tenderly supplying all their need, and upholding them in all their journeying. He fed them with angels' food; he sheltered them by day from the heat, and at night he lit up their canvas city with a pillar of fire. He himself walked in the midst of them, and revealed himself to them as he had done to no other nation: they were a people near unto him, a nation beloved of the Lord. But under the exceedingly favorable circumstances in which they lived in the wilderness, where they had no temporal cares, and no neighbors to mislead them, they did not keep the statutes of their God; nay, they did not even remain faithful to him as their God; for they worshipped a molten image, and likened the Lord of Glory to an ox that eateth grass. They bowed down before the image of a bullock that hath horns and hoofs; and they cried,



“These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” Thus they brake the covenant in the most wanton and wicked manner. Such a covenant was easily violated by a rebellious people; therefore the Lord, in his immeasurable grace, resolves to make with them a covenant of a new kind, which cannot thus be broken. The Lord was faithful to the old covenant: the breaking was on the part of the people, as we read in <sup>2022</sup>Jeremiah 31:32:

“Which my covenant they brake,  
although I was an husband unto them.”

After long patience, he visited them for their iniquities, and their carcases fell in the wilderness, for they could not enter into his rest. In after-ages he gave them into the hands of their enemies, who were a scourge to them; he made them to be carried away captive; and at last he suffered the Roman to burn their holy city, and scatter the people throughout all lands. They would not keep the covenant of God, and therefore their treachery was visited upon them. But in these days the Lord hath, in Christ Jesus, made with the true seed of Abraham, even with all believers, a new covenant; not after the tenor of the old, nor liable to be broken as it was. Brethren, take care to distinguish between the old and the new covenants; for they must never be mingled. Many never catch the true idea of the covenant of grace; they do not understand a compact of pure promise. They talk about grace, but they regard it as dependent upon merit. They speak about God’s mercy, and then combine with it conditions which make it rather justice than grace. Distinguish between things which differ. If salvation be of grace, it is not of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; and if it be of works, it is not of grace, otherwise work is no more work. The new covenant is all of grace, from its first letter to its closing word; and we shall have to show you this as we go on.

It is an “everlasting” covenant, however: that is the point upon which the text insists. The other covenant was of very short duration; but this is an “everlasting covenant.” Despite modern thought, I hope I shall be allowed to believe that the word “everlasting” means lasting for ever. While there is any meaning in language, we shall be satisfied that “an everlasting covenant” means a covenant that will never come to an end. Why is it so?

The first reason why it is an everlasting covenant is, that it was made with us in Christ Jesus. The covenant of works was made with the race in the first Adam; but the first Adam was faulty, and failed full soon; he could not bear the stress of his responsibility, and so that covenant was broken. But the surety of the new covenant is our Lord Jesus Christ; and he is not faulty, but perfect. The Lord Jesus is the federal head of his chosen, and he stands for them: they are regarded as members of his body, and he is their head, their mouthpiece, their representative. The Lord Jesus, as the second Adam, entered into covenant with God on the behalf of his people; and because he cannot fail — for in him there is no infirmity or sin — therefore the covenant of which he is the surety must stand. He abideth for ever in his Melchizedek priesthood, and in the power of an endless life. He is, both in his nature and in his work, eternally qualified to stand before the living God. He stands in absolute perfectness under every strain, and, therefore, the covenant stands in him. When it is written, “I have given him for a covenant to the people,” we see that the covenant cannot fail, because he cannot fail who is the sum and substance of it. Because the Lord Jesus represents all his believing people in the covenant, therefore the covenant is everlasting.

Next, the covenant cannot fail because the human side of it has been fulfilled. The human side might be regarded as the weak side of it; but when Jesus became the representative of man that side was sure. He has at this hour fulfilled to the letter every stipulation upon that side of which he was the surety. He has magnified the law, and made it honorable by his own obedience to it. He has met the demands of moral government, and made amends to holiness for man’s offenses. The law is more glorified by his atoning death than it was dishonored by man’s sin. This Man hath offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, and that is so effectual for the fulfillment of the covenant that he sits down at the right hand of God. Since, then, that side of the covenant has been fulfilled which appertains to man, there remaineth only God’s side of it to be fulfilled, which consists of promises — unconditional promises, full of grace and truth, such as these: — “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you

an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Will not God be true to his engagements? Yes, verily. When he makes a covenant, and on man's part the compact has been fulfilled, depend upon it, on the Lord's side no word will fall to the ground. Even to the jots and tittles, all shall be carried out.

Furthermore, the covenant must be everlasting, for it is founded upon the free grace of God. The first covenant was conditioned upon the obedience of men. If they kept the law, God would bless them; but they failed through disobedience, and inherited the curse. The divine sovereignty determined to deal with men, not according to merit, but according to mercy; not according to the personal character of men, but according to the personal character of God; not according to what men might do, but according to what the Lord Jesus would perform. Sovereign grace declares that he will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom he will have compassion. This basis of sovereignty cannot be shaken. The covenant which saves men according to God's will and good pleasure, is founded upon a rock; for God's free grace is always the same, and God's sovereignty is linked to immutability, even as it is written, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." The slightest touch of merit puts perishable material into the covenant; but if it be of pure grace, then the covenant is everlasting.

Again, in the covenant, everything that can be supposed to be a condition is provided. It is necessary that a man, to be forgiven, should repent; but then the Lord Jesus is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins. It is necessary that a man, in order to be saved, should have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; but faith is of the operation of God, and the Holy Ghost worketh in us this fruit of the Spirit. It is needful, before we enter heaven, that we should be holy; but the Lord sanctifies us through the Word, and worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure. All that is required is also supplied. If there be, anywhere in the Word of God, any act or grace mentioned as though it were a condition of salvation, it is in another Scripture described as a covenant gift which will be bestowed upon the heirs of salvation by Christ Jesus. So that the condition, which might seem to put the covenant in danger, is so surely provided for, that thence ariseth no flaw or fracture.

Moreover, the covenant must be everlasting, because it cannot be superseded by anything more glorious. In the order of God's working he always advances from the good to the better. The old law was put away because he found fault with it, and therefore the new covenant must last till a fault can be found with it; which will never be. This is the glory which excelleth: no brightness can exceed the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. There can be nothing more gracious, nothing more righteous, nothing more just to God or more safe to man, than the plan of salvation set forth in the covenant of grace. The moon gives way to the sun, and the sun gives way to a lustre which shall exceed the light of seven days; but what is to supersede the light of free grace and dying love, the glory of the love which gave the Only-begotten that we might live through him! The covenant of grace made with us in Christ Jesus is the masterpiece of divine wisdom and love, and it is established on such sure principles that it must last for ever.

Beloved, rest in the covenant of grace as affording you eternal security and boundless comfort. It may well be everlasting, since it was divine in its conception. Surely the counsel of the Lord shall stand. Who else could have thought of a covenant, "ordered in all things and sure," to be made with guilty man? It was also divine in its carrying out, and therefore it shall endure. Who could have provided a Savior like the Only-begotten of the Father? Who could have given him for a covenant but the Father? The covenant is divine in its maintenance. Note well the word of the Lord: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them." He does not say, "They shall make a covenant with me"; but "I will make a covenant with them." That God is the maker of the covenant, is a reason for its certainty and everlastingness. The faithful God has given guarantees which fix it fast, even his promise and his oath; those two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie. Through these we have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to Christ Jesus. Thus much upon the first head; and very little it is, compared with the grandeur of the subject.

**II.** Secondly, we have now devoutly to think upon THE UNCHANGING GOD OF THE COVENANT: "I will not turn away from them, to do them good."

Please notice the terms here: the Lord does not merely say, “I will not turn away from them,” but, “I will not turn away from them, to do them good.” He will not cease to work good for his chosen. The Lord is always doing his people good; and here he promises that he will never leave off blessing them. Not only will he always love them, but he will always prove his love by active kindness and blessing. He is pledged to continue the gifts and work of his goodness. In effect he says, “I will not cease blessing them; I will continually, everlastingly be doing them good.” Now, why is this, that God is thus unchanging in his doings towards his covenanted ones?

He will not turn away from doing them good, first, because he has said so. That is enough. Jehovah speaks, and in his voice lies the end of all controversy. He says, “I will not turn away from them, to do them good”; and we are sure that he will not forfeit his word. I do not need to bring forth more reasons: this suffices, the Lord hath said it. Hath he said, and will he not do it?

Still, let us remember that there is no valid reason why he should turn away from them to do them good. You remind me of their unworthiness. Yes, but observe that when he began to do them good they were as unworthy as they could possibly be. He began to do them good when they were “dead in trespasses and sins.” He began to do them good when they were enemies, rebels, and under condemnation. When first the sinner feels the movement of divine love upon his heart, he is in no commendable state. In some cases the man is a drunkard, a swearer, a liar, or a profane person. In certain cases the man has been a persecutor like Manasseh or Saul. If God left off blessing us because he could see no good in us, why did he begin to do us good when we were without desire towards him? We were a mass of misery, a pit of wants, and a dunghill of sins when he began to do us good. Whatever we may be now, we are not otherwise than we were when first he revealed his love towards us. The same motive which led him to begin leads him to continue; and that motive is nothing but his grace.

Moreover, there can be no reason in the faultiness of the believer why the Lord should cease to do him good, seeing that he foresaw all the evil that would be in us. No wandering child of God surprises his heavenly Father.

He foreknew every sin we should commit: he proposed to do us good notwithstanding all this foreknown iniquity. If, then, he entered into a covenant with us, and began to bless us with all our sin before his mind, nothing new can spring up which can alter the covenant once made with all these drawbacks known and taken into account. There is no scarlet sin which has been omitted, for the Lord has said, “Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet.” He entered into a covenant that he would not turn away from us, to do us good; and no circumstance has arisen, or can arise, which was unknown to him when he thus pledged his word of grace.

Moreover, I would have you remember that we are by God at this day viewed in the same light as ever. He saw us at the first as under sin, fallen and depraved, and yet he promised to do us good.

*“He saw me ruined in the fall,  
Yet loved me notwithstanding all.”*

And if to-day I am sinful, if to-day I have to groan by reason of my evil nature, yet I am but where I was when he chose me, and called me, and redeemed me by the blood of his Son. “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” We were undeserving objects upon whom he bestowed his mercy, out of no motive but that which he drew from his own nature; and if we are undeserving still, his grace is still the same. If it be so, that he still deals with us in the way of grace, it is evident that he still views us as undeserving; and why should he not do good towards us now as he did at the first? Assuredly, the fountain being the same, the stream will continue to flow.

Moreover, remember that he sees us now in Christ. Behold, he has put his people into the hands of his dear Son. He has even put us into Christ’s body; “for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” He sees us in Christ to have died, in him to have been buried, and in him to have risen again. As the Lord Jesus Christ is well-pleasing to the Father, so in him are we well-pleasing to the Father also; for our being in him identifies us with him. If, then, our acceptance with God stands on the footing of Christ’s acceptance with God, it standeth firmly, and is an unchanging argument with the Lord God for doing us good. If we stood before God in our own individual righteousness, our ruin would be sure

and speedy; but in Jesus our life is hid beyond peril. Firmly believe that until the Lord rejects Christ he cannot reject his people; until he repudiates the atonement and the resurrection, he cannot cast away any of those with whom he has entered into covenant in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord will not turn away from his people, from doing them good, because he has shown them so much kindness already; and all that he has done would be lost if he did not go through with it. When he gave his Son, he gave us a sure pledge that he meant to finish his work of love. They say of a man that does not finish his work, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish"; but that shall never be said of the Lord Jehovah. The Lord God has laid out his whole Deity to save his people, and given his whole self in the person of the Well-beloved for our redemption; and can you believe that he will fail in it? Surely, the idea is blasphemous. Some of us have known too much love already to believe that it will ever cease to flow towards us. We have been so favored that we dare not fear that his favor toward us will cease. So heavenly, so divine is the sense of the love of God, when it is revealed to the soul, that we cannot believe that it has been given to mock us. We have been carried away with such torrents of love, that we will never believe that they can be dried up. The Lord has communed with us so closely, that the secret of the Lord is with us, and he will for ever recognize that mystic token by which our union has been sealed. Like Paul, each one of us may say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." The cost to which our Lord has gone assures us that he will complete his designs of grace.

Beloved, we feel sure that he will not cease to bless us, because we have proved that even when he has hidden his face he has not turned away from doing us good. The Lord has withdrawn the light of his countenance, but never the love of his heart. When the Lord has turned away his face from his people, it has been to do them good, by making them sick of self and eager for his love. How often he has brought us back from wandering by making us feel the evil of the sin which grieves his Spirit! When we have cried, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" we have been greatly blessed by the anguish of our search. Bear me witness, ye tried people of God; the Lord's chastenings have always been for your good. When the Lord has bruised you till the wound has been blue, your heart has been

bettered. When the Lord has taken away your comforts, he has done you good by driving you closer to the highest good. The Lord has enriched you by your losses, and made you healthy by your sicknesses. If, then, the Lord our God, when he is seen in darkest colors, has not turned away from doing us good, we are persuaded that he will never cease daily to load us with benefits.

Moreover, I close with this argument, that he has involved his honor in the salvation of his people. If the Lord's chosen and redeemed are cast away, where is the glory of his redemption? Will not the enemy say of the Lord, "He had not the power to carry out his covenant, nor the constancy to continue blessing them"? Shall that ever be said of God? Will he thus lose the glory of his omnipotence and immutability? I cannot believe that any purpose of the Lord can fail; neither can I conceive that he can withdraw his declarations of love to those with whom he is in covenant. The God whom we adore and reverence, the God of Abraham, the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, fainteth not, neither is weary. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" "He will ever be mindful of his covenant." Of our Lord Jesus we truly sing —

*"His honor is engaged to save  
The meanest of his sheep;  
All that his heavenly Father gave,  
His hands securely keep."*

Whether my arguments seem good to you or not, is of small consequence; for the text is the inspired Word of God, and it cannot be misunderstood or questioned. Thus saith the Lord, "I will not turn away from them, to do them good."

**III.** The third part of our subject leads us to see THE PERSEVERING PEOPLE IN THE COVENANT: "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

Let me read very distinctly these words: "They shall not depart from me." If there were only that text in the Bible, it would suffice to prove the final perseverance of the saints: "They SHALL NOT depart from me." The salvation of those who are in covenant with God is herein provided for by an absolute promise of the omnipotent God, which must be carried out. It is plain, clear, unconditional, positive: "They shall not depart from me."



It is not carried out by altering the effect of apostasy. If they did depart from God, it would be fatal. Suppose a child of God should utterly depart from the Lord, and wholly lose the life of God: what then? Would he nevertheless be saved? I answer, His salvation lies in the fact that he will never utterly lose the life of God. Why are we to ask what would happen in a case which can never occur? But if we must suppose it, we are not slow to say that if the believer were wholly separated from Christ, he must, without doubt, perish everlastingly. If a man abide not in Christ, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered. The Scripture is very positive about it: if grace were gone, safety would be gone. “Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned?” “If these shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.” If the work of grace could wholly and totally fail in any man, the case would be beyond all remedy, since the best means has, on that supposition, been tried and has failed. If the Holy Ghost has indeed regenerated a soul, and yet that regeneration does not save it from total apostasy, what can be done? There is such a thing as being “born again”; but there is no such thing as being born again and again. Regeneration is once for all: it cannot be repeated. Scripture has no word or hint that it could be. If men have been washed in the blood of Jesus, and renewed by the Holy Ghost, and this sacred process has failed, there remains no more. When old things have passed away and all things have become new, can it be imagined that these will grow old again? No man may therefore say, “Though I go back to my old sin, and cease to pray, or repent, or believe, or have any life of God in me, yet I shall be saved because I was once a believer.” Nay, nay, profane talker; the text saith not, “They shall be saved though they depart from me”; but “They shall not depart from me” — which is a very different matter. Woe unto them that depart from the living God! for they must perish, and with them no covenant of peace has been made.

Neither does this perseverance of the saints come in by the removal of temptation. It is not said, “I will put them where they shall not be tempted; I will give them such a sufficient livelihood that they shall not be tried by poverty, and at the same time they shall never be so rich as to know the temptations of wealth.” No, the Lord does not take his people out of the world; but he allows them to fight the battle of life in the same field as others. He does not remove us from the conflict, but “he giveth us

the victory.” We are tempted as was our Lord; but we have a way of escape provided. Our heart is prone to wander, and we are not kept from the scene of possible wandering. But what is said is this — “They shall not depart from me.” What a blessed assurance! They may be tempted; but they shall not be overcome. Though they sin in measure, yet shall they not so sin as to depart from God. They shall still hold on to him, and live in Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

How, then, are they preserved? Well, not as some falsely talk, as though we preached, “that the man who is converted may live as he likes.” We have never said so; we have never even thought so. The man who is converted cannot live as he likes; or, rather, he is so changed by the Holy Spirit, that if he could live as he likes, he would never sin, but live an absolutely perfect life. Oh, how deeply do we long to be kept clear of every sin! We preach not that men may depart from God and yet live; but that they shall not depart from him.

This is effected by putting a divine principle within their hearts. The Lord saith, “I will put my fear in their hearts.” It would never be found there if he did not put it there. It will never spring up naturally in any heart. “I will put my fear in their hearts”; that is, regeneration and conversion. He makes us tremble before his law. He makes us feel the smart and bitterness of sin. He causes us to remember the God we once forgot, and to obey the Lord whom once we defied. “I will put my fear in their hearts” is the first great act of conversion, and it is continued throughout life by the perpetual working of the Spirit upon the heart. The work which commences at conversion is duly carried on in the converted ones; for the Lord still puts his fear into their hearts. How the Spirit of God works we cannot tell: he has ways of acting directly upon our minds which are all his own, and cannot be understood by us. But without violating the freedom of our nature, leaving us men as we were before, he knows how to make us continue in the fear of God. This is God’s great holdfast upon his people, “I will put my fear in their hearts.”

What is this fear of God? It is, first, a holy awe and reverence of the great God. Taught of God, we come to see his infinite greatness, and the fact that he is everywhere present with us; and then, filled with a devout sense of his Godhead, we dare not sin. Since God is near, we cannot offend. The

words, “my fear,” also intend filial fear. God is our Father, and we feel the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father.” This child-like love kindles in us a fear to grieve him whom we love, and therefore we have no desire to depart from him. There moves also in our hearts a deep sense of grateful obligation. God is so good to me, how can I sin? He loves me so, how can I vex him? He favors me so greatly from day to day that I cannot do that which is contrary to his will. Did you ever receive a choice and special mercy? It has often fallen to my lot; and when the tears have been in my eyes at the sight of so great a favor, I have felt that if a temptation came to me, it would come at a time when I had neither heart, nor eye, nor ear for it. Gratitude bars the door against sin. Great love received overthrows great temptation to wander. Our cry is, “The Lord bathes me in his love, he indulges me with the nearest and dearest fellowship with himself, and how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Loved of him so specially, and united to him by an everlasting covenant, how can we fly in the face of love so wonderful? Surely, we can find no pleasure in offending so gracious a God; but it is our joy to do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.

See, beloved, this perseverance of the saints, is perseverance in holiness: “They shall not depart from me.” If the grace of God has really changed you, you are radically and lastingly changed. If you have come to Christ, he has not placed in you a mere cup of the water of life, but he has said it: “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” The work that is done in regeneration is not a temporary work, by which a man is, for a time, reformed; but it is an everlasting work, by which the man is born for heaven. There is a life implanted at the new birth, which cannot die, for it is a living and incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever. Grace will go on working in a man until it leads him to glory.

If any differ from what I have said, I cannot help it; but I would beg them not to differ from the text; for the Scripture cannot be broken. Read it: “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” There it stands, “They shall not depart from me.” But if you ask, By what instrumentality does God maintain this fear in the hearts of his people? I answer, it is the work of the Spirit of God: but the Holy Spirit usually works by means. The fear of God is kept alive in our hearts by the hearing

of the Word; for faith cometh by hearing, and holy fear cometh through faith. Be diligent, then, in hearing the Word. That fear is kept alive in our hearts by reading the Scriptures; for as we feed on the Word, it breathes within us that fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. This fear of God is maintained in us by the belief of revealed truth, and meditation thereon. Study the doctrines of grace, and be instructed in the analogy of the faith. Know the gospel well and thoroughly, and this will bring fuel to the fire of the fear of God in your hearts. Be much in private prayer; for that stirs up the fire, and makes it burn more brilliantly. In fine, seek to live near to God, to abide in him; for as you abide in him, and his words abide in you, you shall bring forth much fruit, and so shall you be his disciples.

I find this precious doctrine of the perseverance of the saints to be a very fruitful one. One Thursday night, not long ago, I preached this doctrine with all my might, and many were comforted by it; but, better still, many were set thinking, and were led to turn their faces Christ-ward. Some preach a doctrine which has a very wide door, but it is all door, and when you get in, there is nothing to be had; you are no safer than you were outside. Sheep are not in a hurry to enter where there is no pasture. Some have thought my doctrine narrow, though I am sure it is not; but if a door should seem strait, yet, if there is something worth the having when you get in, many will seek admission. There are such wonderful blessings provided in the covenant of grace that those who are wise are anxious to obtain them. "Oh!" says one, "if salvation is an everlasting thing, if this regeneration means a change of nature such as can never be undone, let me have it. If salvation is a mere plated article which will wear out, I do not want it; but if it is pure silver all through, let me have it." Does the gift of grace make us partakers of the divine nature, and cause us to escape the corruption which is in the world through lust? then let us have it. I pray that some here may desire salvation, because it secures a life of holiness. The sweetmeat which tempted me to Christ was this — I believed that salvation was an insurance of character. In what better way can a young man cleanse his life than by putting himself into the holy hands of the Lord Jesus, to be kept from falling? I said — If I give myself to Christ, he will save me from my sins. Therefore, I came to him, and he keeps me. Oh, how musical these words, "They shall not depart from me!"

To use an old figure: be sure that you take a ticket all the way through. Many people have only believed in God to save them for a time; so long as they are faithful, or so long as they are earnest. Beloved, believe in God to keep you faithful and earnest all your life: take a ticket all the way through. Get a salvation which covers all risks. There is no other ticket issued from the authorized office but a through-ticket. Other tickets are forgeries. He that cannot keep you for ever cannot keep you a day. If the power of regeneration will not last through life, it may not last an hour. Faith in the everlasting covenant stirs my heart's blood, fills me with grateful joy, inspires me with confidence, fires me with enthusiasm. I can never give up my belief in what the Lord hath said, "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." God bless you, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —

— Hebrews 8; 10:12-39.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 27, 229, 228.

# THE MUSTARD SEED: A SERMON FOR THE SABBATH-SCHOOL TEACHER

SERMON NO. 2110

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
OCTOBER 20TH, 1889,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.”

—  Luke 13:18-19.

I SHALL not attempt fully to explain this great little parable. A full exposition may be left for another occasion. The parable may be understood to relate to our Lord Himself, who is the living seed. You know also how His church is the tree that springs from Him, and how greatly it grows and spreads its branches until it covers the earth. From the one man Christ Jesus, despised and rejected of men, slain and buried, and so hidden away from among men — from Him, I say, there arises a multitude which no one can number. These spread themselves, like some tree which grows by the rivers of waters, and they yielded both gracious shelter and spiritual food. I called it a great little parable, and so it is: it has a world of teaching within the smallest compass. The parable is itself like a grain of mustard seed, but its meanings are as a great tree.

At this time of the year, Sabbath-school teachers come together especially to pray for a blessing on their work, and pastors are invited to say a word to cheer them in their self-denying service. This request I would cheerfully fulfill, and therefore my discourse will not be a full explanation of the

parable, but an adaptation of it to the cheering of those who are engaged in the admirable work of teaching the young the fear of the Lord. Never service more important; to overlook it would be a grave fault. We rejoice to encourage our friends in their labor of love.

In this parable light is thrown upon the work of those who teach the Gospel. First, notice a very simple work: “a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden.” Secondly, observe what came of it: “it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.”

**FIRST, NOTICE A VERY SIMPLE WORK.** The work of teaching the gospel is as the casting of a grain of mustard seed into a garden.

Note, first, what the nameless man did. “It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took.” He took it; that is to say, picked it out from the bulk. It was only one grain, and a grain of a very insignificant seed; but he did not let it lie on the shelf; he took it in his hand to put it to its proper use. A grain of mustard seed is too small a thing for public exhibition; the man who takes it in his hand is almost the only one who spies it out. It was only a grain of mustard seed, but the man set it before his own mind as a distinct object to be dealt with. He was not sowing mustard over broad acres, but he was sowing “a grain of mustard seed” in his garden. It is well for the teacher to know what he is going to teach, to have that truth distinctly in his mind’s eye, as the man had the grain of mustard seed between his fingers. Depend upon it, unless a truth is clearly seen and distinctly recognized by the teacher, little will come of it to the taught. It may be a very simple truth, but if a someone takes it, understands it, grasps it, and loves it, he will do something with it. Beloved, first and foremost let us ourselves take the Gospel, let us believe it, let us appreciate it, let us prize it beyond all things; for truth lives as it is loved, and no hand is so fit for its sowing as the hand which grasps it well.

Further, in this little parable we notice that this man had a garden: “Like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden.” Some Christian people have no garden — no personal sphere of service. They belong to the whole clan of Christians, and they pine to see the entire band go out to cultivate the whole world, but they do not come to personal particulars. It is delightful to be warmed up by missionary addresses, and

to feel a zeal for the salvation of all the nations; but, after all, the net result of a general theoretic earnestness for all the world does not amount to much. As we should have no horticulture if people had no gardens, so we shall have no missionary work done unless each person has a mission. It is the duty of every believer in Christ, like the first man, Adam, to have a garden to dress and to till. Children are in the Sunday-schools by millions: thank God for that! But have you a class of your own? All the church at work for Christ! Glorious theory! Are you up and doing for your Lord? It will be a grand time when every believer has his allotment, and is sowing it with the seed of truth. The wilderness and the solitary place will blossom as the rose when each Christian cultivates his own plot of roses. Where should this unnamed man sow his mustard seed but in his own garden? It was near him, and dear to him, and to it he went. Teach your own children, speak to your neighbors, seek the conversion of those whom God has especially entrusted to you.

Having a garden, and having this seed, the man sowed it, and simple as this is, it is the hinge of the instruction. You have a number of seeds in a pill-box. There they are: look at them! Take that box down this day a year from now, and the seeds will be just the same. Lay them by in that dry box for seven years, and nothing will happen. Truth is not to be kept to ourselves; it is to be published and advocated. There is an old proverb, "Truth is mighty, and will prevail." The proverb is true in a sense, but it needs to be taken with a grain of salt. If you put truth away and leave it without a voice, it won't prevail; it will not even contend. When have great truths prevailed? Why, when brave men have persisted in declaring them. Daring spirits have taken up a cause which has been at the first unpopular, and they have spoken about it so earnestly and so often that at length the cause has commanded attention; they have pressed on and on until the cause has triumphed altogether. Truth has been mighty, and has prevailed, but yet not without the people who gave it life and tongue. Not even the Gospel itself, if it is not taught, will prevail. If revealed truth is laid on one side and kept in silence, it will not grow. Mark how through the dark ages the Gospel lay asleep in old books in the libraries of monasteries until Luther and his fellow reformers fetched it out and sowed it in the minds of men.



This man simply cast it into his garden. He did not wrap it around with gold leaf, or otherwise adorn it, but he put it into the ground. The naked seed came into contact with the naked soil. O teachers, do not try to make the Gospel look fine; do not overlay it with your fine words or elaborate explanations. The Gospel seed is to be put into the young heart just as it is. Get the truth concerning the Lord Jesus into the children's minds. Make them know, not what you can say about the truth, but what the truth itself says. It is wicked to take the Gospel and make a peg of it to hang our old clothes upon. The Gospel is not a boat to be freighted with human thoughts, fine speculations, scraps of poetry, and pretty tales. No, no. The Gospel is the thought of God; in and of itself it is the message which the soul needs. It is the Gospel itself which will grow. Take a truth, especially that great doctrine, that humanity is lost and that Christ is the only Savior, and see to it that you place it in the mind. Teach plainly the great truth that whosoever believes in Him has everlasting life, and that the Lord Jesus bare our sins in His own body on the tree and suffered for us, the just for the unjust — I say take these truths and set them forth to the mind, and see what will come of it. Sow the very truth; not your reflections on the truth, not your embellishments of the truth, but the truth itself. This is to be brought into contact with the mind, for the truth is the seed, and the human mind is the soil for it to grow in.

These remarks of mine are very plain and trite; and yet everything depends upon the simple operation described. Nearly everything has been tried in preaching of late, except the plain and clear statement of the glad tidings and of the atoning sacrifice. People have talked about what the church can do, and what the Gospel can do; we have been informed as to the proofs of the Gospel, or the doubts about it, and so forth; but when will they give us the Gospel itself? Friends, we must come to the point and teach the Gospel, for this is the living and incorruptible seed which abides forever. It is an easy thing to deliver an address upon mustard seed, to give the children a taste of the pungency of mustard, to tell them how mustard seed would grow, what kind of a tree it would produce, and how the birds would sing among its branches. But this is not sowing mustard seed. It is all very fine to talk about the influence of the Gospel, the ethics of Christianity, the elevating power of the love of Christ, and so on; but what we want is the Gospel itself, which exercises that influence. Sow the

seed: tell the children the doctrine of the Cross, the fact that with the stripes of Jesus we are healed, and that by faith in Him we are justified. What is wanted is not talk about the Gospel, but the Gospel itself. We must continually bring the living Word of the living God into contact with the hearts of men. Oh, for the aid of the Holy Spirit in this! He will help us, for He delights to glorify Jesus.

That which is described in the parable was an insignificant business: the man took the tiny seed and put it into his garden. It is a very commonplace affair to sit down with a dozen children around you and open your Bible and tell them the well-worn tale of how Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. No Pharisee is likely to stand and blow a trumpet when he is going to teach children; he is more likely to point to the children in the temple and sneeringly say, "Hearest thou what these say?" It is a lowly business altogether, but yet, to the mustard seed, and to the man with a garden, the sowing is the all-important matter. The mustard seed will never grow unless put into the soil; the owner of the garden will never have a crop of mustard unless he sows the seed. Dear Sunday-school teacher, do not become weary of your humble work, for none can measure its importance. Tell the boys and girls of the Son of God, who lived and loved and died that the ungodly might be saved. Urge them to immediate faith in the mighty Savior that they may be saved at once. Tell of the new birth, and how the souls of human beings are renewed by the Holy Spirit, without whose divine working none can enter the kingdom of heaven. Cast in mustard seed, and nothing else but mustard seed, if you want to grow mustard. Teach the Gospel of grace, and nothing but the Gospel of grace, if you would see grace growing in the hearts of your young people.

Secondly, let us consider what it was that the man sowed. We have seen that he sowed; what did he sow? It was one single seed, and that seed a very small one; so very, very small that the Jews were accustomed to say, "As small as mustard seed." Hence the Savior speaks of it as the smallest among seeds, which it may not have been absolutely, but which it was according to common parlance; our Lord was not teaching botany, but speaking a popular parable. Yes, the Gospel seems a very simple thing: Believe and live! Look to Jesus lying in the sinner's stead! Look to Jesus crucified, even as Israel looked to the brazen serpent lifted up upon a pole. It is simplicity itself; in fact, the Gospel is so plain a matter that our

superior people are weary of it and look out for something more difficult of comprehension. People nowadays are like the person who liked to hear the Scriptures “properly confounded”; or like the other who said, “You should hear our minister dispense with the truth.” Sowing seed is work too ordinary for the moderns; they demand new methods. But, beloved, we must not run after vain inventions; our one business is to sow the Word of God in the minds of children. It is yours and mine to teach everybody the simple truth that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. We know nothing else among adults or among children. This one seed, apparently so little, so insignificant, we continue to sow. They sneeringly say, “What can be the moral result of preaching such a Gospel? Surely it would be better to discourse upon morals, social economics, and the sciences?” Ah, friends! if you can do any good in those ways, we will not hinder you, but our belief is that a hundred times more can be done with the Gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone that believes. The Gospel is not the enemy of any good thing; say, rather, it is the force by which good things are to be carried out. Whatsoever things are pure and honest and of good repute are all nurtured by that spirit which is begotten by the simple Gospel of Christ. Yet conversions do not come by essays upon morals but by the teaching of salvation by Christ. The cleansing and raising of our race will not be effected by politics or science, but by the Word of the Lord, which lives and abides forever. To bring the greatest blessings upon our rising youth we must labor to implant in their minds faith in the Lord Jesus. Oh, for divine power in this work!

But the seed, though very small, was a living thing. There is a great difference between a mustard seed and a piece of wax of the same size. Life slumbers in that seed. What life is we cannot tell. Even if you take a microscope you cannot spy it out. It is a mystery, but it is essential to a seed. The Gospel has a something in it not readily discoverable by the philosophical inquirer, if, indeed, he can perceive it at all. Take a maxim of Socrates or of Plato, and inquire whether a nation or a tribe has ever been transformed by it from barbarism to culture. A maxim of a philosopher may have measurably influenced a person in some right direction, but who has ever heard of a someone’s whole character being transformed by any observation of Confucius or Socrates? I confess I never have. Human

teachings are barren. But within the Gospel, with all its triteness and simplicity, there is a divine life and that life makes all the difference. The human can never rival the divine, for it lacks the life-fire. It is better to preach five words of God's Word than five million words of human wisdom. Human words may seem to be the wiser and the more attractive, but there is no heavenly life in them. Within God's Word, however simple it may be, there dwells an omnipotence like that of God from whose lips it came.

Truth to tell, a seed is a very comprehensive thing. Within the mustard seed what is to be found? Why, there is all in it that ever comes out of it. It must be so. Every branch and every leaf and every flower and every seed that is to be is, in its essence, all within the seed. It needs to be developed, but it is all there. And so, within the simple Gospel, how much lies concentrated? Look at it! Within that truth lie regeneration, repentance, faith, holiness, zeal, consecration, perfection. Heaven hides itself away within the Gospel. Like a young bird in its nest, glory dwells in grace. We may not at first see all its results, nor, indeed, shall we see them at all until we sow the seed and it grows; yet it is all there. Do you believe it, young teacher? Have you realized what you have in your hold when you grasp the Gospel of the grace of God? It is the most wonderful thing beneath the skies. Do you believe in the Gospel which you have to teach? Do you discern that within its apparently narrow lines the Eternal, the Infinite, the Perfect, and the Divine are all enclosed? As in the babe of Bethlehem there was the Eternal God, so within the simple teaching of "Believe and live" there are all the elements of eternal blessedness for people, and boundless glory for God. It is a very comprehensive thing, that little seed, that Gospel of God.

And for this reason it is so wonderful: it is a divine creation. Summon your chemists, bring them together with all their vessels and their fires. Select a jury of the greatest chemists now alive, analytical or otherwise, as you will. Learned sirs, will you kindly make us a mustard seed? You may take a mustard seed, and pound it and analyze it, and you may thus ascertain all its ingredients. So far so good. Is not your work well begun? Now make a single mustard seed. We will give you a week. It is a very small affair. You have all the elements of mustard in yonder mortar. Make us one living grain; we do not ask for a ton weight. One grain of mustard seed will

suffice us. Great chemists, have you not made so small a thing? A month has gone by. Only one grain of mustard seed we asked of you, and where is it? Have you not made one in a month? What are you at? Shall we allow you seven years? Yes, with all the laboratories in the kingdom at your service and all known substances for your material and all the world's coal beds for your fuel, get to your work. The air is black with your smoke and the streams run foul with your waste products; but where is the mustard seed? This baffles the wise; they cannot make a living seed. No; and nobody can make a Gospel, or even a new Gospel text. The thinkers of the age could not even concoct another life of Christ to match with the four Gospels which we have already. I go further: they could not create a new incident which would be congruous with the facts we already know. Plenty of novel writers nowadays can beat out imaginary histories upon their anvils: let them write a fifth Gospel — say the Gospel according to Peter, or Andrew. Let us have it! They will not even commence the task. Who will write a new psalm, or even a new promise? Clever chemists prove their wisdom by saying at once, “No, we cannot make a mustard seed”; and wise thinkers will equally confess that they cannot make another Gospel. My learned brethren are trying very hard to make a new Gospel for this nineteenth century, but you teachers had better go on with the old one. The advanced men cannot put life into their theory. This living Word is the finger of God. That simple grain of mustard seed must be made by God, or not at all; He must put life into the Gospel, or it will not have power in the heart. The Gospel of Sunday-school teachers, that Gospel of “Believe and live,” however people may despise it, has Godgiven life in it. You cannot make another which can supplant it, for you cannot put life into your invention. Go on and use the one living truth with your children, for nothing else has God's life in it.

I want you to see what a little affair the sowing seemed, as we answer the question, What was it to him? It was a very natural act; he sowed a seed. It is a most natural thing that we should teach others what we believe ourselves. I cannot make out how some professors can call themselves Christians and yet never communicate the faith to others. That the young people of our churches should gather other young people around them and tell them of Jesus, whom you love, is as natural as for a gardener to put seeds into his prepared ground.

To sow a mustard seed is a very inexpensive act. Only one grain of mustard: nobody can find me a coin small enough to express its value. I do not know how much mustard seed the man had; certainly it is not a rare thing, but he only took one grain of it and cast it into his garden. He emptied no exchequer by that expenditure; this is one of the excellencies of Sabbath-school work, that it neither exhausts the church of people nor of money. However much of it is done, it does not lessen the resources of our Zion; it is done freely, quietly, without excitement, without sacrifice of life, and yet what a fountain of blessing it is!

Still, it was an act of faith. It is always an act of faith to sow seed, because you have, for the time, to give it up and receive nothing in return. The farmer takes his choice seed corn and throws it into the soil of his field. He might have made many a loaf of bread with it, but he casts it away. Only his faith saves him from being judged a maniac: he expects it to return to him fiftyfold. If you had never seen a harvest, you would think that someone burying good wheat under the clods had gone mad; if you had never seen conversions, it might seem an absurd thing to be constantly teaching to boys and girls the story of the Man who was nailed to the tree. We preach and teach as a work of faith, and remember, it is only as an act of faith that it will answer its purpose. The rule of the harvest is, "According to thy faith, be it unto thee." Believe, dear teacher, believe in the Gospel. Believe in what you are doing when you tell it. Believe that great results from slender causes spring. Go on sowing your mustard seed of salvation by faith, expecting and believing that fruit will come thereof.

It was an act which brought the sower no honor. The Savior has chronicled the fact that the man took a grain of mustard seed and sowed it, but thousands of people had gone on sowing mustard seed for half a lifetime without a word. Nobody has ever spoken in your honor, my friend, though you have taught the truth. Dear teacher, go on sowing, though nobody should observe your diligence or praise your faithfulness. Sow the seed of precious truth in the garden of the child's mind, for much more will come of it than you have dared to hope.

It seems to me that our Lord selected the mustard seed in this parable, not because its results are the greatest possible from a seed — for an oak or a cedar are much greater growths than a mustard tree — but He selected it

because it is the greatest result as compared with the size of the seed. Follow out the analogy. Come to yonder school, and see! That earnest young man is teaching a boy, one of those wild creatures of the street; they swarm in every quarter. A dozen young Turks are before him, or say young Arabs of the street; he is teaching them the Gospel. Small affair, is it not? Yes, very; but what may come of it? Think of how joyfully much may grow out of this little! What is that young man teaching? Only one elementary truth. Do not sneer; it is truth, but it is the mere alphabet of it. He touches upon nothing deep in theology; he only says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Dear boy, believe in the Lord Jesus and live." That is all he says. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? The teacher himself is teaching the one truth in a very poor way; at least, he thinks so. Ask him, when he has done, what he thinks of his own teaching, and he replies, "I do not feel fit to teach." Yes, that young man's teaching is sighed over, and in his own judgment it is poor and weak, but there is life in the truth he imparts and eternal results will follow — results of which I have now to speak in the second part of my sermon. May the good Spirit help me so to speak as to encourage my beloved friends, who have given themselves up to the Christlike work of teaching the little ones!

**SECONDLY**, let us enquire, **WHAT CAME OF IT?**

First, "it grew." That was what the sower hoped would come of it: he placed the seed in the ground hoping that it would grow. It is not reasonable to suppose that he would have sown it if he had not hoped that it would spring up. Dear teacher, do you always sow in hope, do you trust that the Word will live and grow? If you do not, I do not think your success is very probable. Expect the truth to take root and expand and grow up. Teach divine truth with earnestness and expect that the life within it will unveil its wonders.

But though the sewer expected growth, he could not himself have made it grow. After he had placed the seed in the ground he could water it, he could pray God to make the sun shine on it, but he could not directly produce growth. Only He that made the seed could cause it to grow. Growth is a continuance of that almighty act by which life is at first given. The putting of life into the seed is God's work, and the bringing forth of

the life from the seed is God's work too. This is a matter within your hope, but far beyond your power.

A very wonderful thing it is that the seed should grow. If we did not see it every day, we should be more astonished at the growth of seed than at all the wonders of magicians. A growing seed is God's abiding miracle. You see a piece of ground near London covered with a market garden, and after a few months you go by the place and you see streets and a public square and a church and a great population. You say to yourself, "It is remarkable that all these houses should have sprung up in a few months." Yet that is not at all so wonderful as for a plowed field to become covered four feet high with corn, and all without the use of wagons to bring the material, or tools to work it up into a harvest. Without noise of hammer, or the ringing of trowels; without handiwork of man, the whole has been done. Wonder at the growth of grace. See how it increases, deepens, strengthens! Growth in grace is a marvel of divine love. That a person should repent through the Gospel, that he should believe in Jesus, that he should be totally changed, that he should have a hope of heaven, that he should receive power to become a child of God — these are all marvelous things; yet they are going on under our eyes and we fail to admire them as we should. The growth of holiness in such fallen creatures as we are is the admiration of angels, the delight of all intelligent beings.

To the sower this growth was very pleasing. How pleasant it is to see the seed of grace grow in children! Do you not remember when you first sowed mustard-and-cress as a child, how the very next morning you went and turned the ground up to see how much it had grown? How pleased you were when you saw the little yellow shoot, and afterward a green leaf or two! So is it with the true teacher: he or she is anxious to see growth and makes eager inquiry for it. What was expected is taking place and it is most delightful to that teacher, whatever it may be to others. An unsympathetic person cries, "Oh, I do not think anything of that child's emotions. It is merely a passing impression: he will soon forget it." The teacher does not think so. The cold critic says, "I don't think much of a child's weeping. Children's tears lie very near the surface." But the teacher is full of hope that in these tears is a real sorrow for sin, and an earnest seeking after the Lord. The questioner says, "It is nothing for a child to say that he gives his heart to Jesus. Youngsters soon think that they



believe. They are so easily led.” People talk thus because they do not love children and live with the desire to save them. If you sympathize with children, you are pleased with every hopeful token and are on the watch for every mark of divine life within them. If you are a florist, you will see more of the progress of your plants than if you are no gardener and have no interest in such things. Think, then, of what my text says: “It grew.” Oh, for a prayer just now from all of you this morning, “Lord, make the Gospel grow wherever it falls! Whether the preacher scatters it, or the teacher sows it; whether it falls among the aged people, or the young; Lord, make the Gospel grow!” Pray hard for it, friends! You cannot make it grow, but you can prevail with God to bless it to His honor and praise.

Next, having started growing, it became a tree. Luke says, “It waxed a great tree.” It was great in itself, but the greatness was seen mainly in comparison with the size of the seed. The growth was great. Here is the wonder, not that it became a tree, but that being a mustard seed, it should become “a great tree.” Do you see the point of the parable? I have already brought it before you. Listen! It was only a word spoken — “Dear boy, look to Jesus.” Only such a word, and a soul was saved, its sin was forgiven, its whole being was changed, a new heir of heaven was born. Do you see the growth? A word produces salvation! A grain of mustard seed becomes a great tree! A little teaching brings eternal life. That is not all: the teacher, with many prayers and tears, took her girl home, and pleaded with her for Christ, and the girl was led to yield her heart to the dominion of Christ Jesus — a holy, heavenly life came out of that pleading. See! she becomes a thoughtful girl, a loving wife, a gracious mother, a matron in Israel, such a one as Dorcas among the poor, or Hannah with her Samuel. What a great result from a little cause! The teacher’s words were tearfully spoken; they could not have been printed, for they were far too broken and childlike; but they were, in God’s hands, the means of fashioning a life most sweet, most chaste, most beautiful.

A boy was about as wild as any roamer of our streets; a teacher knelt by his side with his arm about the lad’s neck. He pleaded with God for the boy, and with the boy for God. That boy was converted, and as a youth in business he was an example to the workroom; as a father he was a guide to his household; as a man of God he was a light to all around; as a preacher of righteousness he adorned the doctrine of God his Savior in all things.

There is much more which I might easily picture, but you can work it out as well as I can. All that is to be desired may spring out of the simple talk of a humble Christian with a youth. A mustard seed becomes a great tree; a few words of holy admonition may produce a noble life.

But is that all? Beloved, our teaching may preserve souls from the deep darkness of the abode of the lost. A soul left to itself might hurry down from folly to vice, from vice to obduracy, from obduracy to fixed resolve to perish; but by the means of loving teaching all this is changed. Rescued from the power of sin, like a lamb snatched from between the jaws of the lion, the youth is now no longer the victim of vice, but seeks holy and heavenly things. Hell has lost its prey, and see up yonder, heaven's wide gate has received a precious soul. "Sweeping through the gates of the New Jerusalem" many have come who were led there from the Sunday-school. They who once were foul are now white-robed, washed in the blood of the Lamb. Hark to their songs of praise! You may keep on listening, for those songs will never come to an end. All this was brought about through a brief address of a trembling brother who stood up one Sunday afternoon to close the school and talk a little about the Cross of Jesus. Or all this came of a gentle sister who could never have spoken in public, yet was enabled to warn a young girl who was growing giddy and seemed likely to go sadly astray. Wonderful that a soul's taking the road to heaven or to hell should be made, in the purpose of God, to hinge upon the humble endeavors of a weak but faithful teacher! You see how the mustard seed grew until it waxed a great tree.

This great tree became a shelter: "the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it." Mustard in the East does grow very large indeed. The commonest kind of it may be found eight or ten feet high, but there is a kind which will grow almost like a forest tree, and there probably were some of these latter trees in the sheltered region wherein our Lord was speaking. A mustard which grew here and there in Palestine was of surprising dimensions. When the tree grew, the birds came to it. Here we have unexpected influences. Think of it. That man took a mustard seed which you could hardly see if I held it up. When he took the mustard seed, when he put it into his garden, had he any thought of bringing birds to that spot? Not he. You do not know all you are doing when you are teaching a child the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. When you are trying to bring a

soul to Christ, your action has ten thousand hooks to it, and these may seize on innumerable things. Holy teaching is the opening of a well, and no one knows all the effect which the waters will produce on that spot. There seems no link between sowing a grain of mustard seed and birds of the air, but the winged wanderers soon made a happy connection. There may seem no connection between teaching that boy and the reclaiming of cannibals in New Guinea, but I can see a very possible connection. Tribes in Central Africa may have their destiny shaped by your instruction of a tiny child. When John Pounds bribed an urchin with a hot potato to come and learn to read the Bible, I am sure John Pounds had no idea of all the Ragged schools in London, but there is a clear line of cause and effect in the whole matter. A hot potato might be the coat of arms of the Ragged school Union. When Nasmyth went about from house to house visiting in the slums of London, I do not suppose that he saw in his act the founding of the London City Mission and all the Country Town Missions. No one can tell the end of his beginnings, the growth of his sowings. Go on doing good in little ways and you shall one day wonder at the great results. Do the next thing that lies before you. Do it well. Do it unto the Lord. Leave results with His unbounded liberality of love, but hope to reap at least a hundredfold.

How many fowls came and roosted under that one mustard tree I do not know. How many birds in a day, how many birds in the year, came and found a resting place, and picked the seeds they loved so well, I cannot tell. When one person is converted, how many may receive a blessing out of him none can tell. Now is the day for romances: our literature is drenched with tales religious or irreligious. What stories might be written concerning benefits bestowed, directly and indirectly, by a single godly man or woman! When you have written a thrilling story upon the subject, I can assure you I can match it with something better still. One single individual can scatter benedictions across a continent, and belt the world with blessing.

But what is that I hear? I see this mustard tree — it is a very wonderful tree; but I not only see, I hear! Music! music! The birds! the birds! It is early morning, the sun is scarcely up — what torrents of song! Is that the way to produce music? Shall I sow mustard seed, and reap songs? I thought we must buy an organ or purchase a violin, or by some wind or

stringed instrument come at music, but here is a new plan altogether. Nebuchadnezzar had his flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, but all that mingled sound could not rival the melody of birds. I shall sow mustard seed now, and get music in God's own way. Friends, when you teach your children the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, you are sowing the music of heaven. Every time you tell the tidings of pardon bought with blood, you are filling the choirs of glory with sweet voices which, to the Eternal Name, shall day and night trill out songs of devout gratitude. Go on, then, if this is to be the result. If even heaven's high harmonies depend upon the simple teaching of a Ragged school, let us never cease from our hallowed service.

Having said so much, I now close with these three practical observations. Are we not highly honored to be entrusted with such a marvelous thing as the Gospel? If it is a seed comprehending so much within it which will come to so much if it be properly used, blessed and happy are we to have such good news to proclaim! I thought this morning, when I awoke into the damp and rain, and felt my bones complaining, I shall be glad when four more Sundays shall have gone, and I shall be free to take a little rest in a sunnier clime. Jaded in mind, and weary in spirit, I braced myself with this reflection — what blessed work I have to do! What a glorious Gospel have I to preach! I ought to be a very happy man to have such glad tidings to bear to my fellows. I said to myself, "So I am." Well now, beloved teacher, next Sunday, when you leave your bed, and say, "I have had a hard week's work, and I could half wish that I had not to go to my class," answer yourself thus: "But I am a happy person to have to talk to children about Christ Jesus. If I had to teach them arithmetic or carpentering, I might get tired of it, but to talk about Jesus, whom I love, why, it is a joy forever.

Let us be encouraged to sow the good seed in evil times. If we do not see the Gospel prospering elsewhere, let us not despair; if there were no more mustard seed in the world, and I had only one grain of it, I should be all the more anxious to sow it. You can produce any quantity if only one seed will grow. So now today there is not very much Gospel about, the church has given it up, a great many preachers preach everything but the living truth. This is sad, but it is a strong reason why you and I should teach more Gospel than ever. I have often thought to myself — Other men may teach socialism,

deliver lectures, or collect a band of fiddlers that they may gather a congregation, but I will preach the Gospel. I will preach more Gospel than ever if I can; I will stick more to the one cardinal point. The others can attend to the odds and ends, but I will keep to Christ crucified. To those of vast ability who are looking to the events of the day I would say, “Allow one poor fool to keep to preaching the Gospel.” Beloved teachers, be fools for Christ, and keep to the Gospel. Don’t you be afraid. It has life in it, and it will grow; only you bring it out, and let it grow. I am sometimes afraid that we may prepare our sermons and addresses too much, so as to make ourselves shine. If so, we are like the man who tried to grow potatoes — he never grew any, and he wondered much, “for,” said he, “I very carefully boiled them for hours.” So, it is very possible to extract all the life out of the Gospel, and put so much of yourself into it that Christ will not bless it.

And, lastly, we are bound to do it. If so much will come out of so little, we are bound to go in for it. Nowadays people want ten percent for their money. Hosts of fools are readily caught by any scheme or speculation or limited liability company that promises to give them immense dividends! I would like to make you wise by inviting you to an investment which is sure. Sow a mustard seed, and grow a tree. Talk of Christ, and save a soul; that soul saved will be a blessing for ages, and a joy to God throughout eternity. Was there ever such an investment as this? Let us go on with it. If on our simple word eternity is hung, let us speak with all our heart. Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown, hang on the lips of the earnest teacher of the Gospel of Jesus. Let us never cease speaking while we have breath in our body. The Lord bless you! Amen, and Amen.


PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Matthew 13:1-23.  
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 916, 643, 30.

# A GRACIOUS DISMISSAL

## SERMON NO. 2183

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
JANUARY 11TH, 1891,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“And he said to the woman,  
Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” —  Luke 7:50.*

The main part of my subject will be — that gracious dismissal, “Go in peace.” To her who had been so lately blest, the word “Go” sounded mournfully; for she would fain have remained through life with her pardoning Lord; but the added words “in peace” turned the wormwood into honey — there was now peace for her who had been so long hunted and harried by her sins. Rising from the feet she had washed with tears, she went forth to keep her future footsteps such as those of a believing, and therefore saved, woman ought to be.

We like a motto to begin the year with, and it has been useful to some spirits to choose a motto with which to enter on a new course of life. We climb the hill of enterprise, or dare the wave of trial, with an inspiring word upon our lip. To certain young men a word has come in life's early morning, wet with the dew of heaven and that word of their day-dawn has kept with them. The echoes of that life-evoking word have followed them long after it was spoken; amid strange scenes it has come to them like a voice from the unseen. It has whispered to them within the curtains of their dying bed: it has murmured consolation amid Jordan's swelling waves. That first word of joy, and peace from Jesus with which they began the new life came to them over again just as they were melting away into the invisible land; so they began the service of the Redeemer, and so he declared that their work was finished. Perhaps that love-note will be their welcome at the very gates of heaven.

Our Lord, in the instance before us, sent a penitent away from the chill atmosphere of self-righteous cavilling, and thus relieved her of a controversy for which she was not fitted; but I see more than that in this

benediction. It looks to me as if our divine Master, when he found this poor sinner so full of love to him that she washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, having by a parable explained to the Pharisee the reason for the greatness of her love, then said to her, “Go in peace” — meaning that word not only to be cheering for the necessary purpose of the moment, but to go with her, and to attend her all the rest of her life, until, when she came into the dark valley, she should fear no evil, for she would still hear that sweet voice saying, “Go in peace.” What music to have heard! What music still to hear!

Now, I would to God that the word which I shall speak at this time might be honored of the Lord to serve that sacred purpose to some here present. May it be a life-word to certain of you! May it be to others of us who have long known the Savior a revival of our rest, and may we get such a draught of peace from Jesus that we may never thirst again! The lips of our divine Lord are a well-spring of delight; each word is a chalice brimmed with sweetness. Imbibing this, we shall go our way henceforth even to our journey’s end, after the manner of the hymn which we sang just now: —

*“Calm in the hour of buoyant health,  
Calm in my hour of pain;  
Calm in my poverty or wealth,  
Calm in my loss or gain;  
“Calm me, my God, and keep me calm,  
Soft resting on thy breast;  
Soothe me with holy hymn and psalm,  
And bid my spirit rest.”*

Oh, that our life may be as a sea of glass! May the sacred circle of our fellowship be within the golden line of the peace of God! Thou who didst bid us come to thee and rest, now bid us “go in peace.”

I am going to say a little in my opening upon a delightful assurance which constituted the reason why the woman went in peace: “Thy faith hath saved thee”; or, as in the forty-eighth verse, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” Upon the strength of the assurance that she was saved, she might safely go in peace. When we have talked a little upon that subject, we will then come to a considerate precept: the Savior directed her, in the moment of trial, to “go in peace.” There was an assurance for her comfort, and a precept for her guidance.

**I.** First, then, consider A DELIGHTFUL ASSURANCE. The ground upon which the penitent woman might go in peace was that she had been saved. The Savior assured her: "Thy faith hath saved thee."

She was not saved otherwise than we are saved; but she received the common salvation by like precious faith. The way of salvation to her was faith in Christ: there is the same way for us, but she had what some of you, no doubt, would greatly like to have: she had an assurance that she was saved, from the Lord's own mouth. I think I hear some saying, "I should go in peace, I am sure, if the Lord Jesus would but appear to me, and speak and say with his own lips, 'Thy faith hath saved thee'." It is natural that you should think so; it must have been rapture to receive a benediction from the mouth of our King, our Savior. Yet, dear friends, we must not hang our confidence upon a mere circumstance. For a mere circumstance it is, whether Christ shall literally stand before you in the flesh, and say, "Thy faith hath saved thee," or whether he shall say it to you by the infallible record of his own Word. It does not make much difference as to my faith in what my father says to me, whether I meet the venerable man in the morning in my garden, and there hear his voice, or whether I get a letter by post in his handwriting, and he says to me upon that paper just what he would have said if I had met him face to face. I do not require him always to come up the hill to my house to tell me everything that he has to say: I should think myself an idiot if I did. If I were to say, "My dear father, you have assured me of your love by letter; but somehow, I cannot credit it unless you come and look me in the face, and take my hand, and assure me of your good will," surely, he would say to me, "My dear son, what ails you? You must be out of your mind. I never knew you to be so childish before: my handwriting has always been enough. I can hardly think you mean it when you say that you cannot credit me unless I stand manifest before your eyes, and with your ears you hear me speak." Now, what I would not do to my earthly father, I certainly would not do to my heavenly Savior. I am perfectly satisfied myself to believe what he writes to me; and if it be so written in his Book, it seems to me to be quite as true and sure as if he had actually come from heaven, and had talked with me, or had appeared to me in the visions of the night. Is not this the reasoning of common-sense? Do you not at once agree with me?



“Well,” you say, “we go with you there, dear sir; but, then he spoke that word to her personally. We should never have any more doubts, but should go in peace, if he said that word of assurance to us. You see, it is not merely that Jesus himself spoke, and said, ‘Thy faith hath made thee whole,’ but he looked that way; he turned towards her, and she knew that he referred to her. There was no mistaking to whom the assurance was given. There were other people in the room, but he did not say it to Simon; he did not say it to Peter; he did not say it to James and John. She knew by the look of him that he meant it for her, and for her alone, for she was the only person to go, and consequently the only one to ‘go in peace.’ Our Lord put it in the singular number, and said. ‘Thy faith hath saved thee.’ I want it to come home just so to me.” Yes, but I think that this is a little unreasonable, too; is it not? Because if my father (to carry on my figure) were to speak to me, and to my brothers and to my sisters, and were to say, “Dear children, I have loving thoughts concerning you, and I have laid up in store for your needs,” I do not think that I should say to him by-and-by, “Now, father, do you know that I did not believe you, or derive any pleasure from what you said, because you spoke to others beside myself? I did not think your statement of love could be true, because you included my brothers and my sisters. You did not use the singular, but you put it in the plural; and you spoke to all my brothers and sisters, as well as to myself; and therefore I felt that I could not take any comfort out of your tender assurances.” I should be a most unreasonable kind of body if I were to talk in that way; and my father would begin to think that his son was qualifying for a lunatic asylum. If he did not attribute it to unkindness of heart, he certainly would ascribe it to imbecility of head. Why, surely, surely, if my father says the same to each one of his children as he says to me, his words are all the more likely to be true, instead of being less worthy of belief; and therefore I derive comfort from his promises of love being put in the plural rather than in the singular. Surely, it should not be less easy to believe that God would deal graciously with me in company with thousands of others than that he should pursue a solitary plan with me as the lone object of his love. Is it not so?

“Ah, yes!” says one, “but you have not hit on it yet. I want to know that I am one that is in that plural, and I want to know that I really am one of those to whom Jesus speaks in his Word.” My anxious friend, you may

know it; and you may know it most certainly. It is written, “He that believeth on him hath everlasting life.” It need never be a question whether you believe in him or not; if you trust him, that is the gist of the matter. You can readily ascertain whether you do really trust him, or do not trust him. If you do trust him, you are his, and every promise of his covenant is made to you. You have faith, and when the Lord lays it down as a general statement that faith saves — the statement is applicable to all the world, in every place, and in all time, until the present age shall end, and men shall have passed into the fixed state of retribution, where no gospel faith is preached. “Thy faith hath saved thee”: if thou hast faith at all — if thou believest that Jesus is the Christ — thou art born of God. If thou canst say to the Lord Jesus,

*“All my trust on thee is stayed,  
All my help from thee I bring,”*

that is faith, and Jesus testifies, “Thy faith hath saved thee.” Now, because the infallible Witness says this of all who have faith, I do not think you ought to doubt it. It is true you do not hear his voice, because he says it rather by the written Word than by word of mouth; but surely this does not affect your faith. We believe a true man whether he writes or speaks: indeed, if there be any choice, we prefer that which he has deliberately put upon paper; for this remains when the sound of the voice is clean gone. It is most profitable for us that we should read our Lord’s declaration over and over again, and put it in all sorts of shapes, and see how it remains evermore faithful and true. It is more assuring to you to find it in the volume of the Book than it would be if the Savior met you tonight, and said to you, “Thy sins are forgiven thee. Thy faith hath saved thee.” The record excels the voice. “No,” say you, “I cannot see that.” Well now, Peter was with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, and nothing could shake Peter’s conviction that he had been there in the midst of that heavenly glory; and yet, for all that, Peter says, concerning the inspired Word, “We have a more sure Word of testimony.” He felt that even the memory of that vision, which he had assuredly seen, did not always yield to him so much assurance as did the abidingly inspired Word of God. You ought to feel the same. If I were conscious tonight that, at some period of my life, I had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken to me, the very spot of ground on which it occurred would be exceedingly dear

and sacred to my spirit; but I am certain that when I grew depressed, when darkness rushed over my soul, as it does sometimes, I should be sure to say to myself, "You never saw anything of the kind. It was a delusion, a figment of imagination, a delirium, and nothing more." But, beloved, when I get to this Book, and see before me the sacred lines, I know that I am not deluded. There it stands, "God so loved the world, that he gave his Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I am sure about that, and I am sure that I believe, and therefore I am sure that I am saved. I like to put my finger right down on the passage, and then say, "Lord, I know thou canst not lie. I have never had a question about this being thy Book. Whatever other doubts have plagued me, this has not. Thou hast so spoken it home to my soul, that I am as assured that this is thy Book as I am assured of my own existence; and, hence, thou has done better for the removal of my doubts, and for the assurance of my soul's eternal salvation, by putting thy promise in the Book, than if thou hadst thyself personally appeared to me, and spoken with thine own voice." O my hearer, the written Word is most sure! If thou believest, thou art saved as surely as thou art alive. If thou believest, heaven and earth may pass away, but the Word of the Lord shall stand fast for thee. "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." He has eternal life in present possession. Our Lord has put it thus: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." "He that with his heart believeth, and with his mouth maketh confession of him, shall be saved." There are no "ifs" or "buts" about these words of promise. Salvation is put as a present thing, and as an abiding thing, but in every case as a certain thing; and why should we be worried and worn about the matter? It is so, and let us take the comfort of the fact. We must either throw away this Book by beginning to talk about "degrees of inspiration" and all that foul rubbish, or else we are logically bound to be sure of our hope, and to rejoice in it. I warrant thee, O my hearer, that as long as thou standest fast by the belief that this is a sure Word of testimony, thou wilt know that thou art saved! If this Book be true, every believer in Jesus is as safe as Jesus himself. To say, "I believe, but I am afraid I am not saved," is to say, only in a roundabout way, that you do not believe at all; for, if you believe, then you believe that God speaks the truth; and this is the testimony, that "God hath given us eternal life, and that life is in his Son." This is the testimony of the great Father, and the testimony of the eternal Spirit; and

we must not dare to doubt it. You may doubt whether you believe or not; but given that you do really and unfeignedly put your trust in the Lord Jesus, then, as effect follows cause, it is certain that the cause of faith will be followed by its sure effect — salvation. “Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace.” Do not worry any longer: go in peace. Have done with questioning; end debate; go in peace. Go about your business, for the work of salvation is done. You are a saved soul: go and rejoice in finished salvation, and ask no more questions. “Wherefore criest thou unto me?” said God to Moses, “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.” Wherefore do you question and doubt any longer? Go forward to enjoy what God has prepared for you; and as you are saved and justified in Christ, now seek sanctification, and all the other blessings of the covenant of grace which lie before you in Christ Jesus your Lord. The promise is sure; be sure that it is so, and in perfect rest of soul enjoy the good which God provides you.

I think I have thus brought out as clearly as I can that delightful assurance which is the ground of the command, “Go in peace.”

**II.** We come, secondly, to hearken to A CONSIDERATE PRECEPT. Our Lord, with wise tenderness, dismissed the beloved object of his pardoning love, and bade her “Go in peace.” May the Holy Spirit bless this to us!

This precept divides itself into two parts. There is, first, “Go,” and then there is “Go in peace.”

There is “go.” Now, in “go” there are two things: to go from and to go to. Where was she to go from? First, she was to go from these quibblers. Simon and the Pharisees are as full of objections as a swarm of bees is full of stings. They say in their hearts one to another, “Who is this that forgiveth sins also?” They have even dared to question the character of the perfect One, and have hinted a suspicion of his purity for allowing such a woman to come so near him, and to wash his feet with her tears. Therefore the Savior says to her, “Go.” This was not a happy place for a child-like love to linger in. Her soul would have been among lions. Jesus seems to say, “Do not stay to be tormented by these cavillers. Thy faith hath saved thee; go. You have gained a great blessing; go home with it. Let these people argue with each other; you have a rich prize, take it out of the reach of these pirates.”

Oftentimes, I believe that the child of God would find it to be his greatest wisdom, whenever he is in company that begins to assail his Lord, or to denounce his faith, just to go about his business, and let the scoffers have their scoffing to themselves. Some of us have thought it our miserable duty to read certain books that have been brought out against the truth, that we might be able to answer them; but it is a perilous calling. The Lord have mercy upon us when we have to go down into these sewers; for the process is not healthy!

“Oh,” says a man, “but you must prove all things!” Yes, so I will; but if one should set a joint of meat on his table, and it smelt rather high, I would cut a slice and if I put one bit of it in my mouth, and found it far gone, I should not feel it necessary to eat the whole round of beef to test its sweetness. Some people seem to think that they must read a bad book through; and they must go and hear a bad preacher often before they can be sure of his quality. Why, you can judge many teachings in five minutes! You say to yourself, “No, sir, no, no, no! this is good meat — for dogs. Let them have it, but it is not good meat for me, and I do not intend to poison myself with it.” The Savior does not tell the woman, “Stop, now, and hear what Simon has got to say. Dear good woman, you have been washing my feet with tears and here is a highly intelligent gentleman, a Pharisee, who has a very learned prelection to deliver; give him a fair hearing. You have to prove all things; therefore, stop and hear him. And here are more gentlemen who object to my pardoning your sins; and their objections are fetched from deep veins of thought. Listen to them, and then I will meet their questions, and quiet your mind.” No; the Savior says, “Go, go, go in peace. You have peace: do not stop till you lose it. You have your comfort and joy: refuse to be robbed of them.” Why, if you were in a room, and you saw a certain number of gentlemen of a suspicious character, and you had your watch with you, you would not feel it necessary to stop and see whether they were able to extract your watch from you, but you would say to yourself, “No; I am best out of this company.” We are safest out of the society of those whose great object it is to rob us of our faith. “Thy faith hath saved thee. Go home. Leave them. Go in peace.”

I think that he meant, besides going away from the men, “Go away from the publicity into which you have unwillingly stepped.” If our Savior had

been like some excellent people of the present day, he would have said, "Stand before all these men, and tell your experience. I shall require you to be at half-a-dozen meetings this week, and you must speak at every one of them." A splendid woman, was she not, who washed the Savior's feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head? She might have exhibited her eyes and her hair, and told their gracious story. Who can tell but several would have been impressed by the narrative? The Savior said to the woman — so excitable, for she was all that, as well as grateful — "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace." As much as to say, "There are certain of your own sex that you can speak to. You will find some poor fallen woman to whom you can quietly tell of my pardoning grace. But yours is a case in which the very beauty of your character will lie in the quietude of your future life. 'Thy faith hath saved thee.' That is enough for thee. Thou hast come upon the stage of action by that splendid act of thy love; but do not acquire the habit of winning publicity. Do not aspire to display thyself in a bold and heroic attitude, but go in peace." He almost seems to say, "Subside now into thy family. Take thy place with the rest of thy sisters. Adorn by thy future purity my doctrine, and let all men see what a change has been wrought in thee; for, mayhap, that very weakness of thine, which made thee what thou wast as a sinner, may put thee in danger even as a saint. Therefore I do not ask thee to tarry here, and join my disciples, and follow me publicly through the streets, but thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace."

I think that the Master taught a great deal of wisdom here, which some of those who are leaders in the church of God would do well to copy. Yea, I think that I shall go a little further, and say, that I think the Savior there and then dismissed her from that high ministry which, for once in her life, she had carried out. She washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. It was the action of a love which had risen to a passion. It was an action such as shall be told for a memorial of her everywhere; and we may well imitate her penitence, and her heroic courage, as well as her love to Christ. But, at the same time, we cannot always be doing heroic actions: life is mainly made up of common deeds. It would not be possible to be always washing feet with tears, nor to be always unbraiding tresses to use them as a towel. The difficulty with some people is that they are always wanting to practice the sublime. Alas! they

often fail by just one step, and become ridiculous. They are always straining after effect; and, hearing of what has been done once, by one choice person, they must do it themselves, and they must keep on doing it. O my sister! there may come a time when you will have to speak for Christ, and speak openly before many; but tomorrow you had better go home, and see to the children, and make home happy for your husband. You will glorify Christ by darning stockings, and mending the socks of the little ones, quite as surely as by washing his feet with tears. You make a great mistake if you have not a piety which will take you into domestic life — which will help you to make the common drudgery of life a divine service. We want men that can serve God with the axe and plane, or behind a counter, or by driving a quill. These are the men we want; but there are many that crave to vault at once into a conspicuous place, and perform an astounding deed. Having done it once, they become unsettled all the rest of their lives; and do not seem as if they ever could take to plainly keeping the ten commandments, and walking in the steps of Jesus. I wish that those who must flash and blaze would hear the Lord Jesus say to them, “Go in peace.” I mean any of you who really did distinguish yourselves on one occasion, and deserved much praise from your Christian friends. I fear lest you should pine for unusual and even undesirable forms of service and become useless in the ordinary course of life. Now, do not be spoiled for life by having been allowed in one unusual deed, but hear the Master say, “Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace. Serve me in the daily avocations of life, and bring glory to my name at home. Go from the strain of publicity to the gentler pressures of family duty.”

Do you not think that he even meant that she was now to cease from that singular fellowship with him that she had enjoyed? She had been very close to him; but she was, perhaps, never to be quite so near to him again. In spirit she should be; but certainly not physically. It happens that those who take to the contemplative life — and there is no life higher than that — are apt to think that they must forget the practical life. But it must not be so. We must do that which the Master bids us do, as well as sit at his feet. I am tempted to tell a story which most of you must know concerning the famous man of God, who, in his cell, thought he saw the Lord Jesus, and under that persuasion he worshipped with rapt delight. But just then the bell at the convent-gate rang, and it was his turn to stand

at the door, and deal out bread to the hungry. There was a little battle in his mind as to which he should do — tarry with his Lord, or go to hand out bread to the poor mendicants. At last, he felt that he must do his duty even at the cost of the highest spiritual bliss. He went and distributed the bread, and when he came back, to his great delight, the vision was still there, and a voice said to him, “If thou hadst stayed, I would have gone; but as thou hast gone, I have therefore stayed still to commune with thee.” The path of duty must be followed, and no spiritual enjoyment can excuse us from it. Never offer one duty to God stained with the blood of another. Balance your duties, and let not one press out another. “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” Do not think that thou needest to be all day long at thy Bible, or all the evening at thy prayer. There is a time for everything. Let every holy work have its place, that thy life may be a fair mosaic of brilliant colours, all set according to the divine pattern, to make up a perfect character. “Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace, and do the next thing, and the next, without weariness.”

That leads me to speak of what she was to go to. It seems to me that the Savior said, “Now go home. You have been a fallen woman: home is the place for you. Go home to your mother and father, or other relatives. Seek a home. Be domesticated. Attend to your own work. Whatever your place is, go to it. Leaving daily duty was the source of your temptation; return to walks of usefulness, and habits of order, and this will be your safety. You will be less likely to be led away if you have to work to occupy head, and heart, and hands.”

Did he not mean, “Go now to your ordinary life-trial”? Do you think yourself a very peculiar person — a sort of saint, that has to float in the air, or live upon roses? Do not fancy such a thing. I have heard of the Chinese, that they sell shoes with which you can walk on the clouds; and I believe that some people must have bought a pair of these remarkable articles; for their lives are spent in cloudland, walking as in a dream, upon high stilts of fond imaginations. Do not think great things of yourself. You are but a commonplace man or woman. Do such duty as your fellow-Christians do, and do not think yourself a superior person. The worst people in the world to work with are superior people. Those are of no importance who think they are of great importance. Poor creature! it is not the grace of God which turns your brain, but your own silly conceit.



Go forth to your further service: “Go in peace. There are some to whom you can tell of my love. Oh, how you will tell it! You that have washed my feet with your tears, go and shower those tears over fallen ones like yourself. Go, use those eyes, that you may look my love right into their hearts as you are speaking to them. Go all your life in peace, and do for me all that I shall put in your way to do for me.” That is what I think our Lord meant. Brethren, do not think of sitting here to enjoy yourselves; but go off, and glorify your Redeemer’s name. Go!

But then here is the point of it: he said “Go in peace.” O my brethren, I desire that all of us who love the Lord may go henceforth all the rest of our life journey in peace. May pardoning love put us at peace concerning all our sins! O pardoned one, thou lovest much, for thou hast had much forgiven; let thy thoughts all run to love, and none to fear. Fret not about the past — the dark, dishonorable past. The hand that was pierced has blotted it all out. The great Lord has frankly forgiven thee all thy debt. Let not that disturb thee any longer. Go in peace. What a rest it is to be rid of the burden of sin, and to know of a certainty, from the teaching of God’s own word, that your sins are forgiven you! This is peace which passeth all understanding.

Our Lord meant, next, “Go in peace” in reference to all the criticisms of all these people who have looked at you. Do not mind them. Do not trouble about them. What have they to do with you? It is enough for a servant if his master accepts him: he need not mind what others have to say about his service. Thy faith hath saved thee. Forget all the unkind things they have said, and do not trouble thy heart about the cruel speeches they may yet make. Go in peace, and be under no alarm as to upbraiding tongues.

And then I think he meant, “Go in peace about what thou hast done.” I know the need of a word like that. I have preached the gospel: I have thrown my whole soul into it; and after it is all over, I have felt bound to chide myself that I did not do much better as to style, or spirit, or length, or some other matter. Oh, but if the Master accepts it, one may go in peace about it! This woman had done a very extraordinary thing in washing Christ’s feet with tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head; and when she got away, she might have said to herself, “I wonder that I was so bold. Was I not immodestly conspicuous? How could I have done it? How must I have looked when I was bathing his feet? For me, too

— such a sinner as I am — for me to have done it to the blessed and holy One! I fear he must have felt vexed at my rudeness!” Have you not sometimes done a brave thing for Christ, and then afterwards felt just like that? “I was a bold minx,” say you, “after all, to push myself so forward.” The good young man, who has just preached for the first time, says, “Well, I got through it this time, but I will never attempt it again, for I am sure that I am not fit for such holy work.” So the Master says to this woman, “Go in peace. I have accepted thee and thy loving service. Do not trouble about what thou hast done. It is all sweet to me, and has a rich perfume of thy great love. Never fret about what you have done. You have done the right thing. Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace.” I want us to have just that kind of peace — peace about what we have done for our Lord, even as we have peace about sin forgiven, and peace about human criticisms.

“Go in peace.” Oh, to possess, from this time forth, a holy quiet! We are so apt to grow fretful. I know some good brethren who have a swollen vein of suspicion about them, that bleeds every now and then, and pains them greatly, and alarms other people. I know some sisters: they are very good, but unreasonably fearful. They say that they are “nervous.” Perhaps that is the fact; and so I will say no more. But, oh, that we could get them cured of this disease of the nerves! I would they could be quieted! I admire the members of the Society of Friends for this virtue beyond almost any other which they exhibit: they seem to be so steady, self-contained, and equable. They are a little slow, perhaps; but then they are very sure, and firm, and steadfast, and calm. We are some of us too much in a hurry to go fast. If we were a little slower, we should be quicker. If we left our affairs more entirely with God, our peace might be like a river.

Yes, I would to God, dear friends, that we might feel henceforth a constant joy. Why not? Nothing ought to trouble us, for we know that all things work together for good. If we live by faith, nothing can trouble us; for between here and heaven we shall keep company with thee, thou Blessed One! And if the way thou takest be rough, the fact of thy being with us shall make it smooth to us. We will travel merrily with this as our march-music — “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”

Still, to come back to where I began, I dare say that the good woman thought that she would like to speak a word for the Lord. When they said

that he could not forgive sin, would not she have liked to say, "But he did forgive my sin, and he changed my nature. How dare you speak thus?" But the Savior said, "Go." She was not called to contend. Thank God every child of God is not called to fight with the adversary: those of us who are men of war from our youth up take no pleasure in strife. We wish that, like this holy woman, we could be exempt from this warfare. She might well rejoice in her escape from the sacred conscription. Many a cuff and blow she thus avoided; and as her Captain sent her off the field, she might go home right happily.

She might have lost the blessed frame of mind in which she then was, and this would have been a real injury to her. She was sweetly wrapped up in love, and there her Lord would have her abide. He seems to say, "You are too precious to be battered and bruised in battle. Go — go in peace. Dear soul, you are so full of love to me that I do not want you to be worried with fighting, and contending, and controverting. Go in peace." She would have done no good, I dare say, if she had ventured into a fray for which she was so unfitted. If she had spoken, she would have said something which the cruel Pharisees would have turned into a jest. So he said to her, "Go in peace." Why should her feebleness give them an occasion for unholy triumph? All true hearts are not fit for fight. Besides, she had her Lord to be her Advocate, and there was no need for her to speak. Therefore he said, "I can manage them without your presence. Go in peace." When we may believingly leave a difficulty with our Lord, it is faith's duty to go home quietly. No doubt, by going in peace, she would be doing greater service than she would by using her tongue upon these ungodly men. A quiet, happy life is often the noblest witness that we can bear for Christ. Therefore I say to everyone who loves the Lord, there are times when he will say to us, "Do not enter into any of this conflict, and turmoil, and muddle. Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace."

The last word I have to say is this. There are many poor souls who talk about coming to Christ, who are not yet saved; and they are always hearing about faith, and thinking of it, and yet they never do, in very truth, believe. Now, do not hear nor debate any more about faith, but believe. Trust Jesus Christ, and think no more about your own trusting. Thou shalt think of it as a thing done, I mean, but not as a thing to be done. God

help thee now to believe in Jesus, and so pass over the bridge of belief to the golden shore of Jesus himself!

Well, but I notice some say that they believe, but it is not believing, because if it were believing, they would “go in peace.” A person comes to the bank with a cheque. He believes it to be honestly his, and the signature to be correct. He puts it down on the counter, and the clerk puts out the money. But see! The man does not take it! He stands and loaf about; and the clerk looks at him, and wonders what he is at. At last, when the person has been there long enough to wear the good man’s patience out, the clerk says, “Did you bring that cheque to have the money?” “Yes, I handed it in.” “Well, then, why do you not take the money, and go about your business?” If he is a sensible man, he delays no longer; nay, he would not have delayed so long. He takes the money, and departs in peace. Now, dear soul, if thou hast a promise from God — “He that believeth is not condemned,” or “he that believeth hath everlasting life” — dost thou believe? Then take the blessing, and go about thy business. Do not keep on saying, “Perhaps it is so,” and “Perhaps it is not so.” Do you believe that God speaks the truth? If so, then take the promised blessing and enjoy it; for thou art a saved man. “But I have been going to a place of worship for years, and I have been believing in a sort of a way; but I have never dared to say that I was saved.” Then you are acting the part of an unbeliever. If you do not know that you are saved, how dare you go to sleep tonight? How should a man dare to eat his meals, and go about his business, and yet say, “I do not know whether I am saved or not?” Thou mayest know it, and thou oughtest to know it. If you believe, you are saved: if you doubt that fact, you are rather an unbeliever than a believer. Take up your money, and go home. “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Trust Jesus! Thy faith has saved thee. Go in peace.

The Lord help you truly to believe, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

### **PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —**

 **ROMANS 8:15 - 39.**

**HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 719, 726, 702.**

# THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

## SERMON NO. 2195

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, AUGUST 21ST, 1890,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” — ~~SUB~~ Hebrews 11:8.

THE part of the text to which I shall call your attention lies in these words, “By faith Abraham obeyed.” Obedience — what a blessing it would be if we were all trained to it by the Holy Spirit! How fully should we be restored if we were perfect in it! If all the world would obey the Lord, what a heaven on earth there would be! Perfect obedience to God would mean love among men, justice to all classes, and peace in every land. Our will brings envy, malice, war; but the Lord’s will would bring us love, joy, rest, bliss. Obedience — let us pray for it for ourselves and others!

*“Is there a heart that will not bend  
To thy divine control?  
Descend, O sovereign love, descend,  
And melt that stubborn soul!”*

Surely, though we have had to mourn our disobedience with many tears and sighs, we now find joy in yielding ourselves as servants of the Lord: our deepest desire is to do the Lord’s will in all things. Oh, for obedience! It has been supposed by many ill-instructed people that the doctrine of justification by faith is opposed to the teaching of good works, or obedience. There is no truth in the supposition. We preach the obedience of faith. Faith is the fountain, the foundation, and the fosterer of obedience. Men obey not Cod till they believe him. We preach faith in order that men may be brought to obedience. To disbelieve is to disobey. One of the first signs of practical obedience is found in the obedience of the mind, the understanding, and the heart; and this is expressed in believing the teaching of Christ, trusting to his work, and resting in his

salvation. Faith is the morning star of obedience. If we would work the work of God, we must believe on Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Brethren, we do not give a secondary place to obedience, as some suppose. We look upon the obedience of the heart to the will of God as salvation. The attainment of perfect obedience would mean perfect salvation. We regard sanctification, or obedience, as the great design for which the Savior died. He shed his blood that he might cleanse us from dead works, and purify unto himself a people zealous for good works. It is for this that we were chosen: we are “elect unto holiness.” We know nothing of election to continue in sin. It is for this that we have been called: we are “called to be saints.” Obedience is the grand object of the work of grace in the hearts of those who are chosen and called: they are to become obedient children, conformed to the image of the Elder Brother, with whom the Father is well pleased.

The obedience that comes of faith is of a noble sort. The obedience of a slave ranks very little higher than the obedience of a well-trained horse or dog, for it is tuned to the crack of the whip. Obedience which is not cheerfully rendered is not the obedience of the heart, and consequently is of little worth before God. If the man obeys because he has no opportunity of doing otherwise, and if, were he free, he would at once become a rebel — there is nothing in his obedience. The obedience of faith springs from a principle within, and not from compulsion without. It is sustained by the mind’s soberest reasoning and the heart’s warmest passion. The man reasons with himself that he ought to obey his Redeemer, his Father, his God; and, at the same time, the love of Christ constrains him so to do, and thus what argument suggests affection performs. A sense of great obligation, an apprehension of the fitness of obedience, and spiritual renewal of heart, work an obedience which becomes essential to the sanctified soul. Hence, it is not relaxed in the time of temptation, nor destroyed in the hour of losses and sufferings. Life has no trial which can turn the gracious soul from its passion for obedience; and death itself doth but enable it to render an obedience which shall be as blissful as it will be complete. Yes, this is a chief ingredient of heaven — that we shall see the face of our Lord, and serve him day and night in his temple. Meanwhile, the more fully we obey at this present, the nearer we

shall be to his temple-gate. May the Holy Spirit work in us, so that, by faith — like Abraham — we may obey !

I preach to you, at this time, obedience — absolute obedience to the Lord God; but I preach the obedience of a child, not the obedience of a slave; the obedience of love, not of terror; the obedience of faith, not of dread. I shall urge you, as God shall help me, in order that you may come at this obedience, that you should seek after stronger faith — “For by faith Abraham obeyed.” In every case where the father of the faithful obeyed, it was the result of his faith; and in every case in which you and I shall render true obedience, it will be the product of our faith. Obedience, such as God can accept, never cometh out of a heart which thinks God a liar; but is wrought in us by the Spirit of the Lord, through our believing in the truth, and love, and grace of our God in Christ Jesus. If any of you are now disobedient, or have been so, the road to a better state of things is trust in God. You cannot hope to render obedience by the more forcing of conduct into a certain groove, or by a personal, unaided effort of the resolution. There is a free-grace road to obedience, and that is receiving, by faith, the Lord Jesus, who is the gift of God, and is made of God unto us sanctification. We accept the Lord Jesus by faith, and he teaches us obedience, and creates it in us. The more of faith in him you have, the more of obedience to him will you manifest. I was about to say that that obedience naturally flows out of faith, and I should not have spoken amiss, for as a man believeth so is he, and in proportion to the strength and purity of his faith in God, as he is revealed in Christ Jesus, will be the holy obedience of his life.

That our meditation may be profitable, we will first think a little of the kind of faith which produces obedience; and then, secondly, we will treat of the kind of obedience which faith produces; and then we will advance another step, and consider the kind of life which comes out of this faith and obedience.

I will be as brief as I can upon each point. Let us look up to the Holy Ghost for his gracious illumination.

**I.** First consider THE KIND OF FAITH WHICH PRODUCES OBEDIENCE.

It is, manifestly, faith in God as having the right to command our obedience. Beloved in the Lord, you know that he is Sovereign, and that his will is law. You feel that God, your Maker, your Preserver, your Redeemer, and your Father, should have your unswerving service. We unite, also, in confessing that we are not our own, we are bought with a price. The Lord our God has a right to us which we would not wish to question. He has a greater claim upon our ardent service than he has upon the services of angels; for, while they were created as we have been, yet they have never been redeemed by precious blood. Our glorious Incarnate God has an unquestioned right to every breath we breathe, to every thought we think, to every moment of our lives, and to every capacity of our being. We believe in Jehovah as rightful Lawgiver, and as most fitly our Ruler. This loyalty of our mind is based on faith, and is a chief prompter to obedience. Cultivate always this feeling. The Lord is our Father, but he is, “our Father which art in heaven.” He draws near to us in condescension; but it is condescension, and we must not presume to think of him as though he were such a one as ourselves. There is a holy familiarity with God which cannot be too much enjoyed; but there is a flippant familiarity with God which cannot be too much abhorred. The Lord is King; his will is not to be questioned; his every word is law. Let us never question his sovereign right to decree what he pleases, and to fulfill the decree; to command what he pleases, and to punish every shortcoming. Because we have faith in God as Lord of all, we gladly pay him our homage, and desire in all things to say: “Thy will be done in earth, as it is done in heaven.”

Next, we must have faith in the rightness of all that God says or does. I hope, beloved, you do not think of God’s sovereignty as tyranny, or imagine that he ever could or would will anything but that which is right. Neither will we admit into our minds a suspicion of the incorrectness of the Word of God in any matter whatever, as though the Lord himself could err. We will not have it that God, in his Holy Book, makes mistakes about matters of history, or of science, any more than he does upon the great truths of salvation. If the Lord be God, he must be infallible; and if he can be described as in error in the little respects of human history and science, he cannot be trusted in the greater matters. My brethren, Jehovah never errs in deed, or in word; and when you find his law written either in the



ten commandments, or anywhere else, you believe that there is not a precept too many, or too few. Whatever may be the precepts of the law, or of the gospel, they are pure and holy altogether. The words of the Lord are like fine gold, pure, precious, and weighty — not one of them may be neglected. We hear people talk about “minor points,” and so on; but we must not consider any word of our God as a minor thing, if by that expression is implied that it is of small importance. We must accept every single word of precept, or prohibition, or instruction, as being what it ought to be, and neither to be diminished nor increased. We should not reason about the command of God as though it might be set aside or amended. He bids: we obey. May we enter into that true spirit of obedience which is the unshaken belief that the Lord is right! Nothing short of this is the obedience of the inner man — the obedience which the Lord desires.

Furthermore, we must have faith in the Lord’s call upon us to obey. Abraham went out from his father’s house because he felt that, whatever God said to others, he had spoken to him, and said, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house.” Whatever the Lord may have said to the Chald’ans, or to other families in Ur, Abraham was not so much concerned with that as with the special word of command which the Lord had sent to his own soul. Oh, that we were most of all earnest to render personal obedience! It is very easy to offer unto God a sort of “other people’s obedience” — to fancy that we are serving God, when we are finding fault with our neighbors, and lamenting that they are not so godly as they ought to be. Truly, we cannot help seeing their shortcomings; but we should do well to be less observant of them than we are. Let us turn our magnifying glasses upon ourselves. It is not so much our business to be weeding other people’s gardens as to keep our own vineyard. To the Lord each one should cry, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” We, who are his chosen, redeemed from among men, called out from the rest of mankind, ought to feel that if no other ears hear the divine call, our ears must hear it; and if no other heart obeys, our soul rejoices to do so. We are bound with cords to the horns of the altar. The strongest ties of gratitude hold us to the service of Jesus: we must be obedient in life to him who, for our sakes, was obedient unto death. Our service to our Lord is freedom: we will to yield to his will. To delight him

is our delight. It is a blessed thing when the inmost nature yearns to obey God, when obedience grows into a habit, and becomes the very element in which the spirit breathes. Surely it should be so with every one of the blood-washed children of the Most High, and their lives will prove that it is so. Others are bound to obey, but we should attend most to our own personal obligation, and set our own houses in order. Our obedience should begin at home, and it will find its hands full enough there.

Obedience arises out of a faith which is to us the paramount principle of action. The kind of faith which produces obedience is lord of the understanding, a royal faith. The true believer believes in God beyond all his belief in anything else, and everything else. He can say, "Let God be true, but every man a liar." His faith in God has become to him the crown of all his believings; the most assured of all his confidences. As gold is to the inferior metals, such is our trust in God to all our other trusts. To the genuine believer the eternal is as much above the temporal as the heavens are above the earth. The infinite rolls, like Noah's flood, over the tops of the hills of the present and the finite. To the believer, let a truth be tinctured with the glory of God, and he values it; but if God and eternity be not there, he will leave these trifles to those who choose them. You must have a paramount faith in God, or else the will of God will not be a paramount rule to you. Only a reigning faith will make us subject to its power, so as to be in all things obedient to the Lord. The chief thought in life with the true believer is, "How can I obey God?" His great anxiety is to do the will of God, or acceptably to suffer that will; and if he can obey, he will make no terms with God, and stand upon no reservations. He will pray, "Refine me from the dross of rebellion, and let the furnace be as fierce as thou wilt." His choice is neither wealth, nor ease, nor honor; but that he may glorify God in his body, and his spirit, which are the Lord's. Obedience has become as much his rule as self-will is the rule of others. His cry unto the Lord is, "By thy command I stay or go. Thy will is my will; thy pleasure is my pleasure; thy law is my love."

God grant us a supreme, over-mastering faith, for this is the kind of faith which we must have if we are to lead obedient lives! We must have faith in God's right to rule, faith in the rightness of his commands, faith in our personal obligation to obey, and faith that the command must be the paramount authority of our being. With this faith of God's elect, we shall

realize the object of our election — namely, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love.

Dear friend, have you this kind of faith? I will withdraw the question as directed to you, and I will ask it of myself: Have I that faith which leads me to obey my God? — for obedience, if it be of the kind we are speaking of, is faith in action — faith walking with God, or, shall I say, walking before the Lord in the land of the living? If we have a faith which is greedy in hearing, severe in judging, and rapid in self-congratulation, but not inclined to obedience, we have the faith of hypocrites. If our faith enables us to set up as patterns of sound doctrine, and qualifies us to crack the heads of all who differ from us, and yet lacks the fruit of obedience, it will leave us among the “dogs” who are “without.” The faith that makes us obey is alone the faith which marks the children of God. It is better to have the faith that obeys than the faith which moves mountains. I would sooner have the faith which obeys than the faith which heaps the altar of God with sacrifices, and perfumes his courts with incense. I would rather obey God than rule an empire; for, after all, the loftiest sovereignty a soul can inherit is to have dominion over self by rendering believing obedience to the Most High.

Thus much upon faith. “By faith Abraham obeyed;” and by faith only can you and I obey.

**II.** Let us consider, secondly, THE KIND OF OBEDIENCE WHICH FAITH PRODUCES. This I shall illustrate from the whole of the verse.

Genuine faith in God creates a prompt obedience. “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed.” There was an immediate response to the command. Delayed obedience is disobedience. I wish some Christians, who put off duty, would remember this. Continued delay of duty is a continuous sin. If I do not obey the divine command, I sin; and every moment that I continue in that condition, I repeat the sin. This is a serious matter. If a certain act is my duty at this hour, and I leave it undone, I have sinned; but it will be equally incumbent upon me during the next hour; and if I still refuse, I disobey again and so on till I do obey. Neglect of a standing command must grow very grievous if it be persisted in for years. In proportion as the conscience becomes callous upon the subject, the guilt

becomes the more provoking to the Lord. To refuse to do right is a great evil; but to continue in that refusal till conscience grows numb upon the matter is far worse. I remember a person coming to be baptised, who said that he had been a believer in the Lord Jesus for forty years; and that he had always seen the ordinance to be Scriptural. I felt grieved that he had so long been disobedient to a known duty, and I proposed to him that he should be baptised at once. It was in a village, and he said that there were no conveniences. I offered to go with him to the brook, and baptise him, but he said, "No; he that believeth shall not make haste." Here was one who had wilfully disobeyed his Lord, for as many years as the Israelites in the wilderness, upon a matter so easy of performance; and yet, after confessing his fault he was not willing to amend it, but perverted a passage of Scripture to excuse him in further delay. David says, "I made hast and delayed not to keep thy commandments." I give this case as typical illustration; there are a hundred spiritual, moral, domestic business, and religious duties, which men put off in the same manner as if they thought that any time would do for God, and he must take his turn with the rest. What would you say to your boy, if you bade him go upon an errand, and he answered you, "I will go to-morrow." Surely you would "morrow" him in a style which would abide upon his memory. Your tone would be sharp, and you would bid him go at once. If he, then, promised to run in an hour's time, would you call that obedience? It would be impudence. Obedience is for the present tense: it must be prompt, or it is nothing. Obedience respects the time of the command as much as any other part of it. To hesitate is to be disloyal. To halt and consider whether you will obey or not, is rebellion in the germ. If thou believest in the living God unto eternal life, thou wilt be quick to do thy Lord's bidding, even as a maid hearkens to her mistress. Thou wilt not be as the horse, which needs whip and spur; thy love will do more for thee than compulsion could do for slaves. Thou wilt have wings to thy heels to hasten thee along the way of obedience. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Next, obedience should be exact. Even Abraham's obedience failed somewhat in this at first; for he started at once from Ur of the Chaldees, but he only went as far as Haran, and there he stayed till his father died; and then the precept came to him again, and he set off for the land which the Lord had promised to show him. If any of you have only half obeyed,

I pray that you may take heed of this, and do all that the Lord commands, carefully endeavoring to keep back no part of the revenue of obedience.

Yet the error of the great patriarch was soon corrected, for we read that “Abraham, when he was called to go out . . . went out.” I have only omitted intermediate words, which do not alter the sense: and that is exactly how we should obey. That which the Lord commands we should do — just that, and not another thing of our own devising. How very curiously people try to give God something else instead of what he asks for! The Lord says, “My son, give me thine heart,” and they give him ceremonies. He asks of them obedience, and they give him will-worship. He asks faith, and love, and justice; and they offer ten thousand rivers of oil, and the fat of fed beasts. They will give all except the one thing which he will be pleased with: yet “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” If the Lord has given you true faith in himself, you will be anxious not so much to do a notable thing as to do exactly what God would have you to do. Mind your jots and tittles with the Lord’s precepts. Attention to little things is a fine feature in obedience: it lies much more as to its essence in the little things than in the great ones. Few dare rush into great crimes, and yet they will indulge in secret rebellion, for their heart is not right with God. Hence so many mar what they call obedience by forgetting that they serve a heart-searching, rein-trying God, who observes thoughts and motives. He would have us obey him with the heart, and that will lead us, not merely to regard a few pleasing commands, but to have respect unto all his will. Oh, for a tender conscience, which will not wilfully neglect, nor presumptuously transgress!

And next, mark well that Abraham rendered practical obedience. When the Lord commanded Abraham to quit his father’s house, he did not say that he would think it over; he did not discuss it pro and con, in an essay; he did not ask his father, Terah, and his neighbor to consider it; but, as he was called to go out, he went out. Alas! dear friends, we have so much talk, and so little obedience! The religion of mere brain and jaw does not amount to much. We want the religion of hands and feet. I remember a place in Yorkshire, years ago, where a good man said to me, “We have a real good minister.” I said, “I am glad to hear it.” “Yea,” he said; “‘ he is a fellow that preaches with his feet.” Well, now, that is a capital thing if a preacher

preaches with his feet by walking with God, and with his hands by working for God. He does well who glorifies God by where he goes, and by what he does; he will excel fifty others who only preach religion with their tongues. You, dear hearers, are not good hearers so long as you are only hearers; but when the heart is affected by the ear, and the hand follows the heart, then your faith is proved. That kind of obedience which comes of faith in God is real obedience, since it shows itself by its works.

Next, faith produces a far-seeing obedience. Note this. “‘Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance.’” How great a company would obey God if they were paid for it on the spot! They have “respect unto the recompense of the reward;” but they must have it in the palm of their hand. With them — “A bird in hand is better far, than two which in the bushes are.” They are told that there is heaven to be had, and they answer that, if heaven were to be had here, as an immediate freehold, they might look after it, but they cannot afford to wait. To inherit a country after this life is over is too like a fairy tale for their practical minds. Many there are who enquire, “Will religion pay? Is there anything to be made out of it? Shall I have to shut up my shop on Sundays? Must I alter my mode of dealing, and curtail my profits?” When they have totaled up the cost, and have taken all things into consideration, they come to the conclusion that obedience to God is a luxury which they can dispense with, at least until near the end of life. Those who practice the obedience of faith look for the reward hereafter, and set the greatest store by it. To their faith alone the profit is exceeding great. To take up the cross will be to carry a burden, but it will also be to find rest. They know the words, “No cross, no crown;” and they recognize the truth that, if there is no obedience here, there will be no reward hereafter. This needs a faith that has eyes which can see afar off, across the black torrent of death, and within the veil which parts us from the unseen. A man will not obey God unless he has learned to endure “as seeing him who is invisible.”

Yet, remember that the obedience which comes of true faith is often bound to be altogether unreckoning and implicit; for it is written, “He went out, not knowing whither he went.” God bade Abraham journey, and he moved his camp at once. Into the unknown land he made his way; through fertile regions, or across a wilderness; among friends or through the midst of foes,

he pursued his journey. He did not know where his way would take him, but he knew that the Lord had bidden him go. Even bad men will obey God when they think fit; but good men will obey when they know not what to think of it. It is not ours to judge the Lord's command, but to follow it. I am weary with hearing men saying, "Yea, we know that such a course would be right; but then the consequences might be painful: good men would be grieved, the cause would be weakened, and we ourselves should get into a world of trouble, and put our hands into a hornet's nest." There is not much need to preach caution nowadays: those who would run any risk for the truth's sake are few enough. Consciences, tender about the Lord's honor, have not been produced for the last few years in any great number. Prudent consideration of consequences is superabundant; but the spirit which obeys, and dares all things for Christ's sake — where is it? The Abrahams of to-day will not go out from their kindred; they will put up with anything sooner than risk their livelihoods. If they do go out, they must know where they are going, and how much is to be picked up in the new country. I am not pronouncing any judgement upon their conduct, I am merely pointing out the fact. Our Puritan forefathers reeked little of property or liberty when these stood in the way of conscience: they defied exile and danger sooner than give up a grain of truth; but their descendants prefer peace and worldly amusements, and pride themselves on "culture" rather than on heroic faith. The modern believer must have no mysteries, but must have everything planed down to a scientific standard. Abraham "went out, not knowing whither he went," but the moderns must have every information with regard to the way, and then they will not go. If they obey at all, it is because their own superior judgements incline that way; but to go forth, not knowing whither they go, and to go at all hazards, is not to their minds at all. They are so highly "cultured" that they prefer to be original, and map out their own way.

Brethren, having once discerned the voice of God, obey without question. If you have to stand alone and nobody will befriend you, stand alone and God will befriend you. If you should get the ill word of those you value most, bear it. What, after all, are ill words, or good words, as compared with the keeping of a clear conscience by walking in the way of the Lord? The line of truth is narrow as a razor's edge; and he needs to wear the golden sandals of the peace of God who shall keep to such a line. Through

divine grace may we, like Abraham, walk with our hand in the hand of the Lord, even where we cannot see our way!

The obedience which faith produces must be continuous. Having commenced the separated life, Abraham continued to dwell in tents, and sojourn in the land which was far from the place of his birth. His whole life may be thus summed up: "By faith Abraham obeyed." He believed, and, therefore, walked before the Lord in a perfect way. He even offered up his son Isaac. "Abraham's mistake," was it? Alas for those who dare to talk in that fashion! "By faith he obeyed," and to the end of his life he was never an original speculator, or inventor of ways for self-will; but a submissive servant of that great Lord, who deigned to call him "friend." May it be said of everyone here that by faith he obeyed! Do not cultivate doubt, or you will soon cultivate disobedience. Set this up as your standard, and henceforth be this the epitome of your life — "By faith he obeyed."

**III.** Just a moment or two upon the third point. Let us consider THE SORT OF LIFE WHICH WILL COME OF THIS FAITH AND OBEDIENCE.

It will be, in the first place, life without that great risk which else holds us in peril. A man runs a great risk When he steers himself. Rocks or no rocks, the peril lies in the helmsman. The believer is no longer the helmsman of his own vessel; he has taken a pilot on board. To believe in God, and to do his bidding, is a great escape from the hazards of personal weakness and folly. If we do as God commands, and do not seem to succeed, it is no fault of ours. Failure itself would be success as long as we did not fail to obey. If we passed through life unrecognised, or were only acknowledged by a sneer from the worldly-wise, and if this were regarded as a failure, it could be borne with equanimity as long as we knew that we had kept our faith towards God, and our obedience to him. Providence is God's business, obedience is ours. What comes out of our life's course must remain with the Lord; to obey is our sole concern. What harvest will come of our sowing we must leave with the Lord of the harvest; but we ourselves must look to the basket and the seed, and scatter our handfuls in the furrows without fail. We can win "Well done, good and faithful servant": to be a successful servant is not in our power, and we shall not



be held responsible for it. Our greatest risk is over when we obey. God makes faith and obedience the way of safety.

In the next place, we shall enjoy a life free from its heaviest cares. If we were in the midst of the wood, with Stanley, in the center of Africa, our pressing care would be to find our way out; but when we have nothing to do but to obey, our road is mapped out for us. Jesus says, "Follow me; "and this makes our way plain, and lifts from our shoulders a load of cares. To choose our course by policy is a way of thorns, to obey is as the king's highway. Policy has to tack about, to return upon its own courses, and often to miss the port after all; but faith, like a steam-vessel, steers straight for the harbour's mouth, and leaves a bright track of obedience behind her as she forges ahead. When our only care is to obey, a thousand other cares take their flight. If we sin in order to succeed, we have sown the seeds of care and sorrow, and the reaping will be a grievous one. If we will forsake the path, and try short cuts, we shall have to do a deal of wading through mire and slough, we shall bespatter ourselves from head to foot, we shall be wearied to find our way, and all because we could not trust God, and obey his bidding. Obedience may appear difficult, and it may bring with it sacrifice; but, after all, it is the nearest and the best road. Her ways are, in the long run, ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. He who through the Holy Spirit, is always believingly obedient, has chosen the good part. He it is who can sing —

*"I have no cares, O blessed Lord,  
For all my cares are thine;  
I live in triumph, too, for thou  
Hast made thy triumphs mine."*

Or, to change the verse, he is like Bunyan's shepherd-boy in the Valley of Humiliation, for that lowland is part of the great Plain of Obedience, and he also can sing —

*"He that is down need fear no fall,  
He that is low no pride;  
He that is humble ever shall  
Have God to be his Guide."*

Although he may not reach the heights of ambition, nor stand upon the giddy crags of presumption, yet he shall know superior joys. He has hit upon the happiest mode of living under heaven — a mode of life akin to

the perfect life above. He shall dwell in God's house and be still praising him.

The way of obedience is a life of the highest honor. Obedience is the glory of a human life — the glory which our Lord has given to his chosen, even his own glory. "He learned obedience." He never struck out an original course, but he did always the things which pleased the Father. Be this our glory. By faith we yield our intelligence to the highest intelligence: we are led, guided, directed; and we follow where our Lord has gone. To us who believe, he is honor. To a soldier it is the greatest honor to have accomplished his sovereign's command. He does not debase his manhood who subjects it to honorable command; nay, he is even exalted by obeying in the day of danger. It is no dishonor to have it said :

***"Theirs not to reason why;  
Theirs but to dare and die."***

The bravest and the most honored of men are those who implicitly obey the command of the King of kings. Among his children, they are best who best know their Father's mind, and yield to it the gladdest obedience. Should we have any other ambition, within the walls of our Father's house, than to be perfectly obedient children before him, and implicitly trustful towards him?

But, brethren, this is a kind of life which will bring communion with God. God often hides his face behind the clouds of dust which his children make by their self-will. If we transgress against him, we shall soon be in trouble; but a holy walk — the walk described by my text as faith working obedience — is heaven beneath the stars. God comes down to walk with men who obey. If they walk with him, he walks with them. The Lord can only have fellowship with his servants as they obey. Obedience is heaven in us, and it is the preface of our being in heaven. Obedient faith is the way to eternal life — nay, it is eternal life revealing itself.

The obedience of faith creates a form of life which may be safely copied. As parents, we wish so to live that our children may copy us to their lasting profit. Teachers should aspire to be what they would have their classes to be. If you go to school to the obedience of faith, you will be good teachers. Children usually exaggerate their models; but there will be

no fear of their going too far in faith, or in obedience to the Lord. I like to hear a man say, when his father has gone, "My dear father was a man that feared God, and I would fain follow him. When I was a boy, I thought him rather stiff and Puritanical; but now I see he had a good reason for it all. I feel much the same myself, and would do nothing of which God would not approve." The bringing up of families is a very great matter. This is too much neglected nowadays; and yet it is the most profitable of all holy service, and the hope of the future. Great men, in the best sense, are bred in holy households. God-fearing example at home is the most fruitful of religious agencies. I knew a little humble Dissenting chapel, of the strictest sect of our religion. Culture there was none in the ministry; but the people were staunch believers. Five or six families, attending that despised ministry, learned to believe what they did believe, and to live upon it. It was by no means a liberal creed which they received, but what they held operated on their lives. Five or six families came out of that place, and became substantial in wealth, and generous in liberality. These all sprang from plain, humble men, who knew their Bibles, and believed the doctrines of grace. They learned to fear God, and to trust in him, and to rest in the old faith, and even in worldly things they prospered. Their descendants, of the third generation, are not all of them of their way of thinking; but they have risen through God's blessing on their grandfathers. These men were fed on substantial meat, and they became sturdy old fellows, able to cope with the world, and fight their way. I would to God that we had more men to-day who would maintain truth at all hazards. Alas! the gutta-serena backbone is common among Dissenters, and they take to politics, and the new philosophy, and therefore we are losing the force of our testimony, and are, I fear, decreasing in numbers too. The Lord give us back those whose examples can be safely copied in all things, even though they be decried as being "rigid" or "too precise"! We serve a jealous God, and a holy Savior; wherefore let us mind that we do not grieve his Spirit, and cause him to withdraw from us.

Lastly, faith working obedience is a kind of life which needs great grace. Every careless professor will not live in this fashion. It will need watchfulness and prayer, and nearness to God, to maintain the faith which obeys in everything. Beloved, "he giveth more grace." The Lord will enable us to add to our faith all the virtues. Whenever you fail in any respect in

your lives, do not sit down, and question the goodness of God, and the power of the Holy Ghost; that is not the way to increase the stream of obedience, but to diminish the source of it. Believe more, instead of less. Try, by God's grace, to believe more in the pardon of sin, more in the renovation by the Holy Spirit, more in the everlasting covenant, more in the love that had no beginning, and will never, never cease. Your hope does not lie in rushing into the darkness of doubt; but in returning repentantly into the still clearer light of a steadier faith. May you be helped to do so, and may we, all of us, and the whole multitude of the Lord's redeemed, by faith go on to obey our Lord in all things!

I leave this word with you. Remember, "By faith Abraham obeyed." Have faith in God, and then obey, obey, obey, and keep on obeying, until the Lord shall call you home. Obey on earth, and then you will have learned to obey in heaven. Obedience is the rehearsal of eternal bliss. Practice by obedience now the song which you will sing for ever in glory. God grant his grace to us! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~119:33~~ Psalm 119:33-40.  
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 649, 653, 650.

# THE COVENANT PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

SERMON NO. 2200

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 12TH, 1891,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“And I will put my spirit within you.” — ~~and~~ Ezekiel 36:27.*

No preface is needed; and the largeness of our subject forbids our wasting time in beating about the bush. I shall try to do two things this morning: first, I would *commend the text*; and secondly, I would in some measure *expound the text*.

**I.** First, as for THE COMMENDATION OF THE TEXT, the tongues of men and of angels might fail. To call it a golden sentence would be much too commonplace: to liken it to a pearl of great price would be too poor a comparison. We cannot feel, much less speak, too much in praise of the great God who has put this clause into the covenant of His grace. In that covenant every sentence is more precious than heaven and earth; and this line is not the least among His choice words of promise: “I will put my spirit within you.”

I would begin by saying that it is *a gracious word*. It was spoken to a graceless people, to a people who had followed “their own way,” and refused the way of God; a people who had already provoked something more than ordinary anger in the Judge of all the earth; for He Himself said (verse 18), “I poured my fury upon them.” These people, even under chastisement, caused the holy name of God to be profaned among the heathen, whither they went. They had been highly favored, but they abused their privileges, and behaved worse than those who never knew the Lord. They sinned wantonly, wilfully, wickedly, proudly and presumptuously; and by this they greatly provoked the Lord. Yet to them

He made such a promise as this — “I will put my spirit within you.” Surely, where sin abounded grace did much more abound.

Clearly this is a word of grace, for the law saith nothing of this kind. Turn to the law of Moses, and see if there be any word spoken therein concerning the putting of the Spirit within men to cause them to walk in God’s statutes. The law proclaims the statutes; but the gospel alone promises the spirit by which the statutes will be obeyed. The law commands and makes us know what God requires of us; but the gospel goes further, and inclines us to obey the will of the Lord, and enables us practically to walk in His ways. Under the dominion of grace the Lord worketh in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure.

So great a boon as this could never come to any man by merit. A man might so act as to deserve a reward of a certain kind, in measure suited to His commendable action; but the Holy Spirit can never be the wage of human service: the idea verges upon blasphemy. Can any man deserve that Christ should die for him? Who would dream of such a thing? Can any man deserve that the Holy Ghost should dwell in him, and work holiness in him? The greatness of the blessing lifts it high above the range of merit, and we see that if the Holy Ghost be bestowed, it must be by an act of divine grace — grace infinite in bounty, exceeding all that we could have imagined. “Sovereign grace o’er sin abounding” is here seen in clearest light. “I will put my spirit within you” is a promise which drops with graces as the honeycomb with honey. Listen to the divine music which pours from this word of love. I hear the soft melody of grace, grace, grace, and nothing else but grace. Glory be to God, who gives to sinners the indwelling of His Spirit.

Note, next, that *it is a divine word*: “I will put my spirit within you.” Who but the Lord could speak after this fashion? Can one man put the Spirit of God within another? Could all the church combined breathe the Spirit of God into a single sinner’s heart? To put any good thing into the deceitful heart of man is a great achievement; but to put the Spirit of God into the heart, truly this is the finger of God. Nay, here I may say, the Lord has made bare His arm, and displayed the fullness of His mighty power. To put the Spirit of God into our nature is a work peculiar to the Godhead, and to do this within the nature of a free agent, such as man, is

marvellous. Who but Jehovah, the God of Israel, can speak after this royal style, and, beyond all dispute, declare, "I will put my spirit within you?" Men must always surround their resolves with conditions and uncertainties; but since omnipotence is at the back of every promise of God, He speaks like a king; yea, in a style which is only fit for the eternal God. He purposes and promises, and He as surely performs. Sure, then, is this sacred saying, "I will put my spirit within you." Sure, because divine. O sinner, if we poor creatures had the saving of you, we should break down in the attempt; but, behold the Lord Himself comes on the scene, and the work is done! All the difficulties are removed by this one sentence, "I will put my spirit within you." We have wrought with our spirit, we have wept over you, 'and we have entreated you; but we have failed. Lo, there cometh One into the matter who will not fail, with whom nothing is impossible; and He begins His work by saying, "I will put my spirit within you." The word is of grace and of God; regard it, then, as a pledge from the God of grace.

To me there is much charm in the further thought that *this is an individual and personal word*. The Lord means, "I will put my spirit within you": that is to say, within *you*, as individuals. "I will put my spirit within you" one by one. This must be so since the connection requires it. We read in verse 26, "A new heart also will I give you." Now, a new heart can only be given to one person. Each man needs a heart of his own, and each man must have a new heart for himself. "And a new spirit will I put within you." Within each one this must be done. "And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" — these are all personal, individual operations of grace. God deals with men one by one in the solemn matters of eternity, sin, and salvation. We are born one by one, and we die one by one: even so we must be born again one by one, and each one for himself must receive the Spirit of God. Without this a man has nothing. He cannot be caused to walk in God's statutes except by the infusion of grace into him as an individual. I think I see among my hearers a lone man, or woman, who feels himself, or herself, to be all alone in the world, and therefore hopeless. You can believe that God will do great things for a nation, but how shall the solitary be thought of? You are an odd person, one that could not be written down in any list; peculiar sinner, with constitutional tendencies all your own. Thus saith God, "I

will put my spirit within *you*"; within *your* heart — even *yours*. My dear hearers, you who have long been seeking salvation, but have not known the power of the Spirit — this is what you need. You have been striving in the energy of the flesh, but you have not understood where your true strength lieth. God saith to you, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord"; and again, "I will put my spirit within you." Oh, that this word might be spoken of the Lord to that young man who is ready to despair; to that sorrowful woman who has been looking into herself for power to pray and believe! You are without strength or hope in and of yourself; but this meets your case in all points. "I will put my spirit within you" — within you as an individual. Enquire of the Lord for it. Lift up your heart in prayer to God, and ask Him to pour upon you the Spirit of grace and of supplications. Plead with the Lord, saying, "Let thy good Spirit lead me. Even me." Cry, "Pass me not, my gracious Father; but in me fulfill this wondrous word of thine, 'I will put my spirit within you.'"

Note, next, that *this is a separating word*. I do not know whether you will see this readily; but it must be so: this word separates a man from his fellows. Men by nature are of another spirit from that of God, and they are under subjection to that evil spirit, the Prince of the power of the air. When the Lord comes to gather out His own, fetching them out from among the heathen, He effects the separation by doing according to this word, "I will put my spirit within you." This done, the individual becomes a new man. Those who have the Spirit are not of the world, nor like the world; and they soon have to come out from among the ungodly, and to be separate; for difference of nature creates conflict. God's Spirit will not dwell with the evil spirit: you cannot have fellowship with Christ and with Belial; with the kingdom of heaven and with this world. I wish that the people of God would again wake up to the truth that to gather out a people from among men is the great purpose of the present dispensation. It is still true, as James said at the Jerusalem Council, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." We are not to remain clinging to the old wreck with the expectation that we shall pump the water out of her and get her safe into port. No; the cry is very different — "Take to the lifeboat! Take to the lifeboat!" You are to quit the wreck, and then you are to carry away



from the sinking mass that which God will save. You must be separate from the old wreck, lest it suck you down to sure destruction. Your only hope of doing good to the world is by yourselves being “not of the world,” even as Christ was not of the world. For you to go down to the world’s level will neither be good for it nor for you. That which happened in the days of Noah will be repeated; for when the sons of God entered into alliance with the daughters of men, and there was a league between the two races, the Lord could not endure the evil mixture, but drew up the sluices of the lower deep and swept the earth with a destroying flood. Surely, in that last day of destruction, when the world is overwhelmed with fire, it will be because the church of God shall have degenerated, and the distinctions between the righteous and the wicked shall have been broken down. The Spirit of God, wherever He comes, doth speedily make and reveal the difference between Israel and Egypt; and in proportion as His active energy is felt, there will be an ever-widening gulf between those who are led of the Spirit and those who are under the dominion of the flesh. The possession of the Spirit will make you, my hearer, quite another sort of man from what you now are, and then you will be actuated by motives which the world will not appreciate; for the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Then you will act, and speak, and think, and feel in such a way, that this evil world will misunderstand and condemn you. Since the carnal mind knoweth not the things that are of God — for those things are spiritually discerned — it will not approve your objects and designs. Do not expect it to be your friend. The spirit which makes you to be the seed of the woman is not the spirit of the world. The seed of the serpent will hiss at you, and bruise your heel. Your Master said, “Because ye are not of this world, but I have chosen you out of the world; therefore the world hateth you.” It is a separating word this. Has it separated you? Has the Holy Spirit called you alone and blessed you? Do you differ from your old companions? Have you a life they do not understand? If not, may God in mercy put into you that most heavenly deposit, of which He speaks in our text: “I will put my spirit within you”!

But now notice, *that it is a very uniting word*. It separates from the world, but it joins to God. Note how it runs: “I will put *my* Spirit within *you*.” It is not merely *a* spirit, or *the* spirit, but *my* spirit. Now when God’s own Spirit comes to reside within our mortal bodies, how near akin we are to

the Most High! “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?” Does not this make a man sublime? Have you never stood in awe of your own selves, O ye believers? Have you enough regarded even this poor body, as being sanctified and dedicated, and elevated into a sacred condition, by being set apart to be the temple of the Holy Ghost? Thus are we brought into the closest union with God that we can well conceive of. Thus is the Lord our light and our life; while our spirit is subordinated to the divine Spirit. “I will put my spirit within you” — then God Himself dwelleth in you. The Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead is in you. With Christ in God your life is hid, and the Spirit seals you, anoints you, and abides in you. By the Spirit we have access to the Father; by the Spirit we perceive our adoption, and learn to cry, “Abba, Father”; by the Spirit we are made partakers of the divine nature, and have communion with the thrice holy Lord.

I cannot help adding here that *it is a very condescending word* — “I will put my spirit within you.” Is it really so, that the Spirit of God who displays the power and energetic force of God, by whom God’s Word is carried into effect — that the Spirit who of old moved upon the face of the waters, and brought order and life from chaos and death — can it be so that He will deign to sojourn in men? God in our nature is a very wonderful conception! God in the babe at Bethlehem, God in the carpenter of Nazareth, God in the “man of sorrows,” God in the Crucified, God in Him who was buried in the tomb — this is all marvellous. The incarnation is an infinite mystery of love; but we believe it. Yet, if it were possible to compare one illimitable wonder with another, I should say that God’s dwelling in His people and that repeated ten thousand times over, is more marvellous. That the Holy Ghost should dwell in millions of redeemed men and women, is a miracle not surpassed by that of our Lord’s espousal of human nature. For our Lord’s body was perfectly pure, and the Godhead, while it dwells with His holy manhood, does at least dwell with a perfect and sinless nature; but the Holy Spirit bows Himself to dwell in sinful men; to dwell in men who, after their conversion, still find the flesh warring against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; men who are not perfect, though they strive to be so; men who have to lament their shortcomings, and even to confess with shame a measure of unbelief. “I will put my spirit within you” means the abiding of the Holy Spirit in our

imperfect nature. Wonder of wonders! Yet is it as surely a fact as it is a wonder. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have the Spirit of God, for “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” You could not bear the suspicion that you are not His; and therefore, as surely as you are Christ’s, you have His Spirit abiding in you. The Savior has gone away on purpose that the Comforter might be given to dwell in you, and He does dwell in you. Is it not so? If it be so, admire this condescending God, and worship and praise His name. Sweetly submit to His rule in all things. Grieve not the Spirit of God. Watch carefully that nothing comes within you that may defile the temple of God. Let the faintest monition of the Holy Spirit be law to you. It was a holy mystery that the presence of the Lord was specially within the veil of the Tabernacle, and that the Lord God spake by Urim and Thummim to His people; it is an equally sacred marvel that now the Holy Ghost dwells in our spirits and abides within our nature and speaks to us whatsoever He hears of the Father. By divine impressions which the opened ear can apprehend, and the tender heart can receive, He speaketh still. God grant us to know His still small voice so as to listen to it with reverent humility and loving joy: then shall we know the meaning of these words, “I will put my spirit within you.”

Nor have I yet done with commending my text, for I must not fail to remind you that *it is a very spiritual word*. “I will put my spirit within you” has nothing to do with our wearing a peculiar garb — that would be a matter of little worth. It has nothing to do with affectations of speech — those might readily become a deceptive peculiarity. Our text has nothing to do with outward rites and ceremonies; but goes much further and deeper. It is an instructive symbol when the Lord teaches us our death with Christ by burial in baptism: it is to our great profit that He ordains bread and wine to be tokens of our communion in the body and blood of His dear Son; but these are only outward things, and if they are unattended with the Holy Spirit they fail of their design. There is something infinitely greater in this promise — “I will put my spirit within you.” I cannot give you the whole force of the Hebrew, as to the words “within you,” unless I paraphrase them a little, and read “I will put my spirit in the midst of you.” The sacred deposit is put deep down in our life’s secret place. God puts His Spirit not upon the surface of the man, but into the center of his being. The promise means — “I will put my spirit in your bowels, in your

hearts, in the very soul of you.” This is an intensely spiritual matter, without admixturing of anything material and visible. It is spiritual, you see, because it is the Spirit that is given; and He is given internally within our spirit. It is true the Spirit operates upon the external life, but it is through the secret and internal life, and of that inward operation our text speaks. This is what we so greatly require. Do you know what it is to attend a service and hear God’s truth faithfully preached, and yet you are forced to say, “Somehow or other it did not enter into me; I did not feel the unction and taste the savor of it”? “I will put my spirit within you,” is what you need. Do you not read your Bibles, and even pray, and do not both devotional exercises become too much external acts? “I will put my spirit *within* you” meets this evil. The good Spirit fires your heart; he penetrates your mind; he saturates your soul; he touches the secret and vital springs of your existence. Blessed Word! I love my text. It love it better than I can speak of it.

Observe once more that *this Word is a very effectual one*. “I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.” The Spirit is operative — first upon the inner life, in causing you to love the law of the Lord; and then it moves you openly to keep His statutes concerning Himself, and His judgments between you and your fellow-men. Obedience, if a man should be flogged to it, would be of little worth; but obedience springing out of a life within, this is a priceless breastplate of jewels. If you have a lantern, you cannot make it shine by polishing the glass outside, you must put a candle within it: and this is what God does, He puts the light of the Spirit within us, and then our light shines. He puts His Spirit so deep down into the heart, that the whole nature feels it: it works upward, like a spring from the bottom of a well. It is, moreover, so deeply implanted that there is no removing it. If it were in the memory, you might forget it; if it were in the intellect, you might err in it; but “within you” it touches the whole man, and has dominion over you without fear of failure. When the very kernel of your nature is quickened into holiness, practical godliness is effectually secured. Blessed is he who knows by experience our Lord’s words — “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

If I should fail in expounding the text, I hope I have so fully commended it to you, that you will turn it over and meditate upon it yourselves, and so get a home-born exposition of it. The key of the text is within its own self; for if the Lord gives you the Spirit, you will then understand his words — “I will put my spirit within you.”

**II.** But now I must work upon THE EXPOSITION OF THE TEXT. I trust the Holy Spirit will aid me therein. Let me show you how the good Spirit manifests the fact that He dwells in men. I have to be very brief on a theme that might require a great length of time; and can only mention a part of His ways and workings.

One of the first effects of the Spirit of God being put within us is *quicken*ing. We are dead by nature to all heavenly and spiritual things; but when the Spirit of God comes, then we begin to live. The man visited of the Spirit begins to feel; the terrors of God make him tremble, the love of Christ makes him weep. He begins to fear, and he begins to hope: a great deal of the first and a very little of the second, it may be. He learns spiritually to sorrow: he is grieved that he has sinned, and that he cannot cease from sinning. He begins to desire that which once he despised: he specially desires to find the way of pardon, and reconciliation with God. Ah, dear hearers! I cannot make you feel, I cannot make you sorrow for sin, I cannot make you desire eternal life; but it is all done as soon as this is fulfilled by the Lord, “I will put my spirit within you.” The quickening Spirit brings life to the dead in trespasses and sins.

This life of the Spirit shows itself by causing the man to pray. The cry is the distinctive mark of the living child. He begins to cry in broken accents, “God be merciful to me.” At the same time that he pleads, he feels the soft relentings of repentance. He has a new mind towards sin, and he grieves that he should have grieved his God. With this comes faith; perhaps feeble and trembling, only a touch of the hem of the Savior’s robe; but still Jesus is his only hope and his sole trust. To Him he looks for pardon and salvation. He dares to believe that Christ can save even him. Then has life come into the soul when trust in Jesus spring up in the heart.

Remember, dear friends, that as the Holy Spirit gives quickening at the first, so He must revive and strengthen it. Whenever you become dull and

faint, cry for the Holy Spirit. Whenever you cannot feel in devotion as you wish to feel, and are unable to rise to any heights of communion with God, plead my text in faith, and beg the Lord to do as He hath said, namely, "I will put my spirit within you." Go to God with this covenant clause, even if you have to confess, "Lord, I am like a log, I am a helpless lump of weakness. Unless thou come and quicken me I cannot live to Thee." Plead importunately the promise, "I will put my spirit within you." All the life of the flesh will gender corruption; all the energy that comes of mere excitement will die down into the black ashes of disappointment; the Holy Ghost alone is the life of the regenerated heart. Have you the Spirit? and if you have Him within you, have you only a small measure of His life, and do you wish for more? Then go still where you went at first. There is only one river of the water of life: draw from its floods. You will be lively enough, and bright enough, and strong enough, and happy enough when the Holy Spirit is mighty within your soul.

When the Holy Spirit enters, after quickening He gives *enlightening*. We cannot make men see the truth, they are so blind; but when the Lord puts His Spirit within them their eyes are opened. At first they may see rather hazily; but still they do see. As the light increases, and the eye is strengthened, they see more and more clearly. What a mercy it is to see Christ, to look unto Him, and so to be lightened! By the Spirit, souls see things in their reality: they see the actual truth of them, and perceive that they are facts. The Spirit of God illuminates every believer, so that he sees still more marvellous things out of God's law; but this never happens unless the Spirit opens his eyes. The apostle speaks of being brought "out of darkness into His marvellous light"; and it is a marvellous light, indeed, to come to the blind and dead. Marvellous because it reveals truth with clearness. It reveals marvellous things in a marvellous way. If hills and mountains, if rocks and stones were suddenly to be full of eyes, it would be a strange thing in the earth, but not more marvellous than for you and me by the illumination of the Holy Spirit to see spiritual things. When you cannot make people see the truth, do not grow angry with them, but cry, "Lord, put thy spirit within them." When you get into a puzzle over the Word of the Lord, do not give up in despair, but believingly cry, "Lord, put thy Spirit within me." Here lies the only true light of the soul. Depend upon it, all that you can see by any light except the Spirit of God you do

not spiritually see. If you only see intellectually, or rationally, you do not see to salvation. Unless intellect and reason have received heavenly light, you may see, and yet not see; even as Israel of old. Indeed, your boasted clear sight may aggravate your ruin, like that of the Pharisees, of whom our Lord said, "But now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth." O lord, grant us the Spirit within, for our soul's illumination!

The Spirit also works *conviction*. Conviction is more forcible than illumination: it is the setting of a truth before the eye of the soul, so as to make it powerful upon the conscience. I speak to many here who know what conviction means; still I will explain it from my own experience. I knew what sin meant by my reading, and yet I never knew sin in its heinousness and horror, till I found myself bitten by it as by a fiery serpent, and felt its poison boiling in my veins. When the Holy Ghost made sin to appear sin, then was I overwhelmed with the sight, and I would fain have fled from myself to escape the intolerable vision. A naked sin stripped of all excuse, and set in the light of truth, is a worse sight than to see the devil himself. When I saw sin as an offense against a just and holy God, committed by such a proud and yet insignificant creature as myself, then was I alarmed. Sirs, did you ever see and feel yourselves to be sinners? "Oh, yes," you say, "we are sinners." O sirs, do you mean it? Do you know what it means? Many of you are no more sinners in your own estimation than you are Hottentots. The beggar who exhibits a sham sore knows not disease; if he did he would have enough of it without pretences. To kneel down and say, "Lord, have mercy upon us miserable sinners," and then to get up and feel yourself a very decent sort of body, worthy of commendation, is to mock Almighty God. It is by no means a common thing to get hold of a real sinner, one who is truly so in his own esteem; and it is as pleasant as it is rare, for you can bring to the real sinner the real Savior, and He will welcome him. I do not wonder that Hart said:

*"A sinner is a sacred thing,  
The Holy Ghost hath made him so."*

The point of contact between a sinner and Christ is sin. The Lord Jesus gave Himself for our sins, He never gave Himself for our righteousnesses. He comes to heal the sick, and the point He looks to is our sickness. When a physician is called in he has no patience with things apart from his

calling. “Tut, tut!” he cries, “ I do not care about your furniture, nor the number of your cows, nor what income tax you pay, nor what politics you admire; I have come to see a sick man about his disease, and if you will not let me deal with it I will be gone.” When a sinner’s corruptions are loathsome to himself, when his guilt is foul in his own nostrils, when he fears the death that will come of it, then he is really convinced by the Holy Spirit; and no one ever knows sin as his own personal ruin till the Holy Spirit shows it to him. Conviction as to the Lord Jesus comes in the same way. We do not know Christ as our Savior till the Holy Spirit is put within us. Our Lord says — “He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you,” and you never see the things of the Lord Jesus till the Holy Ghost shows them to you. To know Jesus Christ as your Savior, as one who died for you in particular, is a knowledge which only the Holy Spirit imparts. To apprehend present salvation, as your own personally, comes by your being convinced of it by the Spirit. Oh, to be convinced of righteousness, and convinced of acceptance in the Beloved! This conviction cometh only of Him that hath called you, even of Him of whom the Lord saith, “I will put my Spirit within you.”

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit comes into us for *purification*. “I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” When the Spirit comes, He infuses a new life, and that new life is a fountain of holiness. The new nature cannot sin, because it is born of God, and “it is a living and incorruptible seed.” This life produces good fruit, and good fruit only. The Holy Ghost is the life of holiness. At the same time, the coming of the Holy Ghost into the soul gives a mortal stab to the power of sin. The old man is not absolutely dead, but it is crucified with Christ. It is under sentence, and before the eye of the law it is dead; but as a man nailed to a cross may linger long, but yet he cannot live, so the power of evil dies hard, but die it must. Sin is an executed criminal: those nails which fasten it to the cross will hold it fast till no breath remains in it. God the Holy Ghost gives the power of sin its death wound. The old nature struggles in its dying agonies, but it is doomed, and die it must. But you never will overcome sin by your own power, nor by any energy short of that of the Holy Spirit. Resolves may bind it, as Samson was bound with cords; but sin will snap the cords asunder. The Holy Spirit lays the axe at the root of sin, and fall it must.



The Holy Ghost within a man is “the Spirit of judgment, the Spirit of burning.” Do you know Him in that character? As the Spirit of judgment, the Holy Spirit pronounces sentence on sin, and it goes out with the brand of Cain upon it. He does more: He delivers sin over to burning. He executes the death penalty on that which He has judged. How many of our sins have we had to burn alive! and it has cost us no small pain to do it. Sin must be got out of us by fire, if no gentler means will serve; and the Spirit of God is a consuming fire. Truly, “our God is a consuming fire.” They paraphrase it, “God out of Christ is a consuming fire”; but that is not Scripture: it is, “*our* God,” our covenant God, who is a consuming fire to refine us from sin. Has not the Lord said, “I will purely purge away all thy dross, and take away all thy sin”? This is what the Spirit does, and it is by no means easy work for the flesh, which would spare many a flattering sin if it could.

The Holy Spirit bedews the soul with purity till He saturates it. Oh, to have a heart saturated with holy influences till it shall be as Gideon’s fleece, which held so much dew that Gideon could wring out a bowl full from it! Oh, that our whole nature were filled with the Spirit of God; that we were sanctified wholly, body, soul, and spirit! Sanctification is the result of the Holy Spirit being put within us.

Next, the Holy Ghost acts in the heart as the Spirit of *preservation*. Where He dwells men do not go back unto perdition. He works in them a watchfulness against temptation day by day. He works in them to wrestle against sin. Rather than sin a believer would die ten thousand deaths. He works in believers union to Christ, which is the source and guarantee of acceptable fruitfulness. He creates in the saints those holy things which glorify God, and bless the sons of men. All true fruit is the fruit of the Spirit. Every true prayer must be “praying in the Holy Ghost.” He helpeth our infirmities in prayer. Even the hearing of the Word of the Lord is of the Spirit, for John says, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice.” Everything that comes of the man, or is kept alive in the man, is first infused and then sustained and perfected of the Spirit. “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.” We never go an inch towards heaven in any other power than that of the Holy Ghost. We do not even stand fast and remain steadfast except as we are upheld by the Holy Spirit. The vineyard which the Lord hath planted He

also preserves; as it is written, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Did I hear that young man say, "I should like to become a Christian, but I fear I should not hold out? How am I to be preserved?" A very proper inquiry for "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." Temporary Christians are no Christians: only the believer who continues to believe will enter heaven. How, then, can we hold on in such a world as this? Here is the answer. "I will put my spirit within you." When a city has been captured in war, those who formerly possessed it seek to win it back again; but the king who captured it sends a garrison to live within the walls, and he said to the captain, "Take care of this city that I have conquered, and let not the enemy take it again." So the Holy Ghost is the garrison of God within our redeemed humanity, and he will keep us to the end. "May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." For preservation, then, we look to the Holy Spirit.

Lest I weary you, I will be very brief upon the next point: the Holy Spirit within us is for *guidance*. The Holy Spirit is given to lead us into all truth. Truth is like a vast grotto, and the Holy Spirit brings torches, and shows us all the splendor of the roof; and since the passage seems intricate, He knows the way, and He lead us into the deep things of God. He opens up to us one truth after another, by His light and by His guidance, and thus we are "taught of the Lord." He is also our practical guide to heaven, helping and directing us on the upward journey. I wish Christian people oftener inquired of the Holy Ghost as to guidance in their daily life. Know ye not that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? You need not always be running to this friend and to that to get direction: wait upon the Lord in silence, sit still in quiet before the oracle of God. Use the judgment God has given you; but when that suffices not, resort to Him whom Mr. Bunyan calls "the Lord High Secretary," who lives within, who is infinitely wise, and who can guide you by making you to "hear a voice behind you saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." The Holy Ghost will guide you in life; He will guide you in death; and He will guide you to glory. He will guard you from modern error, and from ancient error, too. He will guide you in a way that you know not; and through the darkness He will lead you in a way you have not seen: these things will He do unto you, and not forsake you.

Oh, this precious text! I seem to have before me a great cabinet full of jewels rich and rare. May God the Holy Ghost Himself come and hand these out to you, and may you be adorned with them all the days of your life!

Last of all, “I will put my spirit within you,” that is, by way of *consolation*, for His choice name is “The Comforter.” Our God would not have His children unhappy, and therefore, He Himself, in the third Person of the blessed Trinity, has undertaken the office of Comforter. Why does your face such mournful colors wear? God can comfort you. You that are under the burden of sin; it is true no man can help you into peace, but the Holy Ghost can. O God, to every seeker here who has failed to final rest, grant Thy Holy Spirit! Put Thy Spirit within him, and he will rest in Jesus. And you dear people of God, who are worried, remember that worry and the Holy Ghost are very contradictory one to another. “I will put my spirit within you” means that you shall become gentle, peaceful, resigned, and acquiescent in the divine will. Then you will have faith in God that all is well. That text with which I began my prayer this morning was brought home to my heart this week. Our dearly beloved friend Adolph Saphir passed away last Saturday, and his wife died three or four days before him. When my dear brother, Dr. Sinclair Patterson, went to see him, the beloved Saphir said to him, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Nobody would have quoted that passage but Saphir, the Biblical student the lover of the word, the lover of the God of Israel. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” His dear wife is gone, and he himself is ill; but “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” This is a deep well of overflowing comfort, if you understand it well. God’s promise is light as well as his promise, and the Holy Spirit makes us know this. God’s word and will and way are all light to his people, and in him is no darkness at all for them. God himself is purely and only light. What if there be darkness in me, there is no darkness in him; and his Spirit causes me to fly to him! What if there be darkness in my family, there is no darkness in my covenant God, and his Spirit makes me rest in him. What if there be darkness in me by reason of my failing strength, there is no failing in him, and there is no darkness in him: his Spirit assures me of this. David says — “God my exceeding joy”; and such He is to us. “Yea, mine own God is he”! Can you say, “My God, my God”? Do you want anything

more? Can you conceive of anything beyond your God? Omnipotent to work all for ever! Infinite to give! Faithful to remember! He is all that is good. Light only: “in him is no darkness at all.” I have all light, yea, all things, when I have my God. The Holy Spirit makes us apprehend this when He is put within us. Holy Comforter, abide with us, for then we enjoy the light of heaven. Then are we always peaceful and even joyful; for we walk in unclouded light. In Him our happiness sometimes rises into great waves of delight, as if it leaped up to the glory. The Lord make this text your own — “I will put my Spirit within you.” Amen.

# MANY KISSES FOR RETURNING SINNERS

OR

# PRODIGAL LOVE FOR THE PRODIGAL SON

SERMON NO. 2236

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
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*“And kissed him.” — ~~and~~ Luke 15:20.*

In the Revised Version, if you will kindly look at the margin, you will find that the text there reads, “And kissed him much.” This is a very good translation of the Greek, which might bear the meaning, “Kissed him earnestly,” or “Kissed him eagerly,” or “Kissed him often.” I prefer to have it in very plain language, and therefore adopt the marginal reading of the Revised Version, “Kissed him much,” as the text of my sermon, the subject of which will be, the overflowing love of God toward the returning sinner.

The first word “and” links us on to all that had gone before. The parable is a very familiar one, yet it is so full of sacred meaning that it always has some fresh lesson for us. Let us, then, consider the preliminaries to this kissing. On the son's side there was something, and on the father's side much more. Before the prodigal son received these kisses of love, he had

said in the far country, “I will arise and go to my father.” He had, however, done more than that, else his father’s kiss would never have been upon his cheek. The resolve had become a deed: “He arose, and came to his father.” A bushful of resolutions is of small value; a single grain of practice is worth the whole. The determination to return home is good; but it is when the wandering boy begins the business of really carrying out the good resolve, that he draws near the blessing. If any of you here present have long been saying, “I will repent; I will turn to God”; leave off resolving, and come to practicing; and may God in His mercy lead you both to repent and to believe in Christ!

Before the kisses of love were given, this young man was on his way to his father; but he would not have reached him unless his father had come the major part of the way. When you give God an inch, He will give you an ell. If you come a little way to Him, when you are “yet a great way off” He will run to meet you. I do not know that the prodigal saw his father, but his father saw him. The eyes of mercy are quicker than the eyes of repentance. Even the eyes of our faith is dim compared with the eye of God’s love. He sees a sinner long before a sinner sees Him.

I do not suppose that the prodigal traveled very fast. I should imagine that he came very slowly —

*“With heavy heart and downcast eye,  
With many a sob and many a sigh.”*

He was resolve to come, yet he was half afraid. But we read that his father ran. Slow are the steps of repentance, but swift are the feet of forgiveness. God can run where we scarcely limp, and if we are limping towards Him, He will run towards us. These kisses were given in a hurry; the story is narrated in a way that almost makes us realize that such was the case: there is a sense of haste in the very wording of it. His father “ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” — kissed him eagerly. He did not delay a moment; for though he was out of breath, he was not out of love. “He fell on his neck, and kissed him much.” There stood his son ready to confess his sin; therefore did his father kiss him all the more. The more willing thou art to own thy sin, the more willing is God to forgive thee. When thou dost make a clean breast of it, God will soon make a clear record of it. He will wipe out the sin that thou dost willingly acknowledge and humbly

confess before Him. He that was willing to use his lips for confession, found that his father was willing to use his lips for kissing him.

See the contrast. There is the son, scarcely daring to think of embracing his father, yet his father has scarcely seen him before he has fallen on his neck. The condescension of God towards penitent sinners is very great. He seems to stoop from His throne of glory to fall upon the neck of a repentant sinner. God on the neck of a sinner! What a wonderful picture! Can you conceive it? I do not think you can; but if you cannot imagine it, I hope that you will realize it. When God's arm is about our neck, and His lips are on our cheek, kissing us much, then we understand more than preachers or books can ever tell us of His condescending love.

The father "saw" his son. There is a great deal in that word, "saw." He saw who it was; saw where he had come from; saw the swineherd's dress; saw the filth upon his hands and feet; saw his rags; saw his penitent look; saw what he had been; saw what he was; and saw what he would soon be. "His father saw him." God has a way of seeing men and women that you and I cannot understand. He sees right through us at a glance, as if we were made of glass; He sees all our past, present and future.

"When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." It was not with icy eyes that the father looked on his returning son. Love leaped into them, and as he beheld him, he "had compassion on him"; that is, he felt for him. There was no anger in his heart toward his son; he had nothing but pity for his poor boy, who had got into such a pitiable condition. It was true that it was all his own fault, but that did not come before his father's mind. It was the state that he was in, his poverty, his degradation, that pale face of his so wan with hunger, that touched his father to the quick. And God has compassion on the woes and miseries of men. They may have brought their troubles on themselves, and they have indeed done so; but nevertheless God has compassion upon them. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not."

We read that the father "ran." The compassion of God is followed by swift movements. He is slow to anger, but He is quick to bless. He does not take any time to consider how He shall show His love to penitent prodigals; that was all done long ago in the eternal covenant. He has no need to prepare for their return to Him; that was done on Calvary. God

comes flying in the greatness of His compassion to help every poor penitent soul.

*“On cherub and on cherubim,  
Full royalty He rode;  
And on the wings of mighty winds  
Came flying all abroad.”*

And when He comes, He comes to kiss. Master Trapp says that, if we had read that the father had kicked his prodigal son, we should not have been very much astonished. Well, I should have been very greatly astonished, seeing that the father in the parable was to represent God. But still, his son deserved all the rough treatment that some heartless men might have given; and had the story been that of a selfish human father only, it might have been written that “as he was coming near, his father ran at him, and kicked him.” There are such fathers in the world, who seem as if they cannot forgive. If he had kicked him, it would have been no more than he had deserved. But no, what is written in the Book stands true for all time, and for every sinner, — “He fell on his neck, and kissed him”; kissed him eagerly, kissed him much.

What does this much kissing mean? It signifies that, when sinners come to God, He gives them a loving reception, and a hearty welcome. If any one of you, while I am speaking, shall come to God, expecting mercy because of the great sacrifice of Christ, this shall be true of you as it has been true of many of us: “He kissed him much.”

**I.** First, this much kissing means MUCH LOVE. It means much love truly felt; for God never gives an expression of love without feeling it in His infinite heart. God will never give a Judas-kiss, and betray those whom He embraces. There is no hypocrisy with God; He never kisses those for whom He has no love. Oh, how God loves sinner! You who repent, and come to Him, will discover how greatly He loves you. There is no measuring the love He bears towards you. He has loved you before the foundation of the world, and He will love you when time shall be no more. Oh, the immeasurable love of God to sinners who come and cast themselves upon His mercy!

This much kissing also means much love manifested. God’s people do not always know the greatness of His love to them. Sometimes, however, it is



shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. Some of us know at times what it is to be almost too happy to live! The love of God has been so overpoweringly experienced by us on some occasions, that we have almost had to ask for a stay of the delight because we could not endure any more. If the glory had not been veiled a little, we should have died of excess of rapture, or happiness. Beloved, God has wondrous ways of opening His people's hearts to the manifestation of His grace. He can pour in, not now and then a drop of His love, but great and mighty streams. Madame Guyon used to speak of the torrents of love that come sweeping through the spirit, bearing all before them. The poor prodigal in the parable had so much love manifested to him, that he might have sung of the torrents of his father's affection. That is the way God receives those whom He saves, giving them not a meagre measure of grace, but manifesting an overflowing love.

This much kissing means, further, much love perceived. When his father kissed him much, the poor prodigal knew, if never before, that his father loved him. He had no doubt about it; he had a clear perception of it. It is very frequently the case that the first moment a sinner believes in Jesus, he gets this "much" love. God reveals it to him, and he perceives it and enjoys it at the very beginning. Think not that God always keeps the best wine to the last; He gives us some of the richest dainties of His table the first moment we sit there. I recollect the joy that I had when first I believed in Jesus; and, even now, in looking back upon it, the memory of it is as fresh as if it were but yesterday. Oh, I could not have believed that a mortal could be so happy after having been so long burdened, and so terribly cast down! I did but look to Jesus on the cross, and the crushing load was immediately gone; and the heart which could only sigh and cry by reason of its burden, began to leap and dance and sing for joy. I had found in Christ all that I wanted, and rested in the love of God at once. So may it be with you also, if you will but return to God through Christ. It shall be said of you as of this prodigal, "The father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him in much love."

**II.** Secondly, this much kissing meant MUCH FORGIVENESS. The prodigal had many sins to confess; but before he came to the details of them, his father had forgiven him. I love confession of sin after forgiveness. Some suppose that after we are forgiven we are never to confess; but, oh,

beloved, it is then that we confess most truly, because we know the guilt of sin most really! Then do we plaintively sing —

*“My sins, my sins, my Savior,  
How sad on Thee they fall!  
Seen through Thy gentle patience,  
I tenfold feel them all,  
I know they are forgiven,  
But still their pain to me  
Is all the grief and anguish  
They laid, my Lord, on Thee.”*

To think that Christ should have washed me from my sins in His own blood, makes me feel my sin the more keenly, and confess it the more humbly before God. The picture of this prodigal is marvelously true to the experience of those who return to God. His father kissed him with the kiss of forgiveness; and yet, after that, the young man went on to say, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” Do not hesitate, then, to acknowledge your sin to God, even though you know that in Christ it is all put away.

From this point of view, those kisses meant, first, “Your sin is all gone, and will never be mentioned any more. Come to my heart, my son! Thou hast grieved me sore, and angered me; but, as a thick cloud, I have blotted out thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins.”

As the father looked upon him, and kissed him much, there probably came another kiss, which seemed to say, “There is no soreness left: I have not only forgiven, but I have forgotten too. It is all gone, clean gone. I will never accuse you of it any more. I will never love you any the less. I will never treat you as though you were still an unworthy and untrustworthy person.” Probably at that there came another kiss; for do not forget that his father forgave him “and kissed him much,” to show that the sin was all forgiven.

There stood the prodigal, overwhelmed by his father’s goodness, yet remembering his past life. As he looked on himself, and thought, “I have these old rags on still, and I have just come from feeding the swine,” I can imagine that his father would give him another kiss, as much as to say, “My boy, I do not recollect the past; I am so glad to see you that I do not see any filth on you, or any rags on you either. I am so delighted to have

you with me once more that, as I would pick up a diamond out of the mire, and be glad to get the diamond again, so do I pick you up, you are so precious to me.” This is the gracious and glorious way in which God treats those who return to Him. As for their sin, He has put it away so that He will not remember it. He forgives like a God. Well may we adore and magnify His matchless mercy as we sing —

*“In wonder lost, with trembling joy  
We take the pardon of our God;  
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye;  
A pardon bought with Jesus’ blood;  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?”*

“Well,” says one, “can such a wonderful change ever take place with me?” By the grace of God it may be experienced by every man who is willing to return to God. I pray God that it may happen now, and that you may get such assurance of it from the Word of God, by the power of His Holy Spirit, and from a sight of the precious blood of Christ shed for your redemption, that you may be able to say, “I understand it now; I see how He kisses all my sin away; and when it rises, He kisses it away again; and when I think of it with shame, He gives me another kiss; and when I blush all over at the remembrance of my evil deeds, he kisses me again and again, to assure me that I am fully and freely forgiven.” Thus the many kisses from the prodigal’s father combined to make his wayward son feel that his sin was indeed all gone. They revealed much love and much forgiveness.

**III.** These repeated kisses meant, next, FULL RESTORATION. The prodigal was going to say to his father, “Make me as one of thy hired servants.” In the far country he had resolved to make that request, but his father with a kiss, stopped him. By that kiss, his sonship was owned; by it the father said to the wretched wanderer, “You are my son.” He gave him such a kiss as he would only give to his own son. I wonder how many here have ever given such a kiss to anyone. There sits one who knows something of such kisses as the prodigal received. That father’s girl went astray, and, after years of sin, she came back worn out, to die at home. He received her, found her penitent, and gladly welcomed her to his house. Ah, my dear friend, you know something about such kisses as these! And you, good woman, whose boy ran away, you can understand something about these kisses, too. He left you, and you did not hear of him for years, and he

went on in a very vicious course of life. When you did hear of him, it well-nigh broke your heart, and when he came back, you hardly knew him. Do you recollect how you took him in? You felt that you wished that he was the little boy you used to press to your bosom; but now he was grown up to be a big man and a great sinner, yet you gave him such a kiss, and repeated your welcome so often, that he will never forget it, nor will you forget it either. You can understand that this overwhelming greeting was like the father saying, "My boy, you are my son. Despite all that you have done, you belong to me; however far you have gone in vice and folly, I own you. You are bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." In this parable Christ would have you know, poor sinner, that God will own you, if you come to Him confessing your sin through Jesus Christ. He will gladly receive you; for all things are ready against the day you return.

*"Spread for thee the festal board,  
See with richest dainties stored,  
To thy Father's bosom pressed,  
Yet again a child confessed;  
Never from his house to roam,  
Come and welcome, sinner, come."*

The father received his son with many kisses and so proved that his prayer was answered. Indeed, his father heard his prayer before he offered it. He was going to say, "Father, I have sinned," and to ask for forgiveness; but he got the mercy, and a kiss to seal it, before the prayer was presented. This also shall be true of thee, O sinner, who art returning to thy God, through Jesus Christ! You shall be permitted to pray, and God will answer you. Hear it, poor, despairing sinner, whose prayer has seemed to be shut out from heaven! Come to your Father's bosom now, and He will hear your prayers; and, before many days are over, you shall have the clearest proofs that you are fully restored to the divine favor by answers to your intercessions that shall make you marvel at the Lord's loving-kindness to you.

Further than this, you shall have all your privileges restored, even as this wandering young man was put among the children when he returned. As you see him now in the father's house, where he was received with the many kisses, he wears a son's robe, the family ring is on his finger, and the shoes of the home are on his feet. He eats no longer swine's food, but children's bread. Even thus shall it be with you if you return to God.

Though you look so foul and so vile, and really are even more defiled than you look; and though you smell so strongly of the hogs among which you have been living that some people's nostrils would turn up at you, your Father will not notice these marks of your occupation in the far country with all its horrible defilement. See how this father treats his boy. He kisses him, and kisses him again, because he knows his own child, and, recognizing him as his child, and feeling his fatherly heart yearning over him, he gives him kiss after kiss. He kisses him much, to make him know that he has full restoration.

In this repeated kissing we see, then, these three things: much love, much forgiveness, and full restoration.

**IV.** But these many kisses meant even more than this. They revealed his father's EXCEEDING JOY. The father's heart is overflowing with gladness, and he cannot restrain his delight. I think he must have shown his joy by a repeated look. I will tell you the way I think the father behaved towards his son who had been dead, but was alive again, who had been lost, but was found. Let me try to describe the scene. The father has kissed the son, and he bids him sit down; then he comes in front of him, and looks at him, and feels so happy that he says, "I must give you another kiss," then he walks away a minute; but he is back again before long, saying to himself, "Oh, I must give him another kiss!" He gives him another, for he is so happy. His heart beats fast; he feels very joyful; the old man would like the music to strike up; he wants to be at the dancing; but meanwhile he satisfies himself by a repeated look at his long-lost child. Oh, I believe that God looks at the sinner, and looks at him again, and keeps on looking at him, all the while delighting in the very sight of him, when he is truly repentant, and comes back to his Father's house.

The repeated kiss meant, also, a repeated blessing, for every time he put his arms round him, and kissed him, he kept saying, "Bless you; oh, bless you, my boy!" He felt that his son had brought a blessing to him by coming back, and he invoked fresh blessings upon his head. Oh sinner! If you did but know how God would welcome you, and how He would look at you, and how He would bless you, surely you would at once repent, and come to His arms and heart, and find yourself happy in His love.

The many kisses meant, also, repeated delight. It is a very wonderful thing that it should be in the power of a sinner to make God glad. He is the happy God, the source and spring of all happiness; what can we add to His blessedness? And yet, speaking after the manner of men, God's highest joy lies in clasping His wilful Ephraims to His breast, when He has heard them bemoaning themselves and has seen them arising and returning to their home. God grant that He may see that sight even now, and have delight because of sinners returning to Himself! Yea, we believe it shall be even so, because of His presence with us, and because of the gracious working of the Holy Spirit. Surely that is the teaching of the prophet's words: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." Think of the eternal God singing, and remember that it is because a wandering sinner has returned to Him that He sings. He joys in the return of the prodigal, and all heaven shares in His joy.

**V.** I have not got through my subject yet. As we take a fifth look, we find that these many kisses mean **OVERFLOWING COMFORT**. This poor young man, in his hungry, faint, and wretched state, having come a very long way, had not much heart in him. His hunger had taken all energy out of him, and he was so conscious of his guilt that he had hardly the courage to face his father; so his father gives him a kiss, as much as to say, "Come, boy, do not be cast down; I love you."

"Oh, the past, the past, my father!" he might moan, as he thought of his wasted years; but he had no sooner said that than he received another kiss, as if his father said, "Never mind the past; I have forgotten all about that." This is the Lord's way with His saved ones. Their past lies hidden under the blood of atonement. The Lord saith by His servant Jeremiah, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve."

But then, perhaps, the young man looked down on his foul garments, and said, "The present, my father, the present, what a dreadful state I am in!" And with another kiss would come the answer, "Never mind the present, my boy. I am content to have thee as thou art. I love thee." This, too, is God's word to those who are "accepted in the Beloved." In spite of all their vileness, they are pure and spotless in Christ, and God says of each

one of them, "Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee. Therefore, though in thyself thou art unworthy, through My dear Son thou art welcome to My home."

"Oh, but," the boy might have said, "the future, my father, the future! What would you think if I should ever go astray again?" Then would come another holy kiss, and his father would say, "I will see to the future, my boy; I will make home so bright for you that you will never want to go away again." But God does more than that for us when we return to Him. He not only surrounds us with tokens of His love, but He says concerning us, "They shall be My people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Furthermore, He says to each returning one, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them."

Whatever there was to trouble the son, the father gave him a kiss to set it all right; and, in like manner, our God has a love-token for every time of doubt and dismay which may come to His reconciled sons. Perhaps one whom I am addressing says, "Even though I confess my sin, and seek God's mercy, I shall still be in sore trouble, for through my sin, I have brought myself down to poverty." "There is a kiss for you," says the Lord: "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure." "But I have even brought disease upon myself by sin," says another. "There is a kiss for you, for I am Jehovah-Rophi, the Lord that healeth thee, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thine diseases." "But I am dreadfully down at the heel," says another. The Lord gives you also a kiss, and says, "I will lift you up, and provide for all your needs. No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly." All the promises in this Book belong to every repentant sinner, who returns to God believing in Jesus Christ, His Son.

The father of the prodigal kissed his son much, and thus made him feel happy there and then. Poor souls, when they come to Christ, are in a

dreadful plight, and some of them hardly know where they are I have known them talk a lot of nonsense in their despair, and say hard and wicked things of God in their dreadful doubt. The Lord gives no answer to all that, except a kiss, and then another kiss. Nothings puts the penitent so much at rest as the Lord's repeated assurance of His unchanging love. Such a one the Lord has often received, "and kissed him much," that He might fetch him up even from the horrible pit, and set his feet upon a rock, and establish his goings. The Lord grant that many whom I am addressing may understand what I am talking about!

**VI.** And now for our sixth head, though you will think I am getting to be like the old Puritans with these many heads. But I cannot help it, for these many kisses had many meanings: love, forgiveness, restoration, joy, and comfort were in them, and also **STRONG ASSURANCE**.

The father kissed his son much to make him quite certain that it was all real. The prodigal, in receiving these many kisses, might say to himself, "All this love must be true, for a little while ago I heard the hogs grunt, and now I hear nothing but the kisses from my dear father's lips." So his father gave him another kiss, for there was no way of convincing him that the first was real like repeating it; and if there lingered any doubt about the second, the father gave him yet a third. If, when the dream of old was doubled, the interpretation was sure, these repeated kisses left no room for doubt. The father renewed the tokens of his love that his son might be fully assured of his reality.

He did it that in the future it might never be questioned. Some of us were brought so low before we were converted, that God gave us an excess of joy when He saved us, that we might never forget it. Sometimes the devil says to me, "You are no child of God." I have long ago given up answering him, for I found that it is a waste of time to argue with such a crafty old liar as he is; he knows too much for me. But if I must answer him, I say, "Why, I remember when I was saved by the Lord! I can never forget even the very spot of ground where first I saw my Savior; there and then my joy rolled in like some great Atlantic billow, and burst in a mighty foam of bliss, covering all things. I cannot forget it." That is an argument which even the devil cannot answer, for he cannot make me believe that such a thing never happened. The Father kissed me much, and I remember it full well. The Lord gives to some of us a clear deliverance such a bright,



sunshiny day at our conversion, that henceforth we cannot question our state before Him, but must believe that we are eternally saved.

The father put the assurance of this poor returning prodigal beyond all doubt. If the first kisses were given privately, when only the father and son were present, it is quite certain that, afterwards, he kissed him before men, where others could see him. He kissed him much in the presence of the household, that they also might not be calling in question that he was his father's child. It was a pity that the elder brother was not there also. You see he was away in the field. He was much more interested in the crops than in the reception of his brother. I have known such a one in modern days. He was a man who did not come out to week-evening services. He was such a man of business that he did not come out on a Thursday night, and the prodigal came home at such a time, and so the elder brother did not see the father receive him. If he lived now, he would probably not come to the church-meetings; he would be too busy. So he would not get to know about the reception of penitent sinners. But the father, when he received that son of his, intended all to know, once for all, that he was indeed his child. Oh, that you might get these many kisses even now! If they are given to you, you will have, for the rest of your life, strong assurance derived from the happiness of your first days.

**VII.** I have done when I have said that I think that here we have a specimen of the INTIMATE COMMUNION which the Lord often gives to sinners when first they come to Him. "His father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him much."

You see, this was before the family fellowship. Before the servants had prepared the meal, before there had been any music or dancing in the family, his father kissed him. He would have cared little for all their songs, and have valued but slightly his reception by the servants, if, first of all, he had not been welcomed to his father's heart. So it is with us; we need first to have fellowship with God before we think much of union with His people. Before I go to join a church, I want my Father's kiss. Before the pastor gives me the right hand of fellowship, I want my heavenly Father's right hand to welcome me. Before I become recognized by God's people here below, I want a private recognition from the great Father above; and that He gives to all who come to Him as the prodigal came to his father. May He give to some of you now!

This kissing, also, was before the table communion. You know the prodigal was afterwards to sit at his father's table, and to eat of the fatted calf; but before that, his father kissed him. He would scarcely have been able to sit easily at the feast without the previous kisses of love. The table communion, to which we are invited, is very sweet. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, in symbol, in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, is, indeed, a blessed thing; but I want to have communion with God by way of the love-kiss before I come there. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." This is something private, ravishing, and sweet. God give it to many of you! May you get the many kisses of your Father's mouth before you come into the church, or to the communion table!

These many kisses likewise came before the public rejoicing. The friends and neighbors were invited to share in the feast. But think how shamefaced the son would have been in their presence, if, first of all, he had not found a place in his father's love or had not been quite sure of it. He would almost have been inclined to run away again. But the father had kissed him much, and so he could meet the curious gaze of his old friends with a smiling face, until any unkind remarks they might have thought of making died away, killed by his evident joy in his father. It is a hard thing for a man to confess Christ if he has not had an overwhelming sense of communion with Him. But when we are lifted to the skies in the rapture God gives to us, it becomes easy, not only to face the world, but to win the sympathy of even those who might have opposed themselves. This is why young converts are frequently used to lead others into the light; the Lord's many kisses of forgiveness have so recently been given to them, that their words catch the fragrance of divine love as they pass the lips just touched by the Lord. Alas, that any should ever lose their first love, and forget the many kisses they have received from their heavenly Father!

Lastly, all this was given before the meeting with the elder brother. If the prodigal son had known what the elder brother thought and said, I should not have wondered at all if he had run off, and never come back at all. He might have come near home, and then, hearing what his brother said, have stolen away again. Yes, but before that could happen, his father had given him the many kisses. Poor sinner! You have come in here, and perhaps you have found the Savior. It may be that you will go and speak to some

Christian man, and he will be afraid to say much to you. I do not wonder that he should doubt you, for you are not, in yourself, as yet a particularly nice sort of person to talk to. But, if you get your Father's many kisses, you will not mind your elder being a little hard upon you. Occasionally I hear of one, who wishes to join church, saying "I came to see the elders, and one of them was rather rough with me. I shall never come again." What a stupid man you must be! Is it not their duty to be a little rough with some of you, lest you should deceive yourselves, and be mistaken about your true state? We desire lovingly to bring you to Christ, and if we are afraid that you really have not yet come back to God, with penitence and faith, should we not tell you so, like honest men? But suppose that you have really come, and your brother is mistaken; go and get a kiss from your Father, and never mind your brother. He may remind you how you have squandered your living, painting the picture even blacker than it ought to be; but your Father's kisses will make you forget your brother's frowns. If you think that in a household of faith you will find everybody amiable, and everyone willing to help you, you will be greatly mistaken. Young Christians are often frightened when they come across some who, from frequent disappointment of their hopes, or from a natural spirit of caution or perhaps from a lack of spiritual life, receive but coldly those upon whom the Father has lavished much love. If that is your case, never mind these cross-grained elder brethren; get another kiss from your Father. Perhaps the reason it is written, "He kissed him much," was because the elder brother when he came near him, would treat him so coldly, and so angrily refuse to join in the feast.

Lord, give to many poor trembling souls the will to come to Thee! Bring many sinners to Thy blessed feet, and while they are yet a great way off, run and meet them; fall on their neck, give them many kisses of love, and fill them to the full with heavenly delight, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Luke 15..

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 568, 521, 548

# GRATITUDE FOR DELIVERANCE FROM THE GRAVE

SERMON NO. 2237

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 3 1892,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

*In connection with the dedication of the Jubilee House, which commemorated the fifth year of a life often threatened by grievous sickness.*

“I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.” — ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 118:17, 18.

How very differently we view things at different times and in differing states of mind! Faith takes a bright and cheerful view of matters, and speaks very confidently, “I shall not die, but live.” When we are slack as to our trust in God, and give way to misgivings and doubts and fears, we sing in the minor key, and say, “I shall die. I shall never live through this trouble. I shall one day fall by the hand of the enemy; and that day is hastening on. Hope is failing me. Bad times are at the door. I shall not live through this crisis.” Thus our tongues show the condition of our inner man. We talk according to our frames and feelings, and would make others think that things are as we see them with our jaundiced eyes. Is it not a pity that we give a tongue to our unbelief? Would it not be better to be dumb when we are doubtful? Muzzle that dog of unbelief! Dog did I call him? He is a wolf; or should I call him hound of hell? His voice is that of Apollyon: it is full of blasphemy against God. Unbelieving utterances will do no good to yourself, and will do harm to those who listen to your babblings. It would be wise to say, “If I should speak thus, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.” Let us be dumb with silence when we cannot speak to the Glory of God. But, oh, it is a blessed thing, when faith is in

our spirit reigning and powerful, to let it have ample opportunity to proclaim the honors of his name! To give his heart a tongue, is wise in man when his heart itself is wise. The more talk we get from the mouth of faith, the better: her lips drop sweet-smelling myrrh. A silent faith, if there be such a thing, robs others of benedictions; and at the same time it does worse, for it robs God of his glory. When we have a joyous faith in full operation, let us communicative, and let us openly and boldly say, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." I would follow my own advice, and crave a patient hearing of you.

You know, perhaps, that this text was inscribed by Martin Luther upon his study wall, where he could always see it when at home. Many Reformers had been done to death- Huss, and others who preceded him, had been burnt at the stake; Luther was cheered by the firm conviction that he was perfectly safe until his work was done. In this full assurance he went bravely to meet his enemies at the Diet of Worms, and indeed, went courageously whenever duty called him. He felt that god had raised him up to declare the glorious doctrine of justification by faith, and all the other truths of what he believed to be the gospel of God; and therefore no faggots could burn him, and no sword could kill him till that work was done. Thus he bravely wrote out his belief, and set it where many eyes would see it, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." It was no idle boast; but a calm and true conclusion from his faith in God and fellowship with him. May you and I, when we are tried, be able, through faith in God, to meet trouble with the like brave thoughts and speeches! We cannot show our courage unless we have difficulties and troubles. A man cannot become a veteran soldier if he never goes to battle. No man can get his sea legs if he lives always on land. Rejoice, therefore, in your tribulations, because they give you opportunities of exhibiting a believing confidence, and thereby glorifying the name of the Most High. But take heed that you have faith, true faith in God; and do not become a puppet of impressions, much less a slave of the judgments of others. To have David's faith, you must be as David. No man may take up a confidence of his own making: it must be a real work of the Spirit, and growth of grace within, grasping with living tendrils the promise of the living God.

I will read the passage from the Psalms over again, and we will consider it by God's help. "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over to death."

First, here is *the believer's view of his afflictions*. "The Lord hath chastened me sore." Secondly, here is *the believer's comfort under those afflictions*. "He hath given me over to death. I shall not die, but live." And, thirdly, here is *the believer's conduct after his afflictions and after his deliverance from them* — "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord."

**I.** At the outset, here is THE BELIEVER'S VIEW OF HIS AFFLICTIONS. "The Lord hath chastened me sore."

On the surface of the works we see the good man's clear observation that his *afflictions come from God*. It is true he perceived the secondary hand, for he says, "Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall." There was one at work who aimed to make him fall. His afflictions were the work of a cruel enemy. Yes; but that enemy's assaults were being overruled by the Lord, and were made to work for his good; so David, in the present verse, corrects himself by saying, "*The Lord* hath chastened me sore. My enemy struck at me and he might make me fall; but in very truth my gracious God was using him to chasten me that I might *not* fall. The enemy was moved by malice, but God was working by him in love to my soul. The second agent sought my ruin, but the Great First Cause wrought my education and establishment."

It is well to have grace enough to see that tribulation comes from god: he fills the bitter cup as well as the sweet goblet. Troubles do not spring out of the dust, neither doth affliction grow up from the ground, like hemlock from the furrows of the field; but the Lord himself kindles the fiery furnace, and sits as a refiner at the door. Let us not dwell too much upon the part played by the devil, as though he were a power co-ordinate with God. He is a fallen creature, and his very existence depends upon the will and permission of the Most High. His power is borrowed, and can only be used as the infinite omnipotence of God permits. His wickedness is his own, but his existence is not self-derived. Blame the devil, and blame all of his servants as much as you will; but still believe in the mysterious and

consoling truth that, in the truest sense, the Lord sends trials upon his saints. "Explain this statement," say you. Oh, no; I am not called upon to explain it, but to believe it. A great many things, when they are said to be explained by modern thinkers, are merely explained away, and I have not yet begun to learn that wretched art. Remember how Peter told the Jews that he, whom God by his determinate counsel and foreknowledge decreed to die, even his son Jesus Christ, nevertheless taken by them with wicked hands, when they had crucified and slain him. The death of Christ was pre-determined in the counsel of God, and yet it was none the less an atrocious crime on the part of ungodly men. The omnipotence and providence of God are to be believed; but man's responsibility is not therefore to be questioned. Our afflictions may come distinctly from man, as the result of persecution or malice; and yet they may come with even greater certainty from the Lord, and may be the needful outcome of his special love to us.

For this reason we may wisely moderate our anger against second causes. If you strike a dog with a stick, he will bite the stick; if he were more intelligent, he would snap at the person using the stick; and, if that intelligence were governed by the spirit of obedience, he would yield to the blow, and learn a lesson from it. Thus, when Shimei reviled David, and Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, said unto king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head;" David meekly replied, "So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hath thou done so?" A sight of God's hand in a trial is the end of rebellion against it in the case of every good man. He says, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." We may lie at his feet, and cry, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me;" but, if the reason does not appear, we must bow in reverent submission, and say with one of old, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." Job saw the Lord in his many tribulations, and therefore praised him, saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord that taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Surely there is nothing better for a man of God than to perceive that his smarts and sorrows come from his Father's hand, for then he will say, "The will of the Lord be done." This is the great point in the believer's view of his

afflictions: “*He* maketh sore, and bindeth up: *he* woundeth, and his hands make whole.”

Next the believer perceives that *his trials come on as a chastening*. “The Lord hath *chastened* me sore.” When a child is chastised, two things are clear: first, that there is something wrong in him, or that there is something deficient in him, so that he needs to be corrected or instructed; and, secondly, it shows that his father has a tender care for his benefit, and acts in loving wisdom towards him. This is certainly true if the father is an eminently kind and yet prudent parent. Children do not think that there can be any need for chastening them; but when years have matured their judgment, they will know better. “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous;” if it did seem joyous, it would not be chastening. The “need be” is not only that we have manifold trials, but that we be in heaviness through them. In the smart of the sorrow lies the blessing of the chastisement. God chastens us in the purest love, because he sees that there is an absolute necessity for it: “for he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” Our fathers, according to the flesh, too often corrected us according to their own pleasure, and yet we gave them reverence; but the Father of our spirits corrects us only of necessity — a necessity to which he is too wise to close his eye. Shall we not, therefore, pay greater reverence to him, and bow before him, and live? When Hezekiah was recovered of his sickness, he wrote, “O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.” I find not that men live by carnal pleasure, nor that the life of the spirit is ever found in the wine-vat or in the oil-press; but I do find that life and health often come to saints through the briny tears, through the bruising of the flesh, and the oppression of the spirit. So have I found it, and I bear my willing witness that sickness has brought me health, loss has conferred gain, and I doubt not that one day death will bring me fuller life.

Be wise then, dear child of God, and look upon your present affliction as a chastening. “What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” There is not a more profitable instrument in all God’s house than the rod. No honey was sweeter than that which dropped from the end of Jonathan’s rod; but that is nothing to the sweetness of the consolation which comes through Jehovah’s rod. Our brightest joys are the birth of our bitterest griefs. When the woman has her



travail pangs, joy comes to the house because the man-child is born; and sorrow is to us also, full often, the moment of the birth of our graces. A chastened spirit is a gracious spirit; and how shall we obtain it except we are chastened? Like our Lord Jesus, we learn obedience by the things which we suffer. God had one Son without sin, but he never had a son without sorrow, and he never will have while the world stands. Let us, therefore, bless God for all his dealings, and in a filial spirit confess, "Thou, Lord, hast chastened me."

Consider the psalmist's view of his affliction a little more carefully. *He noted that his trials were sore*: he says, "The Lord hath chastened me sore." Perhaps we are willing to own in general that our trouble is of the Lord; but there is a soreness in it which we do not ascribe to him, but to the malice of the enemy, or some other second cause. The false tongue is so ingenious in slander that it has touched the tenderest part of our character, and has cur us to the quick. Are we to believe that this also is, in some sense, of the Lord? Assuredly we are. If it be not of the Lord, then it is a matter for despair. If this evil comes apart from divine permission, where are we? How can a trial be met which is independent of divine rule, and outside of the sacred zone of providential government? It is hopeful when we find that all our ills lie within the ring-fence of omnipotent overruling. It is one comfort that we see a wall of fire round about us, a circle so complete that even the devil, malicious as he is, cannot break through it, to do more than the Lord allows. The camels are gone, the sheep, the oxen, the servants, all are destroyed: all this is most trying; but it is still true — "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." But, see, another messenger comes, and cries, "There came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead." Might not Job, then, have said, "This is a blow which I cannot bear; for it is evidently from the prince of the power of the air"? No, but even after that, he said, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." When his wife said, "Curse God, and die," he still blessed God, and held his integrity. He told her that she spoke as one of the foolish speaketh, and then he wisely added, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." May we stand fast in patience as he did, even when our troubles overflow!

It is folly to imagine, as we have sometimes done, that we could bear anything except that which we are called upon to endure. We are like the young man who says he wants a situation. What can you do? He can do anything. That man you never engage, because you know that he can do nothing. So it is with us. If we say, "I could bear anything but this," we prove our universal impatience. If we had the choice of our crosses, the one we should choose would turn out to be more inconvenient than that which God appoints for us; and yet we will have it that our present cross is unsuitable and specially galling. I would say to any who are of that mind, "If your burden does not fit your shoulder, bear it till it does." Time will reconcile you to the yoke if grace abides with you. It is not for us to choose our affliction; that remains with him who chooses our inheritance for us. Read well this word, "The Lord hath hastened me sore," and see the Lord's hand in the soreness of your trial. Even while the wound is raw, and the smart is fresh; be conscious that the Lord is near.

Yet there is in the verse a "but", for the *psalmist perceives that his trial is limited*; "but he hath not given me over to death." Certain of the *buts* in Scripture are among the choicest jewels we have. Before us is a "but" which shows that, however deep affliction may be, there is a bottom to the abyss. There is a limit to the force, the sharpness, the duration and the number of our trials.

*"If God appoints the number ten,  
They ne'er can be eleven."*

Whenever the Lord mixes a potion for his people, he weighs each ingredient, measures the bitters, grain by grain, and allows not even a particle in excess to mingle in the draught. Like a careful dispenser, he will not pour out a drop too little or too much.

*"To his church, his joy, and treasure,  
Every trial works for good:  
They are dealt in weight and measure,  
Yet how little understood;*

Not in anger,

*But from his dear covenant love."*

Our Father's anger at our sin will never blaze into wrath against us, though in mercy he will smite our sins. Remember, then, this gracious boundary. "The Lord hath chastened me sore: *but* he hath not given me over unto death." We have never yet experienced a trouble which might not have been worse. One affliction kills another: the wind never blows east and west at the same time. When the Lord smites you abound, so do consolations abound through Christ Jesus. The whole band of troubles never comes forth at once. Everything painful is graded and proportioned to the man and his strength, and the object for which it is sent. With the trial the Lord makes the way of escape that we may be able to bear it. Faith can see an end and limit where nature's dim eye sees endless confusion. Where the carnal sense -

*"Sees every day new straits attend,  
And wonders where the scene will end,"*

faith looks over the intervening space, and comforts herself with that which is yet to come. Faith sings pleasant songs when she foots it over weary roads.

*"The road may be rough, but it cannot be long,  
So let's smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."*

The Lord keep your faith alive, my brethren and sisters, and then whatever trials surge around you, you will sit on the Rock of ages, above the waves, and joyfully sing praises unto your divine Deliverer! Oh, how sweet to say, as I now do, "The Lord hath chastened me sore: *but he hath not given me over unto death*"!

**II.** This brings me secondly, to consider THE BELIEVER'S COMFORT UNDER HIS AFFLICTIONS. The believer's comfort under his afflictions is this- "I shall not die, but live."

*Occasionally this comes in the form of a presentiment.* I do not think that I am superstitious: I fancy that I am pretty clear of that vice; yet I have had presentiments concerning things to come or not to come; and, moreover, I have not met with so many Christian men who, in the time of trouble have received singular warnings, or sweet assurances of coming deliverance, that I am bound to believe that the Lord does sometimes whisper to the heart of his children, and assure them in trial that they shall not be crushed, and

in sickness that they shall not die. How do you understand the story of John Wycliffe, at Lutterworth, in any other way than this? He had been speaking against the monks, and various abuses of the church. He was the first man known to history that preached the gospel in England during the Popish ages — we know him as the Morning Star of the Reformation. He was a man so great that, if he had possessed a printing-press, we might never have needed a Luther; for he had an even clearer light than that great Reformer. He lacked the means of spreading his doctrine, which the art of printing supplied. He did much: he prepared everything to Luther's hand: and Luther was but the proclaimer of Wycliffe's doctrine. Wycliffe was ill — very ill, and the friars came round him, like crows round a dying sheep. They professed to be full of tender pity; but they were right glad that their enemy was going to die. So they said to him, "Do you not repent? Before we can give you viaticum — the last oiling before you die — would it not be well to retract the hard things which you have said against the zealous friars, and his Holiness of Rome? We are eager to forget the past, and give you the last sacrament in peace." Wycliffe begged an attendant to help him sit up; and then he cried with all his strength, "I shall not die, but live, to declare the works of the Lord, and to expose the wickedness of the friars." He did not die, either: death himself could not have killed him then; for he had work to do, and the Lord made him immortal until it was done. How could Wycliffe know that he spoke truly? Certainly he was free from all foolhardy brag; but there was upon his mind a foreshadowing of future work that he had to do, and he felt that he could not die until it was accomplished. Now, do not be making up presentiments about all sorts of things because I have said that sometimes the Lord grants them to his saints. This would be a mischievous piece of absurdity. I remember a young woman, who lived not far from here, who had a presentiment that she would die. I do not think that there was really much the matter with her; but she refused to eat, and was likely to be starved. I went to see her, and she told me that she had a presentiment that she should die, and therefore she should not waste food by eating it. She spoke to me very solemnly about this presentiment, and I replied, "I believe there may be such things." Yes: she was sure I was on her side! Then I went on to say, I once had a presentiment that I was a donkey, and it turned out true in my case; and now I had much the same presentiment about her. This surprised her, and I asked her friends to bring her food. She said she would not eat it;

and then I told her that if she was resolved on suicide, I would mention it at church-meeting that evening, and put her out of the church, since would could not have suicides in our membership. She could not bear to be put out of the church, and began to eat, and it turned out that my presentiment about her was correct; she had been foolish, and she had the good sense to see that it was so. I felt bound to tell you this story, lest you should fancy that I would support you in sentimental nonsense. While there are so many stupid people in the world, we have no need to give cautions where the wise do not need them. Forecasts of good from the Lord may come to those who are sore sick; and when they do, they help them to recover. We are of good courage when an inward confidence enables us to say, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord."

This, however, I only mention by the way. When a believer is in trouble *he derives great comfort from his reliance upon the compassion of God*. The Lord scourges his sons, but he does not slay them. The believer says, "My Father may make me smart with the blow of a cruel one; but he will do me no real harm, nor allow anyone else to injure me. He will not lay upon me more than is right, nor above what I am able to bear. He will stay his hand when he sees that I have no strength left. Moreover, I know that even when he brings me very low, still underneath me are the everlasting arms. If the Lord kill, it is only to make alive: if he wound, it is that he may heal. I am sure of that." O believer, never let anything drive you away from this confidence, for it has sure truth for its foundation! The Lord is good, and his mercy endureth forever. It is not killing, but curing, that God means when he takes the sharp lancet in his hand. The nauseous medicine, which makes the heart sick, works for the cure of a worse sickness. "His compassions fail not." He may often put his hand into the bitter box, but he has sweet cordials ready to take the taste away. For a small moment has he forsaken us, but with great mercies will he return to us. You have an effectual comfort if your faith can keep its hold upon the blessed fact of the Lord's fatherly compassion.

Next, faith comforts the tried child of God by assuring him of the forgiveness of his sin, and his *security from punishment*. Please to notice the very distant difference between chastisement and punishment. I do not say between the meaning of the words, but between the two things which I just now would indicate by those terms. Here is a boy who has

committed a theft. He is brought before the magistrate that he may be punished. Punitive justice will be executed upon him by imprisonment or by a birch rod. Another boy has also stolen — stolen from his father, and he is brought before his father, not to be punished as a law-breaker, but to be chastised. There is a great difference between the punishment awarded by justice and the chastisement appointed by love. They may be alike in painfulness, but how different in meaning! The father does not give to the child what he would deserve if it were a punishment according to the law, but what he thinks will cure him of the wrong-doing by making him feel that his sin brings sorrow. The magistrate, although he desires the good of the offender, has mainly to consider the law in its bearings upon the whole mass of the population, and he punishes as a matter of justice that which wrongs the commonwealth; but the parent acts on other principles. “The Lord hath chastened me sore,” and in that he has added a fatherly part; “but he hath not given me over unto death” which would have been my lot if he had dealt with me as a judge. My heart trembles at his sword, and cries, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” The sentence of justice has been fulfilled upon our Lord, and our comfort is that now there is nothing punitive in all our troubles. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities;” nor will he do so, for he has already laid our sins upon Christ, and Christ has vindicated the law by bearing its penalty, so that nothing more in the way of penalty is demanded by the moral government of God. That which we receive from the rod of the Lord bears the blessed aspect of chastening from a father’s hand; and this is a gladsome fact, which makes even the sharpest smart to be profitable. “Surely the bitterness of death is past,” when, in the case of the believer, even death has ceased to be the penalty of sin, and is changed into a sweet falling asleep upon the bosom of the Well-Beloved, to wake up in his likeness. Every other affliction is changed in the same fashion. Our wasps have become bees: their sting is not the prominent thought, but the honey which they lay up in store. “All things work together for good to them that love God,” and chastisement is chief among those “all things.” What a well of comforting thought is here!

Furthermore, it is a great blessing to a child of God to feel *a full assurance that he has eternal life in Christ Jesus*. “The Lord hath chastened me sore:

but he hath not given me over unto death.” Notice the words, “Given me over.” It is the most awful thing out of hell to be *given over* by God. I fear that there are some such persons. Does not the psalmist refer to such when he says, “They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish”? While God’s own people are chastened every morning, and plagued all day long, the ungodly prosper in the world, and increase in riches. Of his chosen the Lord says, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” But those who are not the Lord’s are left unchastened, because the Lord hath said of them, “Let them alone, they are given unto idols.” They are allowed their transient mirth; let them make the most they can of it, for their end will be desolation.

Unbroken prosperity and undisturbed health may be signs of being “given over unto death”; and they are in such cases where sin is committed without pangs of conscience, or apprehensions of judgment. Such freedom from fear may be maintained even in death: “There are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.” All goes quietly with them; “Like sheep they are laid in the grave.” But “in hell they lift up their eyes, being in torments.” To be given over unto death is often followed by callousness, presumption, and bravado; but it is a dreadful doom, the direst sentence from the throne of judgment as to this life. But you, dear child of God, have this comfort, *he* has not given *you* over, he is thinking upon you. Men do not prune the vine they mean to uproot; nor thresh out the weeds which they mean to burn. He who is chastened is not given over to destruction. Years ago, I was taken very ill, in Marseilles, while attempting to come home to England. As I lay in bed, it seemed as if the cruel mistral wind was driving through my bones, and breaking them with agony. I ordered a fire to be kindled; but when I saw the man begin to light it with a bundle of little branches, I cried out to him, “Pray let me look at that.” I found that he was using the dry prunings of the vine, and my tears were in my eyes as I remembered the words — “Men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” Comfort followed, for I thought, “I am not feeling, like those dried-up shoots; but I am the bleeding vine, which is sharply cut with the pruning-knife; I feel the keen blade in every part of me.” Then I could say, “The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not

given me over.” What joy lies in this, “He hath not given me over”! As long as the father chastens his boy, he has hope of him; if he ceased to do so altogether, we might fear that he thought him too bad to be reclaimed. Be glad, then, dear child of God, that since the Lord chastens you sore, he has not erased your name from his heart, and his hands, nor yielded you up to your enemy’s power.

Another meaning may be found in this text, “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.” *We are comforted by reliance upon God’s power for success in our life-work.* The critics said — and I must quote this because this sermon is very much a personal one — the critics said, when the lad commenced his preaching, that it was a nine days’ wonder, and would soon come to an end. When the people joined the church in great numbers, they were “a parcel of boys and girls.” Many of those “boys and girls” are here to-night, faithful to God unto this hour. Then there came upon me a heavy, heavy stroke — a sore chastening, which those of us who were present would never forget if we live for a century; and we seemed to be made the reproach of all men, through an accident which we could not have foreseen or prevented. But still the testimony for God in this place, by the same voice, has not ceased, nor lost its power. Still the people throng to hear the gospel after these thirty years and more, and still the doctrines of grace are to the front, notwithstanding the opposition. In the darkest hour of my ministry I might have declared, “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.” If you have been set on fire by a divine truth, the world cannot put an extinguisher upon you. That candle which God has lighted, the devils of hell cannot blow out. If you are commissioned of God to do a good work, give your whole heart to it, trust in the Lord, and you will not fail. I bear my joyful witness to the power of God to work mightily by the most insignificant of instruments.

*“The feeblest saint shall win the day,  
Though death and hell obstruct the way.”*

Once more, though we may die, *we are sustained by the expectation of immortality.* When we gather up our feet in the last bed, we may utter this text in a full and sweet sense, “I shall not die, but live.” When Wycliffe



died as to his body, the real Wycliffe did not die. Some of his books were carried to Bohemia, and John Huss learned the gospel from them, and began to preach. They burnt John Huss, and Jerome of Prague; but Huss foretold, as he died, that another would arise after him, whom they should not be able to put down; and in due time he more than lived again in Luther. Is Luther dead? Is Calvin dead to-day? That last man the moderns have tried to bury in a dunghill of misrepresentation; but he lives, and will live, and the truths that he taught will survive all the calumniators that have sought to poison it. Die! Often the death of a man is a kind of new birth to him; when he himself is gone physically, he spiritually survives, and from the grave there shoots up a tree of life whose leaves heal nations. O worker for God, death cannot touch thy sacred mission! Be thou content to die if the truth shall live better because thou diest. Be thou content to die, because death may be to thee enlargement of thine influence. Good men die as dies seed-corn which thereby abideth not alone. When saints are apparently laid in the earth, they quit the earth, and rise and mount to heaven-gate, and enter into immortality. No, when the sepulcher receives this mortal frame, we shall not die, but live. Then shall we come to our true stature and beauty, and put on our royal robes, our glorious Sabbath-dress.

**III.** So I finish with just two or three words on THE BELIEVER'S CONDUCT AFTER TROUBLE AND DELIVERANCE. "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord."

Here is *declaration*. If we had no troubles, we should all have the less to declare. A person who has no experience of tribulation, what great deliverance has he to speak of? Such persons despise the afflicted, and suspect the character of the choicest of men, for lack of power to understand them. What does the man know about the sea who has only walked on the beach? Get with an old sailor, who has been a dozen times around the world, and often wrecked, and he will interest you. So the much-tried Christian has great wonders to declare, and these are chiefly the works of the Lord; for "they that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep." Tried Christians see how God sustains in trouble, and how he delivers out of it, and they declare his works openly: they cannot help doing so. They are so interested themselves in what God has done that

they grow enthusiastic over it; and if they held their peace, the stones would cry out.

If you read the chapter further down, you will find that they not only give forth a declaration, but they offer *adoration*. They are so charmed with what God has done for them, that they laud and magnify the name of the Lord, saying, “I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.” The saints of God, when they are rescued from their sorrows, are sure to sing, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.”

This done, they make a further *dedication* of themselves to their delivering God. As the psalm puts it, “God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light.” It was very dark! It was very, very dark! We could not see our hand, much less the hand of God! We were frozen with fear. We thought we were as dead men, laid out for burial; when suddenly the Lord’s face shown in upon us, and all darkness was gone, and we leaped into joyful security, crying “God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light.” We were convinced that it was none other than the true God who had removed the midnight gloom. Doubts, infidelities, agnosticisms — they were impossible. We said, “God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light.” In the fourth watch of the night, in the prison where the cold stone shut us in, where the darkness had never known a candle, there a light shone round about us, and an angel smote us on the side, and bade us put on our sandals, and gird ourselves, and follow him. We obeyed the word, and our chains fell off; and when we came to the iron gate which had always been our horror, it opened of its own accord, and we went out into the streets of the city, and we scarcely felt that it could be true, but thought we saw a vision. But when we had considered the thing, and found it was even ourselves, and ourselves set in a large place at perfect liberty, then we said, “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.” God hath showed us light, and we will live to him for ever and for ever. Oh, you, tried believers, who have, nevertheless, not been given over unto death, who can say to-night, “I shall not die, but live,” present yourselves anew unto your delivering Lord as living sacrifices through Jesus Christ your Lord! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 18.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 708, 73 (Part II.), 710.

This sermon begins a new volume; in fact, it commences Vol. XXXVIII. Of The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit. I have, myself, selected it, and prepared it for the press, because it is most suitable as my own personal testimony at the present moment. The subject is even more my own this day than it was seven and a half years ago; for I have been in deeper waters, and nearer to the mouth of the grave. With my whole soul I praise delivering grace. To the Lord God, the God of Israel, I consecrate myself anew. For the covenant of grace, for the revelation of infallible truth in the Bible, for the atonement by blood, and the immutable love of the ever blessed Three-in-One, I am a witness; and more and more would I abide faithful to the gospel of the grace of God. I see each day more reasons for faith, and fewer excuses for doubt. Those who will may ship their anchors and be drifted about the current of the age; but I will sing, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise!"

The whole passage, ~~CHR~~ Psalm 118:13-18, is inscribe upon a marble slab on the Jubilee House at the back of the Tabernacle, and I am told that many went to read it while I lay in the greatest peril through sore sickness, and were comforted thereby. When the Lord permits me to return, I must raise yet another memorial to his praise.

# “THOU ART NOW THE BLESSED OF THE LORD.”

SERMON NO. 2238

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY,  
JANUARY 10TH, 1892,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON  
LORD’S-DAY EVENING, MAY 3<sup>RD</sup>, 1891.

*“Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” — ~~102~~Genesis 26:29.*

THESE words truly describe the position of many whom I address at this time. There are hundreds here upon whom my eye can rest, and to any one of whom I might point with this finger, or rather, to whom I might extend this hand, to give a hearty shake, and say, “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” I need not say it in the same spirit, nor for the same reason, that the Philistines did. They had behaved basely towards Isaac, and now that he had prospered, they urged him to forget the past. They meant, “This is why we trust that you will deal kindly with us, and overlook our hard usage; for, in spite of all, God has so blessed you that you need not be fretful and pettish, and remember what we have done.” I am glad that I am under no necessity to strive to make up a quarrel in this way. These many years we have dwelt in peace, and have enjoyed sweet fellowship together. You have borne with my weaknesses often, and bestowed upon me a wealth of affection which I am sure I do not deserve. So, though I use the language of Abimelech and his friends, my motive is a very different one. Yet the truth is the same concerning many a one here: “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.”

There is, however, much force in the argument which these Philistines used. If God has richly blessed us, notwithstanding all our faults and failures, surely we should learn to forgive many injuries done to ourselves. If the Lord forgives us our debt of ten thousand talents, we must be willing

to forgive our fellow-servant his debt of a hundred pence. Child of God, if you are now the blessed of the Lord, you will often turn a blind eye towards the offenses of your fellow-men. You will say, "God has so blessed me, that I can well overlook any wrongs that you have inflicted, any hard words that you have said. I am now blessed of the Lord; so let bygones be bygones." May you have grace given to you to do that now, if any of you have had a little squabble with any other! If there have been any difficulties between any of you, I would hope that, before I really get into my subject, while with my finger I point you out and say to each one of you, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord," you will immediately say, "As surely as that is true, I do from my very heart forgive all who have offended me, whether Philistine, or Israelites, or Gentiles. How can I do otherwise who myself have received such grace while so unworthy?"

Remember, that that this was spoken by the Philistine king as a reason why he wished to have Isaac for a friend. In your choice of friends, choose those who are the friends of God. If you would have a blessing upon your friendship, select a man whom God has blessed. Look out for one who is a disciple of Christ and say, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord; therefore I seek thine acquaintance. Come under my roof; you will bring a blessing with you." Speak to me in the street; your morning word will be a benediction to me." It was the old custom with apostolic men to say, as they entered a house, "Peace be unto this house." We have given up all idea of blessing our fellow-men in that way. But why have you done so? Is it from a want of love, or want of faith in our own prayer that God would make it even so? For my part, I value a good man's blessing. As I drove up a hill, in the country, some time ago, a poor man and his wife were walking down the hill. I had never seen them before; but the woman pulled the husband by his coat; they both stood and looked at me, and at last she said, quite loudly, "It's him, God bless him!" and although her greeting was not quite grammatical, it evidently came from her heart, and I felt happier for it, as I went on my way. I saw her afterwards, and asked her the reason of her words, "Why," she said, "I have read your sermons for many a year, and I could not help saying, 'God bless him!' when I saw you, for you have been a blessing to me." Thus that humble woman, being blessed of the Lord, became a blessing to me; and we all of us, even the most obscure, who know the grace of God, might daily be like a great

benediction in the midst of the people. When you think of your minister, say sometimes, "God bless him!" it will do him good to hear it. Say to your friend, "God bless you!" Say to your children, "God bless you, my dear boy! The Lord bless you, my dear girl!" They will be the better for it, if you yourself are the blessed of the Lord. You, grandsires, lay your hands on the children's heads, and bless them; they will not forget it when they grow up. It may be that you have done much more for them than you have thought. Concerning his flock the Lord says, "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing." God's people are blessed that they may bless; therefore, for the sake of others, as well as for your own, seek that my text may be abundantly true of you. May this be your prayer -

*"Lord, I hear of showers of blessing,  
Thou art scattering full and free;  
Showers, the thirsty land refreshing;  
Let some droppings fall on me,  
Even me."*

It was for this reason that the Philistines sought the friendship of Isaac, because they could truly say to him, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

I want not so much to preach from this text as to ask every believer in Christ to feel that it is personally true. Once you were condemned; but, being in Christ Jesus, "there is therefore now no condemnation." "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Once you were at enmity against God; but now, being reconciled to God by the death of his Son, you are his friend: "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." "Ye were sometimes in darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." How great the change for the man or woman to whom we can say "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord"!

There was a day when I was cursed, and there was a day when I loved sin, and opposed God's will; but now I love sin no longer, and I find my highest delight in doing the will of my Father in heaven. My soul, if this be true, "thou art now the blessed of the Lord"; thou art a miracle of mercy; thou art a prodigy of grace; and truly, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Sit still in your pews, ye people of God, and roll this sweet

morsel under your tongue! Once, because you believed not, the wrath of God was resting upon you, but now you can say, “O Lord! I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.” Surely then “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” Thou art poor, perhaps, in this world’s goods; but being an heir of the “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,” why, “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” Or, perchance, you are weak and ill, and scarcely able to be in your place; but though thy flesh and strength fail, “thou art now the blessed of the Lord,” for by his grace, you will triumph over all. With many a fear and many a care oppressed, still “thou art now the blessed of the Lord,” and on him thou canst cast thy care, and from him receive deliverance from all thy fears. Whatever thy distresses, this overwhelms them all as with a flood of joy. You can join with one who, though in a very humble station of life, says,-

*“O joy! ‘tis mine, this life divine,  
Life hid with Christ in God;  
Once sin-defiled, now reconciled,  
And washed in Jesus’ blood.*

*“Oft far astray from Christ the Way,  
I went with wilful feet;  
From hopeless track, love brought me back,  
With words of welcome sweet.”*

If thou canst truly sing this sweet song, “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” Thou art not yet perfect; thou art not yet taken out of the body to be with thy Lord in bliss; thou art not yet risen from the dead to stand before the throne of God in thy body of resurrection glory; but yet thou art now, even now, the blessed of the Lord. Will you let the flavour of this sweet truth be in your mouth, and in your heart, while I seek to open this subject to you?

**I.** I would remark upon it, first, that in the case of Isaac, THIS WAS THE TESTIMONY OF ENEMIES. It was the Philistines who said, “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” There are some of God’s people who are so evidently favored of heaven that even those who despise and oppose them cannot help saying of them, “They are the blessed of the Lord.” I wish that we were all such, so distinguished by piety, so marked out by

strength of faith and prevalence of prayer, that even our Abimelechs might be force to say to each of us, “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.”

What caused this heathen king and his companions to use such an expression about Isaac? In seeking the reasons which led them to see the bounty of the Lord in the case of Abraham’s son, we may find some signs of the blessing of God upon ourselves and upon our children.

I think, first, that *they saw it in his wonderful prosperity*. We read in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth verses,

“Then Isaac sowed in the land, and received in the same year a hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: for he had possession of flocks and possession of herds, and great store of servants.”

Prosperity is not always a token of blessing. It may be proof of the lord’s favor, and it may not be. God sometimes gives most to those on earth who will have nothing in heaven; as if, seeing that he cannot bless them in eternity, he would let them enjoy the poor sweets of time. I have heard it said, that prosperity was the blessing of the old covenant and adversity the blessing of the new. Nevertheless, it is true that worldly prosperity may be sent, and has been sent, to the children of God, as a token of divine favor. It is not always when we eat the quails that they make us ill; God can send them in such a way that we may enjoy them, and be strengthened by them. He can give riches as well as poverty. That was the Philistines’ reason, and it is a Philistine’s reason. It is not a very satisfactory one, but it has some force, for the Lord Jesus himself gave the sign of blessing upon the meek, saying, “They shall inherit the earth;” and in the same memorable discourse upon the mount, he uttered the exhortation and promise, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things” — the things which the gentiles seek after — “shall be added unto you.” So we may fairly construe the “mercies of God” as a sign of his blessing.

These Philistines had a further reason for thinking that Isaac was blessed of God; *they felt it by divine impression*. A secret spirit whispered to the king, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.” God always has a way of making men feel “how awful goodness is.” They may



jest and jeer against a Christian, but his life vanquishes them. They cannot help it. They must do homage to the supremacy of grace. The promise is still true, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." God will impress upon the minds even of unbelievers this fact, that such a man, such a woman, is one whom God has blessed. Do you not know some believers who have such an air of other-worldliness about them, that though they mix freely with the people amongst whom they dwell, men instinctively acknowledge that "they have been with Jesus," and have been blessed by him? I do not care to see pictures of the saints of old with a nimbus of light round their heads, even though they have been painted by the old masters, yet there is a something about one who lives a saintly life, a brightness encircling him, like the symbol of God's presence, which separates him from those around him, and leads us to say to him, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Further, before the Philistines bore this testimony to Isaac, no doubt *they remarked his gentleness*. I do believe that there is nothing that has such power over ungodly men as meekness of spirit, quietness of behavior, patience of character, and the continual conquest over an evil temper. If you grow angry when people are angry with you, you will have lost your position; but if you can be patient under persecution, if you can smile when they ridicule you, if you can yield your rights, if you can bear and continue to bear, you are greater than the man who has taken a city. Remember the blessing promised to the disciples of Christ who are peacemakers. They are not only the children of God, but "*they shall be called the children of God.*" People will say, "If any man is a true Christian, he is one;" they will have no doubt about it. When longsuffering, gentleness, and meekness are in the life, men begin to say to such a one, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." As the gentleness of the Lord makes us great, the gentleness of the saints brings to God great glory. Anger hath a temporary sovereignty, that melts in the heat of the sun. Quietness of spirit is king over all the land. If thou canst rule thyself, thou canst rule the world. Isaac conquered by his meekness; for when Abimelech saw that he yielded well after well rather than keep up a quarrel, he said to him, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." Some of you do not understand this. "What!" you say, "are we not to stick up for ourselves?" That depends upon whose you are; if you are your own, take

care of yourselves; but if you are Christ's, let him take care of you. "But," you say, "if you tread on a worm, it will turn." But surely you will not make a worm your pattern? Nay, but let the meek and lowly Christ be your example, and seek to be a partaker of his Spirit. He prayed even for his murderers, "Father, forgive them," and he ever sought to return good for evil. I pray you to do the same, cultivate a gentle spirit, and even worldlings will say to you, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Now, while these Philistines saw that God blessed Isaac, *they nevertheless envied him*, as we read in the fourteenth verse. How strange it is that men, who do not care to be blessed of God themselves, envy them who are blessed of him! I heard one say, "It is not just that God should have a chosen people." Sir, do you want to be one of God's people? These blessings which God gives to them, do you want to have them? You may have them, if you will. If you will not have them, I pray you do not quarrel with God because he chooses to give them where he wills. There are two great truths, which from this platform, I have proclaimed for many years. The first is, that salvation is free to every man who will have it; the second is, that God gives salvation to a people whom he has chosen; and these truths are not in conflict with one another in the least degree. If you want the blessing of the Lord, have it even now, for my commission as an ambassador of Christ is to beseech men to be reconciled to God; if you do not want it, do not quarrel with God for giving it to his own chosen. It was so with those Philistines — they wanted not Jehovah's blessing, and yet they envied Isaac, who had it.

But while they envied him, *they feared him, and courted his favor*. Do I speak to some young believer who has gone into a house of business, or some Christian woman who has been placed in a family where her religion exposes her to opposition? Let me counsel you to go straight on, taking no notice of the hindrances thrown in your way. You will first be envied; after that you will be feared; and after that you will be sought after, and your company will be desired. If you can only keep as firm as Isaac did, never losing your temper, but always being gentle, and meek, and kind, you will conquer; and you who are to-day despised, will yet come to be honored, even as Isaac was by the very Abimelech who had, just a little while before, asked him to go away.

A man of God, who was bearing testimony for the faith, on one occasion was pushed into a kennel by a person passing by, who said, as he thrust him in, "There, take that, John Bunyan." He took off his hat, and said, "I will take anything if you give me the name of John Bunyan. I count it such an honor to have that title, that you may do anything that you like with me." To be identified with those who have been blessed of the Lord is worth more than all the favors of the world. We are in good company. If men despise you, it matters little when God has blessed you. If they push you into the gutter for being a Christian, take your hat off, and thank the, for it is worth while to bear any scorn, that you may have the honor to be numbered with the followers of Christ. Rest assured that if you will count it a privilege even to be mocked for your faith, those who persecute you to-day, will acknowledge your high position to-morrow. It is a grand thing when any one of us thus gets the testimony of our enemies, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

**II.** Now, secondly, not only did his enemies thus bear witness to Isaac, saying, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord;" but THIS WAS ALSO THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD. It was because he had the witness of God that he was able so to behave as to secure the favorable verdict of the Philistines. Like Enoch before his translation, Isaac "had this testimony, that he pleased God." And was thus meekly able to bear the displeasure of the world. When they hunted him from one well, he digged another, yet all the time he with joy drew "water out of the wells of salvation." He might almost have sat for the picture which Jeremiah drew of the blessed man, centuries afterwards, when he said, "Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when the heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Let us see, then, how Isaac had the testimony of God as to his blessedness.

First, this was the Lord's testimony to him *in promises founded upon the covenant* which he had made with Abraham his father. God said to Isaac, "I will be with thee, and will bless thee." In the third verse of this chapter, the promise is made doubly sure to Isaac when God says, "I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father." And in the twenty-fourth verse of the chapter, where the promise is renewed, it is still on the

ground of the covenant: “I am with thee, and I will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham’s sake.” Now, do you know anything of the covenant relationship between God and his people? The bulk of Christians nowadays are wholly ignorant on this subject. The preachers have forgotten it; yet the covenant is the top and bottom of all theology. He that is the master of the knowledge of the covenants has the key of true divinity. But the doctrine has gone out of date except with a few old-fashioned people, who are supposed to know no better, but who, in spite of all the taunts of their opponents, cling to the doctrines of grace, and find in them the very marrow and fatness of the truth of God. I love the promises of God because they are covenant promises God has engaged to keep his word with his people in the person of his dear Son. He has bound himself, by covenant with Christ, and will not, cannot go back from his word; and Christ has fulfilled the conditions of the covenant, and he who hath “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,” will certainly, “make you perfect to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.” The promise is a double promise when it is confirmed in Jesus. Though we are poor and worthless creatures, yet can we say with David, “Although my house not be so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” Twice God says by Isaiah, “I have given him for a covenant to the people” thrice happy are they who receive what God hath given, and who, in Christ, enter into that blessed bond. Beloved, if God has laid the promise home to you by the Spirit, and let you see it as a covenant promise, the God has borne this testimony to you: “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” Thou art blessed now; thou shalt be blessed all thy life long on earth;

*“And when through Jordan’s flood,  
Thy God shall bid thee go,  
His arm shall thee defend,  
And vanquish every foe;  
And in this covenant thou shalt view  
Sufficient strength to bear thee through.”*

Further, the Lord bore testimony to Isaac *in secret manifestation*. He came to him in the watches of the night, and spake with him face to face. None but those who are the blessed of the Lord have such communion with him.

“How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” asked Judas, not Iscariot, at the supper-table, before the Lord’s betrayal. Ah, Judas! It is simply because thou art not Iscariot, but a true disciple; else hadst thou never known intimately the presence of Christ. If he manifests himself to us in this choice manner, it is because he has blessed us in a way in which he would not bless the ungodly world. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.” Do you ever get manifestations of Christ? Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto you? Then thou hast a divine attestation that “thou art now the blessed of the Lord.”

Isaac also found this testimony, I think, *in divine acceptance of his worship*. We find that “he builded an altar,” and then he, “pitched his tent.” Keep up the altar of God in your home, and keep to the right order — the altar first, and the tent second. When God accepts you there, and makes your family altar to be a place of refreshment and delight to you, you will feel that in thus doing he is giving you the sweet assurance that you are now the blessed of the Lord. It is a pity that there are so many houses nowadays without roofs — I mean, houses of Christian people without family prayer. What are some of you at? If your children turn out ungodly, do you wonder at it, seeing that there is no morning and evening prayer, no reading of the Word of God in your home? In every home where the grace of God is known, there should be an altar, from which should rise the incense of praise, and at which the one sacrifice for sin should be pleaded before God day by day. In the midst of such family piety, which I fear is almost dying out in many quarters, you will get the witness, “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.”

Isaac had another proof that he was blessed of God *in swift chastisement for sin*. He told a lie; he said that Rebekah was his sister, whereas she was his wife. Although that might seem to prove that he was not blessed of the Lord, the proof of his blessedness was that he was found out, and became ashamed of it. Worldly people may do wrong, and very likely get off scot-free; but if a Christian man goes off the straight line, he will have an accident in his roguery, and be found out; while other men may do ten times as badly, and never be suspected. Rascals who know not God, and who despise the ordinary morality of honest men, may speculate on the

Stock Exchange with other peoples' money and never be found out; but if you who really love God only do it once, and say, "Well, I feel driven to it," you will be cause as surely as you live. It is one mark of a child of God, that when he does wrong, he gets a whipping. If I were in the street, and saw strange boys breaking windows, I would say, "Go home, or I will find a policeman for you." But if it were my own boy, I would chastise him myself. I would not meddle with the other boys; but with my own I would. So it is with God; who saith, by the mouth of Amos, to his people, "You only have I known for all of the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." It is a mark of God's blessing a man, that if the man does wrong, he cannot do it with impunity. Whenever your sins make you smart, thank God; for it is better to smart than it is to sin, and better that the smart should wean you from sin than that something sweet should come in to make you the slave of that sin forever.

Well, I will not dwell further on this. God testified to Isaac's heart, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." May he testify that to each one of you who know his name, and have received his covenant promises! May the words come to you like a benediction from the throne of God, and send you out to testify of his goodness, and to bless him who hath blessed us, saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"!

**III.** Now, in the third place, I must draw your attention to the fact that, though Isaac was the blessed of the Lord, THIS DID NOT SECURE HIM FROM TRIAL. Already I have approached this part of my subject by speaking of the speedy discovery of his sin; but in addition to this, there were other sorrows not directly resulting from his own conduct, but permitted by God in order that he, who was now blessed, should be still further enriched in character and conduct.

Even before Abimelech saw the source of Isaac's grace, he was "the blessed of the Lord"; yet *he still had to move about*. He was a pilgrim and a stranger, as was his father, and he lived as an alien in the land. He was without any inheritance in the country, and though his flocks and herds increased, he dwelt but in tents, while others reared for themselves stately houses and palaces. But God had prepared some better thing for him, and "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is

God.” Thus, this trial became a means of blessing to him, as trials always do when sanctified by the Spirit of God. If these words reach any child of God whose nest on earth has been disturbed, whose house has been broken up, I would seek to cheer you by the thought of the “continuing city” which shall soon be your portion. If you have, through Christ, an assurance of an abundance entrance there, though you never have a house of your own on earth, and roam from place to place a stranger, seeming to be very often in the way of other people, yet remember that “thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” Daily he doth load thee with benefits, and thou canst even now have thy home in his love.

*“He loves, he knows, he cares,  
Nothing that truth can dim;  
He gives the very best to those  
Who leave the choice to him.”*

In spite of the position of blessedness in which Isaac was placed, *he had enemies to meet*. It is true that, at length, his foes became his friends; but the blessing of the Lord did not begin with their friendship; they then discovered and confessed the fact; but Isaac had been “the blessed of the Lord” all along. When Abimelech sent him away, and when “the herdsmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac’s herdsmen,” he was not shut out from God’s favor. Jehovah never bade him depart, nor took from him his good Spirit. So, tried heart, when foes press around thee, and one thing after another seems to go wrong, do not begin to write bitter things against thyself, as though God had forsaken thee. Remember that it is of the Lord that thou art blessed, and not of men. He will never forsake thee, and his deliverance shall soon make thy heart glad. Even in the midst of the trial, “thou art now the blessed of the Lord,” and, like Isaac, after you have drunk of the waters of “contention” and “hatred”, you will be brought to Rehoboth, where you shall have “room”, yea, even to Beer-sheba, “the well of the oath”, or “the seventh well”, “the well of satiety”, where your enemies shall seek your favor, and glorify your Lord.

Isaac had especially one trial that ate into his very soul; *he had domestic sorrow*. Esau’s double marriage with Hittite women was a grief to his father and to his mother; and I mention this because there may be some of God’s people who are suffering in the like way. I saw one, some days ago, who said, “I am like the Spartan who carried a fox in his bosom, that ate

even to his heart, for I have a thankless, ungrateful child;" and, as he spoke to me, I saw the heart-break of the man. Ah! It may be that some of you are in that condition. If any young man or young woman here is causing that grief to a parent, I pray him or pray her to think of it. You are not heartless, I hope: you have not forgotten your mother's prayers or your father's care of you. Do not kill those who gave you being, or insult and vex those to whom you owe so much. But oh, dear brother or sister, if you have come here broken-hearted about your Esau, and all that he is doing, I want to take you by the hand and say, "But still thou art blessed of the Lord., Let this console thee." What if Abraham has his Ishmael? Yet God blessed him. Bear bravely this trial. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Give God no rest, day or night, till he save thy boy, and bring back thy girl. But still, be not despairing; be not cast down; for it is true of thee — and drink in, I pray thee, this cup of consolation — that "thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Let me speak two or three earnest words in closing. "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." "*Now.*" Beloved, do labor to get a hold of a present blessing. If you are indeed saved, do not be always thinking of what you are to enjoy in heaven; but seek to be the blessed of the Lord now. Why not have two heavens, a heaven here and a heaven there? What is the difference between a believer's life here and a believer's life there? Only this: here Christ is with us, and there we are with Christ. If we live up to our privileges this is the only difference we need to know. Try to be "now the blessed of the Lord." I have heard of a traveler who was followed by a beggar, in Ireland, who very importunately asked for alms. As long as there seemed a chance of getting anything, the old woman kept saying, "May the blessing of God follow your honor all through your life!" but when all hope of a gift was vanished, she bitterly added, "and never overtake you." But the blessings which God has for his chosen are not of that slow-footed kind which never catch us up. It is written, "All these blessings shall come on thee, and *overtake thee*, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God." I beseech you, then, to lay hold of this overtaking blessing. Let it not pass unheeded. "Thou art *now* the blessed of the Lord."

Next, be very grateful that you are in this position of grace. You might have been in the drink-shop, you might have been speaking infidelity, you



might have been in prison, you might have been in hell. But “thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” Wherefore, praise the Lord, whose mercy endureth for ever. If you do not lift up your voice, yet lift up your heart, and bless him for the grace which hath made you to differ from other people.

Again, tell others about it. If “thou art now the blessed of the Lord,” communicate to others the sacred secret that has been the means of bringing such joy to thee. Are we earnest enough about the souls of others? Christian men and women, do you love your fellow-creatures, or do you not? How few there are of us who make it our business to be constantly telling out the sweet story of Jesus and his love! I read, the other day, of a chaplain in the Northern army in the lamentable war in the United States, who, while he lay wounded on the battle-field, heard a man, not far off, utter an oath. Though he himself was so badly wounded that he could not stand, yet he wished to reach the swearer to speak a gospel message to him, and he thought, “I can get to him if I roll over.” So, though bleeding profusely himself, he kept rolling over and over till he got to the side of the poor blasphemer, and on the lone battle-field he preached to him Jesus. Some of the other men came along, and he said to them, “Can you carry me? I fear that I am dying, but I do not want to be taken off the field. I should like you, if you would, to carry me from one dying man to another, all the night long, that I might tell them of a Savior.” What a splendid deed was this! A bleeding man talking to those who were full of sin about a Savior’s bleeding wounds! Oh, you who have no wound, who can walk, and possess all the faculties to fit you for the service, how often you miss opportunities and refuse to speak of Jesus! “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord,” and at this moment I would have you think that the blessed Lord lays his pierced hand on thee saying, “Go and tell others what I have done for thee.” Never cease to tell the divine tale, as opportunity is given, until thy voice is lost in death; then thy spirit shall begin to utter the story in the loftier sphere.

You are coming to the Lord’s table, and I invite you, beloved, to come here with much love. Do not come with doubts and fears, with a cold or lukewarm heart. Remember “Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.” Come, eat his flesh, and drink his blood. There, on the table, thou wilt see nothing but the embers of his flesh and blood; but if thou believest, Christ

will feed thee spiritually upon himself, and as thou dost eat that bread of heaven, and drink that wine of life, thou mayest well hear a voice saying, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord."

Well do I remember the time when I would have given away my eyes to be as a dog under the table, to have eaten only the crumbs which fell, as others feasted, and now for forty-and-one years to-day I have sat as a child at the table, blessed be his name!

As I told our friends this morning, this day is an anniversary of peculiar interest to me. Forty-and-one years ago I went down into the river, and was baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

*"Yet have been upheld till now:  
Who could hold me up but thou?"*

May you, each of you, as you come to the table, hear a voice saying in your heart, "Now a believer; now justified; now quickened; now regenerate; now in Christ; now dear to the heart of God. 'Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.'"

Oh, that some who came in here without the blessing would get it before they go! He that believeth in Jesus hath all the blessing which Jesus can give to him; forgiveness for the past; grace for the present; and glory for the future. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," is the word of the Lord to thee, thou doubter. He was made a curse for thee, that he might redeem thee from the curse of the broken law, for it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." He hung on a tree for guilty man. Believe thou in him, and as thou believest, eternal joys shall come streaming down into thy dry and desolate heart, and it shall be said to thee, "Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." You shall be blessed now, and blessed for evermore! God grant it, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~Gen~~ Genesis 26.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 758, 757, 786.

**LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.**

DEAR FRIENDS, — I have received letters from readers who speak of reading *with interest* the notes at the end of the sermons. I feared that these jottings had become monotonous, and therefore I am amazed that they should interest so many. I am not able, like Paganini, to discourse sweet music on a single string; and therefore I impute the *interest* spoken of the love of the reader rather than to the genius of the writer. We are always interested in the smallest details of the lives of those we greatly love.

This present note may record the fact that on the last evening of 1891, and in the morning of New Year's Day, 1892, I gave two short addresses to about a dozen friends in this hotel. My silence of more than half a year is ending. The chirping of the first spring birds is heard in my land. It is true that I sat down, and talked my little piece, and that I felt glad when it came to an end; but still it has been done, and be that was almost numbered with the dead is now beginning to speak in the ears of the living.

These two little talks, only of interest to my friends, will probably be preserved in *The Sword and the Trowel* for February, for Mr. Harrald took them down in shorthand. You will all guess how happy I am, for I have now some signs and tokens of returning strength; and I am praising God with all my heart for such a wonderful restoration.

To friends who have lovingly kept up the funds for the various institutions, I send my heartiest thanks, and to all well-wishers my kindest regards.

Yours to serve till death,

**C. H. SPURGEON.**

*Hotel Beau Rivage, Menton,*  
*January 2, 1892.*

# “IS GOD IN THE CAMP?”

## SERMON NO. 2239

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY,  
JANUARY 17TH, 1892,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON  
THURSDAY EVENING, APRIL 9TH, 1891.**

“And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! For there hath not been such a thing heretofore” — ~~1~~<sup>1</sup> Samuel 4:7.

ISRAEL was out of gear with God. The people had forgotten the Most High, and had gone aside to the worship of Baal. They had neglected the things of God; therefore they were give up to their enemies. When Jehovah had brought them out of Egypt, he instructed them how they were to live in the land to which he would bring them, and warned them that if they forsook him they would be chastened. His words were very plain: “If ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.” In fulfillment of this threatening, the Philistines had been divinely permitted to make great havoc of the idolatrous Israelites, and to hold them in cruel slavery.

The only way for them to get out of their trouble was to return to God, who, by his judgments, seemed to say. “Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.” The only cure for their hurt was to go back with repentance, and renew their faith and their covenant with God. Then all would have been right. But this is the last thing that men will do. Our minds, by nature, love not spiritual things. We will attend to any outward duty, or to any external rite; but to bring our hearts into subjection to the divine will, to bow our minds to the Most High, and to serve the Lord our God with

all our heart, and all our soul, the natural man abhors. Yet nothings less than this will suffice to turn our captivity.

Instead of attempting to get right with God, these Israelites set about devising superstitious means of securing the victory over their foes. In this respect most of us have imitated them. We think of a thousand inventions; but we neglect the one thing needful. I may be addressing some who, at this time, are passing through sore trial, and who therefore think that they must have forgotten some little thing in connection with the external religion, instead of seeing that it matters little what outward observance they may neglect, so long as they do not possess the faith, without which it is impossible to please God. They forgot the main matter, which is to enthrone God in the life, and to seek to do his will by faith in Christ Jesus. Get right with God; confess thy sin; believe in Jesus Christ, the appointed Savior; be reconciled to God by the death of his Son; then all will be right between thee and the Father in heaven. We cannot bring men to this, apart from the Spirit of God.

In this sermon I shall have to show you how often, and in how many ways, men seek other methods of cure than the only one, namely, to take the case to God. They heal their hurt slightly. They cry, "Peace! Peace!" where there is no peace, and adopt a thousand devious devices rather than accept the only remedy provided by the Great Physician for sin-sick souls. Instead of seeking to become right with God, these Israelites thought that, if they could get the ark of the covenant, which had been the symbol of Jehovah's presence, and bring it from the tent of Shiloh into the midst of their camp, they would then be certain of victory. So they sent and fetched the ark; and when it came into the camp, they were enthusiastic as if their banners already waved over a victorious; they lifted up their voices so loudly, that the earth rang again with their shouts, while the Philistines, hearing their exulting shout, and finding out the reason, were greatly afraid. With fearful hearts, and trembling lips, already counting that all was lost, their enemies turned to one another, and said, "God has come into the camp. Woe unto us! For there hath not been such a thing heretofore."

In considering this subject, we will think, first, of *the great mistake* which both Israel and the Philistines made. In the second place, we will consider

*the great truth* of which their mistake was a caricature. God *does* come into the camp when his people go forth to fight in his name; and when he really comes, the tide of battle is turned. When I have spoken on these two things, I shall close, as God shall help me, by speaking upon *the great lessons* which lie almost upon the very surface of the narrative.

First, then, let us consider THE GREAT MISTAKE which both Israelites and Philistines made. The Israelites, instead of seeing to God himself, went to Shiloh to fetch the ark of the covenant. The ark was the sacred place where God revealed himself in the days when his people truly served him; but it was devoid of power, without the presence of him who dwelt between the cherubim. The Israelites were mistaken, for they shouted long before they were “out of the wood.” Before they had won any victory, the sight of the ark made them boastful and confident. The Philistines fell into an error of a different kind, for they were frightened without any real cause. They said, “God has come into the camp;” whereas God had not come at all. It was only the ark with the cherubim upon it; God was not there.

The mistake they made was just this: *they mistook the visible for the invisible*. It has pleased God, even in our holy faith, to give us some external symbols — water, and bread, and wine. They are so simple, that it does seem, at first sight, as if men could never have made them objects of worship, or used them as instruments of a kind of witchcraft. One would have thought that these symbols would only have been like windows of agate and gates of carbuncle. Through which men would behold the Savior, and draw near to him. Instead thereof, some have neither looked through the windows nor passed through the gates, but have ascribed to the gates and the windows that which is only to be found in him who is behind them both. It is sad, indeed, when the symbol takes the place of the Savior! Man is by nature both an atheist and an idolater. These are two shades of the same thing. We want, if we do worship at all, something that we can see. But a God that can be seen is no God; and so the idolater is first cousin to the atheist. He has a god which is no god, for he cannot be a god if he can be apprehended by human senses. This ark of the covenant, which was but a chest of wood covered with gold, with angelic figures on the lid, was simply a token of the presence of God with his people; and these Israelites transformed it into a sacred object, to be highly revered, to be worshipped, and, as it appears, to be trusted in.

The elders said, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when *it* cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." They ascribed to the ark what could only be done by God himself. This is the tendency of us all. Anything which we can see, we pine after. Hence we lean upon the arm of flesh: we trust in man, though it is written plainly enough, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Yet, still we want some symbol, some token, something before our eyes; and if it can be something artistic, so much the better. We lay hold of something beautiful, that will charm the eye, and produce a kind of sensuous feeling, and straightway we mistake our transient emotion for spiritual worship and true reverence. This is the great mistake that many still make; they think that God has come into the camp merely because some outward religious rite or ceremony has been observed, or because some sacred shrine has been set up among them.

These Israelites fell into another mistake, which is also often made to-day: *they preferred office to character*. In their distress, instead of calling upon God, they sent for Hophni and Phinehas. Why did their hearts turn to them? Simply because they were priests, and the people had come to hold the sacred office in such superstitious reverence that they thought that was everything. But these young men were sinners against the Lord exceedingly; they were not even moral men, much less were they spiritual men. They made the house of God to be abhorred, and dishonored the Lord before all Israel. Yet, because they happened to hold the office of the priesthood, they were put in the place of God. Dear friends, this is a kind of feeling which many indulge. They think they shall be saved if they have a Levite for their priest. They imagine that the worship of God must be conducted properly, because the man who conducts it is in the apostolic succession, and has been duly ordained. You shall see a man eminent for the holiness of his life, for the disinterestedness of his character, for the fidelity of his preaching, for his power in prayer, for the blessing that rests upon his ministry in the conversion of sinners; but he is counted a mere nobody, because he lacks the superstitious qualification which deluded men think is so necessary. Here are Hophni and Phinehas, two of the grossest sinners in all the land of Israel; but then, you see, they are in the line of Aaron, and so they are trusted, and indeed are put in the place of

God. Now, God forbid that we should say a word against the house of Aaron, or against any who speak the name of the Lord, whom God has truly called unto his work! But, beloved, this work is not a mere matter of pedigree; it is a question of the abiding presence of God with man and in a man. Unless God be with the minister whom you hear, to what purpose do you listen? If the leader of the church be not one who walks with God, where will he lead you? "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." The blind man may wear a badge on his arm to show that he is a certified guide; but will you be saved from the ditch simply because he belongs to the order of guides, and has his certification with him? Be not led away by any such vain notion. Yet this is the error into which many have fallen in all ages of the church.

But these people who faced the Philistines made another mistake; *they confounded enthusiasm with faith*. When they saw the ark, they shouted so that the earth rang again. "These are the kind of people I like," says one, "people that can shout." If that is all you want, why do you not go among the bulls of Bashan, and make your home in the midst of them? They can make more noise than any mortal men can make. These Israelites shouted, but there was nothing in their noise, any more than there is in their modern imitators. Anyone who has passed the camp of Israel, that day, might have said that they had "a bright, cheerful, happy service; just the kind of service the people like, you know, nothing dull about it." Hark! How the glad sound rises! Surely these people must have great faith! No, they had not a scrap of the real article. They were under a mistake all the time; and, shout as they might, they had very little to shout about; for in a short time their carcasses strewed the plain. The Philistines put an end to their shouting. Now, beloved, when you are worshipping God, shout if you are filled with holy gladness. If the ejaculation comes from your heart, I would not ask you to restrain it. God forbid that we should judge any man's worship! But do not be so foolish as to suppose that because there is loud noise there must also be faith. Faith is a still water, it floweth deep. True faith in God may express itself with leaping and shouting; and it is a happy thing when it does: but it also sit still before the Lord, and that perhaps is a happier thing still. Praise can sit silent on the lip, and yet be heard in heaven. There is a passion of the heart, too deep for words. There are feelings that break the backs of words; the mind staggers and trembles



beneath the weight of them. Frost of the mouth often comes with thaw of the soul; and when the heart's great deeps are breaking up, it sometimes happens that the mouth is not large enough to let the torrents flow, and so it has to be comparatively silent. Do not, therefore, make the mistake of confounding enthusiasm with faith in judging the externals of worship, else you may fall into a thousand blunders. He may worship God who shouts till the earth rings again, and God may accept him; but he may worship God as truly who sits in silence before the Most High, and says not even a word. It is the spiritual worship which is most acceptable to God, not the external in any form or shape. It is the heart that has fellowship with the Lord; and it needs little in the way of expressing itself, neither has God tied it down to this way or that. It may find its own methods of utterance so long as it is truly "moved by the Holy Ghost."

Another mistake these people made that day was this: *they valued novelty above Scriptural order*. "The Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! For there hath not been such a thing heretofore." The Israelites probably made the same mistake, fixing their hope on this new method of fighting the Philistines, which they hoped would bring them victory. We are all so apt to think that the new plan of going to work will be much more effective than those that have become familiar; but it is not so. It is generally a mistake to exchange old lamps for new. "There hath not been such a thing heretofore." There is a glamour about the novelty which misleads us, and we are liable to think the newer is the truer. If there has not such a thing heretofore, some people will take to it at once for that very reason. "Oh," says the man who is given up to change, "that is the thing for me!" But it is probably not the thing for a true-hearted and intelligent Christian, for if, "there hath not been such a thing heretofore," it is difficult to explain, if the thing be a good one, why the Holy Ghost, who has been with the people of God since Pentecost, and who came to lead us into all truth, has not led the Church of God to this before. If your new discovery is the mind of God, where has the Holy Scriptures been all these centuries? Believing in the infallible Word and the abiding Spirit, I rather suspect your novelty; at least I cannot say that I endorse it until I have tested it by the Word of God. "Oh, but we had such a meeting! There never was the like of it," you say. Probably you ought to pray that there may never be the like of it

again, for, after all, the meetings in which hearts become broken before God, and in which men believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the same Savior who saved their forefathers, who have entered into glory, are no novelty. Those meetings in which men come and give themselves up to God, where “the great transaction” is done, where they become the Lord’s, and he becomes theirs, are very old-fashioned things; they have been heretofore. “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old:” and if we could only see the like, we would not ask to be able to say, “There hath not been such a thing heretofore.” Philistines may like a thing that has not been heretofore; but we like the thing that has been since the days of Pentecost, the things that come from him who is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever”: the workings of that God who changes not, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” Let him work his blessed will; and if he chooses to send a new thing on the earth, we will glorify his name; but because there are new things in the world, we will not ascribe them to him, for they may come from quite another quarter/ We remember that “Lo, here is Christ, or there!” was the cry against which our Lord warned his disciples. Concerning such a cry the Savior said, “Believe it or not.” To you, dear friends, I would say — Stand fast by your great Leader, the blessed, unchangeable Christ, and by the faith once for all delivered to the saints, or else you will be on the road to a thousand blunders.

The mistake made on that battle-field is a mistake which nowadays is frequently imitated. It assumes many forms. We fall into their error when we confound ritual and spirituality. *Now, every form of religion has its ritual.* The Quaker, who sits still, and does not say a word, has a ritual so far; and he that has a thousand rites and ceremonies has a ritual so much farther. But if I have gone through the general routine of the worship of my church, and then think that I have done something acceptable to God, while yet my heart has not communed with him in humble repentance, or faith, or love, or joy, or consecration, I make a great mistake. You may keep on with your religious performances for seventy years or more; you may never miss what our Scotch friends call “a diet of worship”; you may not neglect a single rubric in the whole ritual; but it is all nothing unless the soul has fellowship with God. Godliness is a spiritual thing; for “God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in

truth.” So far as our forms or worship help us towards this spiritual communion, they are good, but no farther. “Oh, well!” says one, “I never worship beneath a cathedral roof; I am quite content to meet with a few friends in a barn.” Do not suppose, my friend, that the meagreness of your accessories has necessarily secured true worship. I thou hast met God in the barn, it is well; and if thy brother has met God in the right spirit, I care but little for thy barn, and I care even less for his cathedral. What does signify how thou hast garnished thine offering if it be not a living sacrifice, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ? A dead thing must not be brought to the altar of God. Remember that, under the Jewish law, they never offered fish upon the altar, because they could not bring it there alive. Everything brought to God as a sacrifice must be alive. Its blood must be poured out warm at the altar’s foot. Oh that you and I might feel that lifting of the soul to God, and that buoyancy of heart, which true spiritual worship alone can bring to us! May our ritual, whether we have much or little, be our guide to God, and not our chain to hold us back from God!

We fall into the same blunder that the Israelites and the Philistines made is we *consider orthodoxy to be salvation*. We have secured much that is worth keeping when we have, intellectually and intelligently, laid hold on that divinely-revealed truth, “the gospel of the grace of God”; but we have not obtained everything even then. O sirs, if it were possible for you to believe every word of Christ’s teaching, if it were possible to hold with only an intellectual faith the teaching of the apostles, rejecting all besides, and to hold it with an accuracy so great that in no joy or tittle you had made a mistake, it would profit you nothing; for “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He may understand these things so as to be a theologian, but he must have them wrought into his soul by the Holy Ghost so as to make him a saint, or else he has not really understood them at all. Unless these are thy meat and thy drink, they are nothing to thee; unless thou findest Christ in them, thou wilt find in them thy ruin, they shall be the “savor of death” unto thee. Remember, it was a beautiful tomb in which the dead Christ was laid; but he left it, and there was nothing there but grave-clothes after he had gone; and, in like manner, the best-constructed system of theology, if it has not Christ in it, and if he who holds it be not himself spiritually alive, is nothing more than a tomb in which are trappings for the dead. It is nothing better than a gilded ark,

without the presence of God; and although you may shout, and say, “God is come into the camp,” it will not be so.

We fall into the same error if we *regard routine as security*, and think that, because we have often done a thing, and have not suffered for it, therefore it will always be well with us. We are all such creatures of habit that, at length, our repeated actions seem to be natural and right. Because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. But though Pompeii may slumber long at the foot of Vesuvius, at length it is overwhelmed. It behooves every one of us to try our ways and specially to call in question things which have become a sort of second nature to us. This is the fault of which Peter gives warning concerning the scoffers of the last days, who will say with regret to the blessed truth of Christ’s second advent, “Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” The apostle says of such that, “they willingly are ignorant,” and therefore are they willfully ignorant of the terrible and unalterable doom that awaits them at the coming of their Judge.

Thus, like the Israelites, we may shout as we see the ark of the covenant, although our sins have driven the Lord far from us; or, like the Philistines, we may say, “God has come into the camp,” and yet he may not be there at all in the sense in which they meant. Thus I might continue to illustrate my text; but time would fail me, and I have yet to speak upon two other points.

Having considered the great mistake these people made, I will draw your attention, in the second place, to THE GREAT TRUTH of which their mistake is caricature. Though what the Philistines said, and what the Israelites thought, on this occasion, was false, it is often true. God does come to the camp of his people, and his presence is the great power of his church. O Brethren, what joy comes to us at such a time! I will briefly sketch the scene that takes place when God comes into the camp.

Then, *the truth of the gospel becomes vital*. The doctrines of grace have then with them the grace of the doctrines. Then is Christ not only to us the Truth, but he is also the Way and the Life. The gospel then becomes a sword with two edges, and it does marvelous execution. The Word of God

then shows itself to be both a hammer and a fire, smiting and melting those upon whom its power is proved. Whoever preaches the gospel, when God has come into the camp, speaks with power. He may have little eloquence, and less learning; but if God is with him, and if his heart is all aglow with divine love, he will speak with power, and the people will say, "Surely, God is in this place, and we know it."

When God comes into the camp, *new life is put into prayer*. Instead of the repetition of holy phrases in a cold, feeble, lifeless fashion, the soul empties itself out before the Lord, like water flowing from a fountain; and men and women cry mightily unto him, laying hold upon the horns of the altar; and they come away with both hands full of heaven's own blessing, for they have prevailed with God in mighty wrestling.

By the presence of God in the camp *fresh energy is thrown into service*. There is a way of serving the Lord in which men do the proper thing while they are fast asleep. I am afraid much of our service for God is done while we are asleep, and that it is accompanied by a kind of celestial snoring, instead of being performed when our spiritual faculties are all alert, and the whole man is wide awake. But when God comes into the camp, how he shakes men up, and awakens the slumberers from their dreams! What a quickening, what a vivifying, the presence of God gives! I remember a picture on the Continent that strangely represents the resurrection. Some of the people, who are pictured as being raised from the dead, have some of their bones coming together; others have their heads covered with flesh, but the rest of the body is a skeleton; and nothing seems complete in this strange, wild conception of a mad artist. But there are hundred of Christian people who seem to be spiritually in as incomplete a stage as those people were supposed to be. They are, I hope, quickened from the dead, but they are not yet fully alive into God. Some of them are still dead in their head; their intellect has not yet been sanctified: some of them are dead at their hands; they cannot get them into their pockets, or if they manage so much as that, they cannot get them out again: some of them are dead at heart, they seem to know things very well with the brain, but not to feel them in the soul. But when the Lord comes to us with power, he makes us alive all over; every part of the man is quickened with a divine energy; then men really work for Jesus, and work successfully, too.

When God comes into the camp, his presence *convinces unbelievers*. Sinners turn to the Lord on the right hand, and on the left, in so marvellous a way that our weak faith is often quite astonished. The last persons in the world that we expected to be converted, come to our services, and there find Christ; and many have been hearers for years, but seem harder than the lower millstone, become soft as wax to the divine Word. When God comes into the camp, the Holy Ghost convinces men “of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment”, the arrows of conviction fly fast and far, and pierce the hearts of the foemen of the King, and the slain of the Lord are many.

The presence of God, moreover, *comforts mourners*. When God comes into the camp, those who are troubled and tried begin to wipe away the tears of sorrow, and feel strengthened to bear their burdens; or, better still, they cast their care on him who is so manifestly near. Our hearts are also cheered by seeing anxious sinners turn their eyes towards the cross of Christ. Then Jesus reveals his love to them, and they perceive it; they fly into his arms, and find salvation there. Oh, what joyful times we have had of late in talking with many who have yielded themselves to Christ, and taken him to be all their salvation, and all their desire! May God stay in the camp with us till every sinner that comes within our ranks, and many also who are outside, shall come to Jesus, and be saved!

When God is in the camp, his presence *infuses daring faith*. Feeble men begin to grow vigorous, young men dream dreams and old men see visions. Many begin to plot and plan something for Jesus which, in their timid days, they would never have thought of attempting. Others reach a height of consecration that seems to verge on imprudence. Alabaster boxes get broken, and the precious ointment is poured out upon the Master’s head, even though Judas shakes his money-bag, and cries, “To what purpose is this waste?” Adventurers for God are raised up — men like the Portuguese navigators, who passed the Cape of Storms, and called it afterwards the Cape of Good Hope. Men begin to mission the slums, the lodging-houses, the dark streets, and after a while those very places become happy hunting grounds for other Christian workers. Because God is in the camp, many take up the work which at first only the truly brave believer dared to try.

The fact of God being in the camp cannot be hidden, for in a delightful way it *distils joy into worship*. People do not think sermons dull when God is in the camp; and prayer-meetings are not then called “stupid affairs.” The saints enjoy fellowship with one another; and when Christian people meet each other, and God is in the camp, they have many a happy word to exchange concerning their Master. Many such seasons we have enjoyed. It has been with us as with the people mentioned by the prophet Malachi: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.” They had such holy talk that God himself turned eaves-dropper to listen to what they had to say; he liked it so well that he put it down; and he thought so much of it that he said he would preserve it; and a book of remembrances was made for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. May there be many more such books of remembrance in our day!

I cannot tell you what innumerable blessings come to the camp of the spiritual Israel when God is there. I hope that we know a little of this even now; and I am sure we want to know a great deal more of it. It is hard work preaching when God is not in the camp. It must be slavery to teach in the Sunday-school when God is not in the camp. And any of you seeking souls must have a heavy drag on your spirits when the Lord is away. We might pray on Sabbath mornings, indeed, every day, and before every duty, “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence;” but if the Lord be in the camp, then the wheels no longer drag heavily, but, like the chariots of Amminadib, we fly before the wind. Everything is done gladly, happily, thankfully, believingly, when “God is come into the camp.” May he abide in our midst, and may our eyes be opened to see him!

*“Thrice blest is he to whom is given  
The instinct that can tell  
That God is in the field, when he  
Is most invisible.”*

Now, in closing our meditations upon this passage, let us try to learn THE GREAT LESSONS which this incident teaches us.

The first lesson is that which I have been insisting upon all through: *the necessity of the divine presence*. Dear friends, you acknowledge this. There is not one among us who does not know that the Holy Ghost is needful to effect any work. But I am afraid that it is something which we know so well, that we have put it up on a shelf, and there it lies unheeded. But it must not be so with thee, my brother, nor with me. We must pray in the Holy Ghost, or else we shall not pray at all; and we must preach under the influence of the Holy Ghost, or else we shall chatter like sparrows on the window-sill in the morning, and nothing will come of the chattering. Only the Holy Ghost can make anything we do to be effectual. Therefore never begin any work without the Holy Ghost, and do not dare go on with the impetus that you have gained, but cry again for the Holy Spirit. The “amen” of the sermon needs to be spoken in the power of the Holy Ghost just as much as the first word of the discourse, and every word between the first and the last. Let all your service for God be in the Spirit, or else it is all good for nothing.

Learn, next, that *we should do all we can to obtain the presence of God in the camp*. If there are any preparations which we can make for his coming, let us set about them at once. You who are out of Christ must not think that there is anything for *you* to do before you receive Christ. All the doing has been done.

*“Jesus did it, did it all,  
Long, long ago.”*

But I am now addressing the people of God, and if we would have God to come very nigh to us, we must prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight in the desert a highway for our God. What can we do to obtain the presence of God in our midst? My time has so far gone that I can only give you a few hints as to what we ought to do if we want to secure that end.

We must confess our helplessness without God, and honestly mean the confession. The first thing that is required of us is to bemoan the fact that, by and of ourselves, we can do nothing; even as our Lord said to his disciples, “Without me ye can do nothing.” The sooner we recognize this truth, the better. Our half-doing is our undoing; but when we cease from self, then we make way for God.



We must, next, have a universal desire for the presence of God with us. I mean by that, that every Christian man and every Christian woman must agonize with God that he would come into the camp; not merely some few of us desiring it, but all of us vehemently crying unto the Lord, "Come, Lord, and tarry not."

We must also be very careful in our lives. God will not come to an unholy church. The sacred Dove will never come to a foul nest. There must be a purging and a cleansing, or else he will not come.

Moreover, there must be a conscientious obedience to his word, a strict adherence to his truth, his doctrine, his precepts, to the whole of Christ's rule and law. He will not prosper us unless we are careful to follow every step that he has taken. God help us to have this conscientious care, this coming out from those who may not be thus careful, according to his word. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

If we desire this special sense of God's presence, there must be unbroken union. The Spirit of God does not love fighting. He is a dove, and he will not come where there is constant strife. We must be as one man in our love to one another. It was when the disciples were "with one accord in one place" that the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost; and thus it is in all our Pentecostal seasons. Often a stone seems to lie at the well's-mouth of our choicest blessings; and it cannot be rolled away "until the flocks be gathered together."

To crown all, there must be a hearty reliance upon God, and a childlike confidence in him. I would recommend you either believe in God up to the hilt, or else not believe at all. Believe this Book of God, every letter of it, or else reject it. There is no logical standing-place between the two. Be satisfied with nothing less than a faith that swims in the deeps of divine revelation; a faith that paddles about the edge of the water is poor faith, and is not good for much. Oh, I pray you, do believe in God, and his omnipotence!

Such are the conditions of obtaining the blessing of God's abiding presence. If these things be in us and abound, we shall be able to shout without making any mistake about the matter, "God has come into the camp."

When God does come to us, *we should seek by all means to retain his presence*. How can this boon be secured?

First, by humble walking with God. If we grow proud because we are honored by our King's company, and begin to think that there must be, after all, something in us to attract God to us, and cause his face to shine upon us, we shall not long have the Lord among us. Seek, then, to be lowly in his presence.

Next, let much grateful praise be given to him from loyal hearts. If God is saving sinners, let us give him the glory of it. If he is at work among us, let us not go and talk about what *we* have been doing; but let us tell to men and angels, too, what *HE* has done. Let us never dare to handle God's jewels as if they were our own.

Moreover, there must be perpetual watchfulness. If God be with us, he may give us a great victory, and yet to-morrow we may be defeated because Achan has hidden the goodly Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold. Unless we are sober and vigilant, we may sadly have to mourn that the Lord has withdrawn his presence from us. There is a fierce light that beats around his throne. "Our God is a consuming fire." Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? The Scriptural answer is, "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly." May God make us men of such calibre as can endure that heat!

And lastly, there must be an individual fellowship with God on the part of each one of us. It is hard work for the whole church to walk with God every day and all the day; but if each member will see to it that his own personal life is right, the church, as a whole, need fear nothing. Let us each one look after his own life, and see that all is right there; then the life of the church will soon be at flood-tide, and when we go forth to the battle, the Philistines will know of a truth that "God is come into the camp." May God speedily raise us all up to this point of personal consecration!

Dear friends, we are having sinners saved in our midst; pray for them. Some are struggling towards the light; seek to help them. If you meet with any such, love them, and cherish them, as a father does his child. I cannot speak longer. Your hearts must tell you what to do. Go on serving the Lord. May he abide with us in power for evermore! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE THE SERMON — ~~BOOK~~ 1 Samuel 4.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 968, 448, 992

## LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

Beloved friends, — The one want of the church in these times is indicated by the title of this sermon. The presence of God, in saving power, in the church, will put to end the present plague of infidelity. Men will not doubt his Word when they feel his Spirit. It will be the only security for the success of the missionary effort. If God be with his people, they will soon see crowds converted and added to the church. For a thousand reasons, we need that Jehovah should come into the camp, as aforetime he visited and delivered his people from bondage in Egypt.

Could we not all unite in prayer for this as fervently as all united in prayer for my life? It is a far greater and more necessary subject for intercession, and the Lord will not be slow to hear us. Come to thy church, O Lord, in fullness of power to save! If the Great Advent is not yet, indulge us with outpourings of grace and times of refreshing!

Oh, that all Christendom would take us this pleading, and continue it until the answer came!

Receive, dear readers, my hearty salutations. Personally, I scarcely make progress during this broken weather; but the doctor says I hold my own, and that is more than he could have expected. Whether I live or die, I would say, in the words of Israel to Joseph, “God shall be with you.”

Yours ever heartily,

**C. H. SPURGEON.**

*Menton, Jan 9, 1892.*

# A CHALLENGE AND A SHIELD.

## SERMON NO. 2240

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
JANUARY 24TH, 1892,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON  
LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 24TH, 1890.

*“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.” —  Romans 8:34.*

HERE are two very wonderful challenges thrown out by the apostle Paul. First, he boldly defies anyone to charge the chosen of God with sin: “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?” and then, even if any charges should be brought against them, he defies all our foes to secure an adverse verdict: “Who is he that condemneth?” This would be a very bold challenge even for a man who had been righteous from his youth up. If there had been a man, in the history of the world, who from his infancy had known God, and who had grown up serving him, devoting himself entirely to the cause of the Lord Christ; and if he had kept the commandments without fail, as far as man could judge, it would be a very hazardous thing even for him to say. “Who is he that condemneth?” For human righteousness is only human; being human, it is finite; and, being finite, it falls short somewhere or other. The best of men are but men at the best; to be a man is to be a fallen creature, and being fallen creatures, we cannot of ourselves perfectly please the thrice-holy Jehovah. In many things we all offend.

The man who uttered this challenge, “Who is he that condemneth?” and uttered it under the inspiration of God, did not, however, occupy the position of a sinless man. His early years had been spent in opposition to his Savior. He had been exceedingly mad against the disciples of Christ, and had persecuted them even unto strange cities. In another place he calls himself the very chief of sinners; and yet it is this man who dares to ask

the question, "Who is he that condemneth?" It is a bold, brave challenge; but it never could have been uttered by Paul if it had not been accompanied by the next sentence, "It is Christ that dies." First, he flings down the gauntlet, and challenges a battle, crying, "Who is he that condemneth?" And then he holds up a shield so broad that he is completely concealed behind it, and every enemy is defeated in the conflict, because "It is Christ that dies." Happy shall you and I be if, though covered with sin, though guilty and unclean, we nevertheless shall have faith to believe in the Christ that dies, a faith so strong, and confident that we shall dare to stand both now, and at the judgment-seat of Christ, and say, "Who is he that condemneth?" May we have this faith on our dying bed, when the pulse is faint and feeble, and heart and flesh begin to fail! May we still, between the very jaws of death, have solid confidence in God, and dare to ask for the presence of men and devils, too, "Who is the that condemneth?" being made bold to do so because we have believed in the Christ that died.

Paul has, in this case, only one answer to the question, "Who is he that condemneth?" He meets it by the blessed fact that "It is Christ that died." I recommend that we should, each one of us, have but one hope of salvation. As long as we have half-a-dozen, we have half-a-dozen doubtful ones: but when it comes to only one, and that such a sufficient one as the truth that "It is Christ that died," we have a well-founded hope, in which we may rest with confidence. Such a hope as this is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast"; and the man who has this anchor on board the barque of his life can never suffer spiritual shipwreck. When the Emperor Charles the Fifth went to war with Francis the First, King of Naples, he sent a herald to him, declaring war in the name of the Emperor of Germany, King of Castille, King of Aragon, King of Naples, King of Sicily, and he went on with many more titles, giving his sovereign all the honors that were his due. When the herald of Francis the First took up the gage of battle, he would not be outdone in the list of honors, so he said, "I take up the challenge in the name of Francis the First, King of France; Francis the First, King of France; Francis the First, King of France; Francis the First, King of France; Francis the First, King of France." He just repeated his master's name and office as many times as the other gentleman had titles. So it is a grand thing, whenever Satan comes and

begins to accuse you, just to say, "Christ has died, Christ has died." If any confront you with other confidences, still keep you to this almighty plea, "Christ has died." If one says, "I was christened, and confirmed," answer him by saying, "Christ has died." Should another say, "I was baptized an adult," let your confidence remain the same: "Christ has died." When another says, "I am a sound, orthodox Presbyterian," you stick to this solid ground, "Christ has died." And if still another says, "I am a red-hot Methodist," answer him in the self-same way: "Christ has died." Whatever may be the confidences of others, and whatever may be your own, put them all away, and keep to this one declaration, "It is Christ that died." There is enough in that one truth to include all that is excellent in the others, and to answer all the accusations that may be brought against you. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died." I would put the trumpet to my lips while I preach, and sound out this one note, praying that it may be a death-blast to all accusations that can be brought against believers in Christ.

I want you to notice that Paul does not even rest his confidence as to the believers' safety upon the fact that they are able to say, "We have trusted in Christ; we have loved Christ; we have served Christ." He allows nothing to mar the glory of this one blessed fact, "It is Christ that died." If he adds anything at all, it is still something about that same Christ — "yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

This is a subject upon which I delight to speak; for here is all my hope and confidence. In these words I see first, *a challenge to all comers*: "Who is he that condemneth?" Secondly, I see here, *a remedy for all sin*. If any take up the gage of battle, and say, "We condemn you," we shall have this for our complete answer to every one, "It is Christ that died." And lastly, I see here, *an answer to every accusation* arising from sin. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died."

Here is A CHALLENGE TO ALL COMERS. By the grace of God, the apostle stands defiantly in the midst of all the believer's foes, and flings down the gauntlet before them all. The encounter to which he challenges them is not to be a mere tilt in a tournament, but a battle for life or death. Who enters the lists against the believer? First comes Satan; then the world; then

conscience; and last of all the law of God. Over them all the believer triumphs. "It is Christ that died," becomes both his sword and his shield; and when the dread conflict is over, and even while it is raging, he sings, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The first who takes up the believer's challenge is *Satan*. Some do not believe in the personality of the devil; but I am as sure of it as I am of the personality of his children who deny their own father. Those of us who have passed through any spiritual conflicts know that Satan is a terribly real personage. He attacks us on the right hand and on the left, from beneath and from above. Very dexterously, with infernal malice, he endeavors to condemn the child of God. It is his business to be the accuser of the brethren, and he carries it on with very great vigor. He knows enough of our conduct to be able, truthfully, to bring to our memory much that might condemn us. When this fails, he never sticks at an accusation because it does not happen to be true. Being the father of lies, he will accuse us of things of which we are not guilty, or, when it suits his purpose, he will exaggerate our guilt, and make it appear worse than it is, in order that he may drive us to despair. There is only one way to successfully resist the onset of the arch-enemy; but that one way ensures certain victory. Up with your shield, and say, "Yes, it is all true, or it might have been, for my heart is so evil that it would have led me to any sin; but 'It is Christ that died.'" This will defeat your great adversary.

Suppose Satan should come to anyone who is seeking the Savior, and say, "You will never find the Lord; you have sinned beyond all limit; you are too far gone for mercy to reach you; you must perish;" it will be your highest wisdom to give him this one reply, "It is Christ that died." That short sentence completely answers to all his accusations. There is no terror to him like the terror of the cross. He gloated over the crucifixion once, and he has been distressed and terrified by it ever since. Tell him that you are a sinner, and that if he should paint your sin in its blackest colors, you would not even then despair, for it would still be true that Christ "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Christ has died, and there is more than enough virtue in his death to atone for the blackest or most crimson sins ever committed by men. Close beside the bottomless pit of our iniquity stands the cross whereon Christ has

made recompense for all our faults; and when we set Christ over against the gulf of our sin, we see that he far transcends it. Sin is great, but Christ is greater. His precious blood takes away every stain of guilt. Take care that you do not answer Satan with any other argument than this: "It is Christ that died." Again and again let this blow, from the sword of the Spirit, descend upon him, "It is Christ that died," and you will soon be acclaimed the victor over your greatest foe. In this way "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

When you have overcome Satan, *the world* will come forth to attack you, and to dispute your claim to be numbered amongst the people of God. As long as you go with evil companions, they will applaud you. You will be "a jolly good fellow" while you join them in their folly; but when you give up their ways, their habits, and their society, then they will say that you are melancholy, and no longer fit company for such, "hail fellows, well met", and they will turn away from you. If you follow after Christ, and find eternal life, when they hear of it, they will sneer at you, and bring up all your past life against you. They will say, "What! *you* converted? You are as bad as any one of us. What! *you* a saint? Well, certainly, you made no pretension to it six months ago; you were about as black as a man could be." The world will begin to throw in the believer's teeth all his former iniquities, when he sets forth with the cry, "Who is he that condemneth?" Tell the world, once for all, that it may condemn you, if it pleases, for it condemned the Lord Jesus long ago, and say that, therefore, you think but little of the condemnation of your fellow-men. Tell the men of the world that it is right that they condemn you for all your past life, for doubtless you have been what they say you are, you will not dispute that fact; but tell them also that what Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth is true of you, "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Tell even them that Christ died. If they say that Christ's death does not repair the injury you have done to your fellow-men, tell them that, as far as you can, you mean to make restitution to them; and wherein you have done the world an ill turn, let them know that your Master has done it more good than you ever did it harm. The influence of his holy religion has made abundant atonement to the world for any wrong that you ever did to it. He has rendered more of good to men than you ever rendered of evil. In all your answers to the



accusations of the world, take care that you base your hopes concerning forgiven sin upon the death of Christ. The world will, before long, understand what you mean by saying that Christ has made atonement for your sin; and, perhaps, here and there, a few of those who ridiculed you will be inclined to know more about this matter, and in private may come and ask you how the death of Christ has saved your soul. At any rate, meet the attack of the world as you met the attack of Satan, with this weapon only: "It is Christ that died," and you will be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."

The third foe that will seek to condemn you, and one that you have great cause to fear, is *your own conscience*; but the weapon which has discomfited your other foes will also avail you against this one. Still, this foe is fierce and terrible. Let me feel the worm that never dies rather than the stings of an offended conscience, if indeed this is not itself, "the worm that dieth not." Fire such as martyrs felt at the stake were but a plaything compared with the flames of a burning conscience. We read that, when David had cut off Saul's skirt. "It came to pass afterward that David's heart smote him." It is an ugly knock that a man's heart gives when it smites him. There is no getting away from yourself, and when you yourself condemn yourself, then you are condemned indeed. You go to your bed, but your conscience is there, and it will not sleep. You go out to your pleasures, but your conscience goes with you, and spoils your mirth. You would forget your guilt in your daily business, but your conscience calls out at such a rate that there is no hearing anything else. Thunderbolts and tornadoes are nothing in force compared with the charges of a guilty conscience.

What is to be done when a man condemns himself? Can he still be valiant, and maintain his ground, calling out, "Who is he that condemneth?" Yes, blessed be God, even this foe can be overcome by the weapon the believer wields in the power of God, for he can tell conscience, as he told his former opponents, "It is Christ that died." It is a wonderful story — this old, old story, of Jesus and his love to guilty sinners; let me tell it once again. God so loved me that he willed to forgive me; but for the sake of the world which he governs righteously he could not forgive me without an atonement for my sin. It would not have been consistent with his justice for him to pass by my sin. What was to be done? His own dear Son came,

and stood in my place, and took my sin upon him. Knowing that my sin deserved death, he willingly died, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring me to God. God is well pleased with the death of Christ as the vindication of his justice, and for Christ's sake he says to me, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Tell conscience that Christ has died for your sins, according to the Scriptures, and it will be perfectly satisfied: it will not go to sleep, but it will use its voice for other purposes, and it will no longer seek to condemn you.

There is still another foe that answers your challenge, "Who is he that condemneth?" Forth it steps into the arena, and we behold *the law of God*. What shall we say to that? The law of God says, "Thou shalt," and we have not done what it commands. The law of God says, "Thou shalt not," and we have done exactly what we were forbidden to do. Only too true is that confession, "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us." The law condemned us in former days, and would again overthrow us if we ventured to meet it unarmed. It must condemn sin, for "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good." But when it has attacked us, and done its worst, there comes in the majesty of divine sovereignty. God is King over all, and able to govern the world according to his own mind, which mind is always infinitely just. He decrees that Christ Jesus, the Well-Beloved, even his own other self, who is one with him, should come into the world and bear the sin of man, make amends to the injured honor of God, and magnify the law before the eyes of the whole universe. If the guilty sinner dies, the law is honored; but if God shall assume human flesh, and die for that sinner, the law is even more honored. When Christ Jesus took away our guilt, and "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree," justice was more terribly displayed than when guilty sinners sink to hell. We are only creatures after all, and when we are condemned, we sink down into destruction, and suffer for our sin; but he is the eternal God, and when he takes our nature, and cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and bleeds his life away in agony, then is the law of God abundantly honored. Therefore do we say to that law, "Law, thou hast nothing to do with me; I am 'not under law, but under grace.' My Substitute has kept the law on

my behalf. He has borne the penalty which I ought to have borne, and I am clear. I am now dead to the law. I have died in Christ, and my life now is that of a child of God, for I have been lifted to that high estate by my redeeming Lord.”

There is now nobody left that I know of, that can condemn us, except the Judge; and if we have escaped our opponents — Satan, the world, conscience, and the law, we need not fear to stand even at God’s judgment seat. The Judge is now on our side; and none of us need fear anybody’s condemnation if the Judge does not condemn us. You come into court with your case, and the counsel on the other side condemns you. When he sits down, he has done his worst; and his witnesses also condemn you; but if the verdict is in your favor, and the judge says that you leave the court with a stainless character, you do not care about the condemnation of others. Now, there is but one Judge — the man Christ Jesus. It is he that died for us. He cannot bring us in debt to divine justice; for in his own hands and feet are the nail-prints, which are the receipts of justice in full settlement of all claims against us. He has paid all we owed and he will vindicate his own death, and claim for the travail of his soul its due reward, which is the forgiveness and the salvation of all guilty men who have come and put their trust in him. Wherefore, since it is only our Judge who can condemn us, and since he is the very Person who has paid our debt for us, and put our sin away, we dare to repeat again, with additional emphasis, our ringing challenge to all the universe, “Who is he that condemneth?”

*“Who now accuseth them,  
For whom their Ransom died?  
Who now shall those condemn  
Whom God hath justified?  
Captivity is captive led;  
For Jesus liveth, who was dead.”*

In the second place, I see in our text A REMEDY FOR ALL SIN. On this I shall speak very briefly. We stand boldly in front of all our foes, because we know that we are free from the evil which once condemned us: it is all gone. Our confidence is therefore strong, and it is so because Christ’s dying has removed all sin from all believers.

“Look,” says one, “*there is sin*. It is true that you are a believer, but you have sinned often, for years, in all sorts of way.” Yes, as we look, we must

confess that it is true, there is the sin. But *yonder is the Savior*, and he is called Jesus, "For he shall save his people from their sins." He has come on purpose to put away our sin, and when he died, he made an end of it. The answer, therefore, to the statement, "There is sin," is this, "Christ has died."

Another says, "Yes, but then you have been specially guilty, *there is great sin* against a great God. You have continued in it, and persisted in it."

True, we do confess that accusation; but then *there is a great sacrifice*, for he that came to save us, laid down his life for us; and greater sacrifice than this could never be. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." This is the grandest message of the gospel, that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The apostle Paul puts this "first of all", and every true preacher of the good tidings of salvation will follow his example. We have, indeed, in the death of Christ, a great atonement; an atonement so great, that none can measure its height and depth, its length and breadth. The glory of the Person who died, the anguish and the suffering he endured, the love that moved him to give himself up to death for us, all make us see how great the atonement is. There is great sin; that we know only too well: but we also rejoice in the knowledge that there is a great atonement to cover all our sin, "For it is Christ that died."

"But, interrupts another, *God must punish sin*. It is not optional with him, it is an inevitable law of the universe. Transgress the law, and punishment will follow." It is even so; but listen: God must punish sin, and *God has punished sin*. He took the great mass of the sins of believers, and piled the whole on Christ; and when he hung upon the cross as his people's Substitute, even his Father hid his face from him. He died, the Prince of glory died the ignominious felon's death, in the room and place and stead of guilty men. God *has* punished sin; and when men say, "God must punish sin," we answer, "Sin has been punished, for Christ has died."

Not only is our sin punished, but *the sin is gone*. If my friend over yonder has paid my debt, it is gone. I owe no man anything after the debt has been paid, whether by myself, or by somebody else; and if Christ took our sin

upon himself, and suffered for it, the sins for which he suffered are gone, plunged as in a shoreless sea, drowned in the Redeemer's blood. They are gone, and gone for ever!

*“He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
He sets the prisoners free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean,  
His blood availed for me.”*

And that my sins are gone is further clear, for he rose again from the dead. “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again.” If he had not paid the debt, he would have remained in the prison of the grave; but he rose again. He has discharged the debt; and we have still another assurance that it is all gone, for the apostle goes on to speak of Christ “who is even at the right hand of God.” He would not be there if he were a debtor. If Christ owed anything to the justice of God by reason of his suretyship engagements, he would not be at God's right hand: but he owes nothing whatever. Both the sinner and the Surety are now free. The debt is paid, and Christ is at the right hand of God. And as to our weaknesses and infirmities, he is there to plead for his people: “Who also maketh intercession for us.” He ever liveth to secure effectually the eternal salvation of every soul for whom he died, even for every one who puts his trust in him. Are you among the number? Oh, if you, my dear hearers, knew the joy and peace that would come to you if you but trusted in the doctrine of substitution, you would not rest until you were able to say, “Christ was in my place, that I might stand in his place: my sins were laid on him, that his righteousness might be girded on me.” If you understood how delightful it is to get out of yourself into Christ, and to live because Jesus died, you would not linger and doubt, and fear, but you would say, “If it be so, I will come to Christ, and I will trust him, that with you I may say, ‘The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.’” This, then is God's great remedy for sin: “It is Christ that died.”

**III.** Now I want your attention while I try to show that this blessed sentence, “It is Christ that died,” is AN ANSWER TO EVERY ACCUSATION which, under any circumstances, may arise from sin. We have seen that Christ's death enables us to conquer our foes, and frees us from our sins. It also delivers us from every fear and doubt. The death of Christ gives us

a full salvation. I cannot mention all the accusations which sin makes, but I will mention a great many of them very quickly, and show how the man who believes in Christ, the dying Christ, the risen Christ, the reigning Christ, is able to meet and overcome them.

Sometimes the accusing whisper comes to your ear, *“You have sinned against a great God.* It will be a terrible thing to have to answer to the great and mighty God for having so sinned.” I will make no answer to that accusation but this: “It is Christ that died.” Christ himself, the great and mighty God is the “Interpreter, one among a thousand”, able to stand between me and God. It is true that God is great, but he cannot ask for more than divine righteousness, and in Christ I present that. Nay, his law never asked for more than human righteousness divine. The law has, therefore, more than it asked for, and I am thus not afraid of the anger of the great God. It is the mighty God himself who came here to be a Man, and to die in our stead, for is it not written that God hath bought his people with his own blood? We read of “the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” It is a strong expression, but as it is Scriptural, we cannot alter it; and we have no wish to do so. Oh, beloved, if we have a God for our Redeemer, though our sins against God be very many, and though they be very black and foul, yet Christ’s infinite sacrifice meets them all.

*“Love of God, so pure and changeless,  
Blood of God, so rich and free,  
Grace of God, so strong and boundless,  
Magnify them all in me,  
Even me.”*

“You have robbed God of his glory,” *another voice seems to say.* “You know how you used to blaspheme his name.” Or, perhaps, you were more polite; you did not curse and swear, but the accusation comes: “You argued against God and his Son, and against his blessed gospel; you have robbed him of his glory.” To that I give the same answer, “It is Christ that died.” I know that I have robbed God of his glory, but Christ has brought all the glory back again. I see “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” A dying Savior brings more glory to the love of God, ay, and to the justice of God, than any mortal sinner could have done; more than any perfect man, though he lived throughout eternity, could have done. Thus,

that doubt is answered by the same all-powerful argument: “It is Christ that died.”

“Ah!” says the accuser “but *you sinned against light and knowledge*. You cannot deny it. When you sinned, you were not like the common people of the street, who know no better. You had a godly father; you had a Christian mother; you were trained in the fear of God. You read your Bible in early youth, and you went astray with a vengeance; for when you sinned, you knew that you were sinning, and yet you transgressed.” Yes, I know that it was so; and Christ, to meet my sin against knowledge brings a sacrifice offered with his own full knowledge of all that it involved.

*“This was compassion like a God,  
That when the Savior knew  
The price of pardon was his blood,  
His pity ne’er withdrew.”*

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands,” poured out water, and began to wash his disciples’ feet, and then went, with full knowledge of all that was before him, to pour out his blood to wash their souls from guilt. In the midst of his agony on the tree, he still had full understanding concerning his sacrifice: “Knowing that all things were now accomplished,” he bowed his head, and died. Thus my ill knowledge is met by the great and heavenly knowledge with which he went about the work of offering a complete atonement in my place and stead. “It is Christ that died.”

“Ay, ay!” says yet another accuser; “but *you have sinned with delight*. You took a pleasure in it. You were not as some who were mere drudges to sin. You drank it down like sweet wine, and you could not have too much of it.” Ah! It is so; but then my Lord Christ delighted to come to be my Savior. In the volume of the Book it is written of him: “I delight to do thy will, O my God! Yea, thy law is within my heart.: I took pleasure in sin; but, “he, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.” Therefore, over against my delight in sin, I set his delight in presenting to the Father his perfect righteousness and his all-sufficient substitutionary sacrifice: “It is Christ that died.”

I do not seem to want to preach. I want to sit down, and suck all the sweetness out of this blessed truth: “It is Christ that died.” Ah! But

another bitter taunt comes to me, "*You have sinned in spirit*. You not only sinned with your body, with your eyes, your lips, your hands; but you have sinned in imagination and desire very horribly." Ah, brethren! Here we must bow our heads. All manner of evil things we commit in our thoughts; sin runs to riot in our spirit. Well, we confess that too; but then Christ suffered in his spirit. The sufferings of his soul were the very soul of his sufferings. He not only groaned in body, when beaten by the Roman soldiers, and pierced with nails and thorns; but in soul he was overwhelmed by exceeding heaviness, and by the desertion of his God. To atone for the sin of my soul there is the sorrow of his soul; if I poured out my soul in sin, he poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors. "It is Christ that died."

If the black thought then comes up, "Ah! but *you have aforesaid refused Christ*. Many times you put him away. You quenched conscience. You went to the house of God, not to pray, but to laugh. Ay, and when Christ would have pulled you away, you held hard on to your sin! You long rejected Christ." Yes; but I set over against that the fact that he always would have me. He loved me to the death; and albeit that he foresaw and foreknew that I should reject him, yet he would not take "No" for answer from me; but he resolved that his true grace should conquer me truly, and make me willing in the day of his power.

Still the accuser continues reminding us of our past life: "*you have trusted in others*, and turned away from Christ; you went everywhere before you came to him." Did you ever want to hire a horse in a market-town? You went to some place, and asked the price, and thought it too high; then you went away to half-a-dozen other stablekeepers, and could not do any better, so you came back to the first; but he, displeased with you, very possibly said, "I do not want your custom. You have been to everybody else; you may go to them now." I have known a surly man act in that way; but Christ never turns us away because we only come to him when others fail us. Many have gone round the world to look for a savior other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and they have only come to him when all others have failed them. It is astonishing where men will go to seek salvation. Some go to Rome, and some to Oxford; some go I know not where. They seek in vain; for there is no Savior to be found, except at Calvary; and after you have made the circuit of the globe, and compassed heaven and hell to find



another way of salvation, you will have to come back to Christ. Blessed be his name, he will not refuse you even then, if you will but believe him! The proof of love to the uttermost is that “It is Christ that died.”

But I feel a darkness coming down over my spirit, and in the darkness there is a fiendish voice that says, “But *you have committed unknown sins*, sins that nobody else knows, and there have been sins which you yourself did not know. Hidden in your heart there is a damning spot which your eye has not discovered.” Here comes in this blessed word taken out of the Greek litany, “By thine unknown sufferings.” It is almost as good as Scripture; for Scripture leads us to think of the sufferings of Christ as an unfathomable deep. Who can tell us what Christ’s suffering really was? It goes into the region of things unknown; it goes beyond the knowable; for flesh and blood will never be able to comprehend what Jesus suffered when the great flood of human sin came rushing down upon him, and filled his spirit to the brim. “It is Christ that died.” My unknown sins are buried in the unknown deeps of his almighty sacrifice.

Ah! but another thought comes up, “You know that he died; but then *you have slain your Lord*. You had a share in his death. You know that every sinner is guilty of the murder of Christ.” I know it; I know it to my shame and confusion; yet do I live by him I slew, I am saved by him I murdered; and I glory in the grace that makes such a miracle of mercy possible.”

*“With pleasing grief and mournful joy  
My spirit now is filled,  
That I should such a life destroy,  
Yet live by him I killed.”*

Whether it was by mine or by any other wicked hands, yet it was by “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” that Jesus died, in the stead of all who believe in him: I believe in him, therefore he has died for me. He died for his murderers, for those that mocked and insulted him; for he commanded his disciples to begin preaching the gospel at Jerusalem, where they crucified him, to preach it even to those who had hounded him to his doom. O dear friends, what comfort lies in this word, “It is Christ that died.”!

“Ah!” says the accuser, but *you are still sinful*. What if Christ died for all your past sins? What about your present sinfulness?” Well, about that, I

have this to say, “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” I believe that, when Christ died, he took all the sins of all his people, past, present, and to come, and when the whole mass was condensed into one bitter cup, he drank it all up.

*“At one tremendous draught of love,”*

leaving not so much as a single drop of wormwood or gall for any to drink who put their trust in him. Come, my hearer, if what I say to you be true (and I will answer for its truth at God’s great judgment-seat), then I pray you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; for “he that believeth in him shall not be ashamed, nor confounded, world without end.” I am in this boat myself. If it sinks, I am lost; but it will not sink, for the Plot of the Galilean Lake is on board. Come in with me, let us sail together to glory. I will not say, “Let us sink or swim together,” for there is no sinking to a soul that rests in Christ. This is a good seaworthy vessel: “It is Christ that died.” God has accepted Christ in the place of his people; and you, accepting Christ to stand in your stead, shall find that your sin is put away, that his righteousness is yours, and that you are “accepted in the Beloved.” I have once more preached the gospel to you as plainly and as simply as I can. Whether you will receive it, or not, must rest with yourselves. May God the Holy Spirit lead you to trust in “Christ that died”! God bless you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~Acts~~ Romans 8:26-39.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 537, 553, 297.

## LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

MY DEAR READERS, — Your weekly preacher is still weakly; but though his progress towards strength is slow, it has been steadily maintained during the late trying weather. When we consider how many have died, your chaplain is very grateful to be alive, to be able to send forth his usual discourse from the press, and to be, as he hopes, half an inch nearer to his pulpit. Happy will he count himself when he is able to preach with the living voice.

*Would it not be well for all the churches to hold special meetings for prayer concerning the deadly scourge of influenza?* The suggestion has, no doubt, been made by others; but I venture to press it upon Christians of all denominations that they may, in turn, urge all their pastors to summon such meetings. Our nation is fast learning to forget God. In too many instances ministers of religion has propagated doubt, and the result is a general hardening of the popular feeling, and a greatly-increased neglect of public worship. It is written, "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Let us, who believe in inspired Scripture, unite our prayers that it may be even so. With a court and a nation in deepest mourning, it is a time to cry mightily unto the Lord.

I have been able again to revise a sermon without assistance. It is upon ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 105:37; and, if the Lord will, it will be published next week. Yours, in deep sympathy with all the sick and the bereaved,

**C. H. SPURGEON**

***Menton, Jan. 17, 1892.***

# A STANZA OF DELIVERANCE.

## SERMON NO. 2241

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
JANUARY 31ST, 1892,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON  
THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 31ST, 1890.

*“He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.” — ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 105:37.*

THIS verse has been making music in my heart for several days, and at times it has even claimed utterance from my tongue. I have caught myself singing a solo, with myself as the only hearer; and this has been the theme, “He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.” I love texts which sing to me, and make me join in their tune. If this verse should get into your hearts, and set you singing in a similar way, you will be entertaining a very pleasant visitor, and it will brighten a dark day for you.

Egypt may very fairly represent those states of sorrow and sadness, depression and oppression, into which God's people come far too frequently. Specially is the house of bondage a true picture of our condition when we are convinced of sin, but are ignorant of the way to escape from its guilt and power. Then sin, which was once our Goshen of pleasure, becomes our iron furnace of fear. Though we yield to sin when under conviction, yet we are no longer its willing subjects: we feel that we are slaves, and we sigh by reason of sore bondage. Glory be to God, he has now brought us out from that state of slavery, and we can sing of freedom given by his own right hand!

Since then we have been permitted, in the order of God's providence, to live among evil persons who have had power over us, and have used it maliciously. They have hated our God, and, therefore, they have hated us,

and shown their dislike of us in many harsh and expecting ways. We find no rest with them; but our soul is among lions. They seem as though they would devour us, or else frighten us from following the road to heaven.

Full often has our gracious God delivered his persecuted people from such a sorrowful condition, and brought them into a large room, wherein he has made them happy with Christian fellowship, and enabled them to go about holy work without let or hindrance. At such times, when God's people have come out from under the yoke of their oppressors, the Lord has "brought them forth also with silver and gold, and there has not been one feeble person among their tribes.

It is possible to go down again into Egypt by reason of our own depression of spirit, inward conflict, and despondency. If you like the preacher, you are by no means a stranger to inward sinkings. Though you do not give up your faith, but are still, like father Jacob, keeping your hold while the sinew is shrinking, yet you are "sore broken in the place of dragons." You feel that you are like that bush in the desert, which burned with fire, and, only through a miracle, was not consumed. When under temptations of the flesh, and memories of old sins, Satan himself comes in with his fiery darts, and you have a hard time of it. He will insinuate dark and dreadful thoughts, and you will be haunted by them, day after day, till you feel like the poor Israelites under the lash of the Egyptian taskmaster. Your covenant with God will bring you out of that state of anguish and distress; and when he does so, you will sing, "He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes."

God forbid we should repeat that senseless and wicked trust in man, which once made us do down into Egypt for help! We will not go there for pleasure: what have we to do with drinking the waters of the muddy river? We drink of a better river than the Nile, even of the river of the water of life. But we shall go to the region weakness and pain to die. Unless the Lord should suddenly come in his glory, we shall close our eyes in death as Jacob and Joseph did. Then when we go into the tomb, which will be a kind of Egypt for our body, we shall only tarry there for a season. We shall slumber for a while, each one in his bed of dust, but the trump of the archangel shall awaken us, and our bodies shall rise again. We shall not,

however, come from the grave so poor and feeble as we went in. No, we shall be great gainers by our sojourn in the dark abode. Those who see the saints in the day of resurrection, ascending to their thrones from the Egypt of death, may fitly say, "He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes."

I am going to try to handle my very delightful subject in the following way: — First, *the deliverances of God's people are always wrought by divine power*. Lay the stress on the first word: "HE brought them forth." Secondly, *their deliverances are attended with enrichment*. "He brought them forth also *with silver and gold*." And, thirdly, *their deliverances are accompanied by a remarkable degree of strength*. "There was not one feeble person among their tribes." May the Holy Spirit make rare music for you upon this harp of three strings.

First, then, when we are led out of the Egypt of our sorrow, OUR DELIVERANCE IS BY DIVINE POWER. When Israel comes out of Egypt, it was Jehovah who brought forth her armies. When any man is saved from spiritual bondage, *it is the Lord Jesus who looseth the captive*. Some little time ago, I delivered an address at the Mildmay Park Conference upon "Following Jesus in the dark", and the Lord was pleased to bless that word to a great many who were then under a cloud. For this cause, I greatly rejoice, but from this happy result I have also had to suffer many things in the following way: it seems as if persons everywhere, having read that address, must needs write to me an account of their trouble, despondency, and darkness of the soul. Having written the doleful narrative, they very naturally ask me endless questions by way of trying to find light for themselves out of my experience and knowledge. I have been delighted to answer those questions as far as I can; but there is a limit to human power. I have lately been like a doctor who has suddenly had a new practice handed over to him, when he was already as busy as he could be, both night and day. He finds his door besieged by patients who cannot be dismissed with just a word of hope and a dose of medicine, but require a long time in which to tell their griefs and to receive their comfort. Spiritually, my night-bell is always going; and when I visit a sick soul, it requires long and weary nursing. I know, therefore, from that, as well as from my own experience, that if ever a man is delivered from spiritual bondage of heart, it is not by any easy work, or by a hasty word. Nay, all

the power of sympathy and experience will fail with some souls. God alone can take away the iron when it enters into the soul. It is of small use for those afflicted in mind to write to me, or to others, if their distress is spiritual, for God only can deliver them. If they are in the dark, we can strike a match as well as anyone else; but since they need the shining of the sun, that remains with the Lord, who alone creates the light. Oh, that the Sun of righteousness would rise with healing beneath his wings, on every soul that now sits in the midnight of despair! Deliverance from a cruel captivity, like that of Israel in Egypt, must be wrought by the hand and outstretched arm of Jehovah alone. When such a liberation is performed, then do we rapturously sing, "HE brought them forth."

*But this does not exclude the use of means.* The Lord used Moses and Aaron, and Moses used his rod and his tongue. Truly Jehovah brought forth Israel, and neither Moses nor Aaron nor the rod in Moses' hand; but yet the Lord's instruments were employed in the service. If the Lord delivers you, my dear afflicted friends, the work will not be done by the preacher, not by a consoling book, nor by any other means so as to prevent its being the Lord alone. The use of instrumentality does not hide divine power, but even makes it more apparent. The man Moses was not only very meek; but he was also so slow in speech that he needed Aaron's help; yet the Lord used him. Aaron was even inferior to Moses; but the Lord used him. As for the rod, it was probably nothing more than a hazel stick, which had been used by Moses in walking and keeping sheep; but it pleased the Lord to make of that rod a very remarkable use, so that no scepter of kings was ever so greatly honored. The Lord took care to employ means which could not pretend to share the honor with himself. Notwithstanding Moses, Aaron, and the rod, "HE brought them forth," and HE alone.

This work of the Lord *does not exclude the action of the will.* The people of Israel came forth freely from the country which had become the house of bondage. "He brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness." They set out exultingly, glad to escape from the intolerable oppression of Pharaoh, who was to them a tyrant indeed. God does not violate the human will when he saves men: they are not converted against their will, but their will itself is converted. The Lord has a way of entering the heart, not with a crowbar, like a burglar, but with a master-key, which

he gently inserts in the lock, and the bolt flies back, the door opens, and he enters. The Lord brought Israel forth; but they had cried unto the Lord by reason of their sore bondage, and they did not receive the blessing without the desiring it, yea, and sighing for it; and when it came, they joyfully accepted it, and willingly trusted themselves with him whom the Lord had made to be their mediator and leader, even Moses. They did not share the honor of their deliverance with God, but still they gave their hearty assent and consent to his salvation. Willingly as they were to move, it was still true, "HE brought them forth."

Brethren, he must have brought them forth, for *they could never have come forth by themselves*. If you have read enough of Egyptian history to understand the position and power of the reigning Pharaohs, you will know how impossible it was for a mob of slaves, like the Israelites, to make headway against the imperious monarch, and his absolute power. If they had clamoured and rebelled, the only possible result would have been to slaughter many, and the still further enslavement of the rest. There was no hope for the most distinguished Israelite against the tyranny of the Pharaoh: He could simply cry, "Get you unto your burdens;" and they could do no less. Pharaoh crushed even his own Egyptians, and much more the strangers. You cannot look upon the pyramids and other vast buildings along the Nile, and remember that all these were built with unpaid labor, with the whip continually at the workman's back, without feeling that a pastoral unarmed race, long held in servitude, could never have obtained deliverance from the power of Pharaohs, if the omnipotent Jehovah had not espoused their cause. "HE brought them forth."

Beloved, *we* can never escape from the bondage of sin by our own power. Our past guilt, and the condemnation consequent thereon, have locked us up in a dungeon, whose bars we can never break. The prince of darkness, also, has such power over our evil natures that we cannot overcome him, or escape from under his dominion of ourselves. If we are ever set free from sin and Satan, it will be eternally and infinitely true that the Lord brought us forth out of the house of bondage. "Salvation is of the Lord."

Moreover, *the spirit of the people was too crushed to have dared to come forth*, even if they could have achieved liberty by a brave revolt. Four hundred years of slavery had ground the very spirit out of the men of



Israel. They toiled, they toiled, they toiled; and when Moses came and talked to them about freedom, at first they listened, and they hoped; but in a few hours they began to murmur, and to complain of Moses, and to cry, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians." That abject condition was ours before conversion; we were not easily aroused to seek redemption. I remember hearing the gospel, and getting a little comfort from it, and almost immediately falling back into my former hopelessness; and I said in my soul, "I may as well enjoy the pleasures of sin while I can, for I am doomed to perish for my iniquities." The slavery of sin takes away manliness and courage from the spirit; and where bright hope smiles upon us, we answer her with the sullen silence of despair. Was it not so with you, my brethren, in those gloomy days? Therefore, it must be true, that, if the prisoners of sin have some forth, the Lord himself brought them forth. They had not the spirit of men who could dare to care about their freedom; they were too enfeebled by their own servile spirit. There may be some before me, at this moment, before whom God has set an open door, and yet they dare not go through it. Christ is put before you; you may have him for your trusting; you may have him at once; but you dare not take him. You are commanded to believe, but you dare not believe what you know to be true. You hear us sing the hymn —

***"Only trust him, only trust him,  
Only trust him now;"***

but you dare not trust the Lord Jesus, though this is your only hope of obtaining salvation. Your sin has left you paralyzed with despair. O God, bring forth these prisoners, even now! Though they lie in the inner prison, with their feet fast in the stocks, may it be said on earth and sung in heaven, "HE brought them forth."

*Yet the Lord did bring them forth.* Not in part, but as a whole, he redeemed his people. Every one of them was set free. Not only all the human beings, but all their cattle came forth, according to the word of the Lord. "Not a hoof shall be left behind." Christ Jesus, in redeeming his people, will have all or none. All that the Father gave him shall come to him; nor shall the power of sin, and death, and hell be able to hold in captivity one whom Jesus has effectually redeemed, nor one whom his Father chose. All the covenanted ones shall be his in the day when he makes up his jewels. He

has paid too much for them to lose one of them. In the loss of one of them too much would be involved; his word, his covenant, his power, his faithfulness, his honor, would all suffer, should one of his little ones perish. Therefore, he makes their deliverance effectual, and in every deed he brings them forth.

*This deliverance came when the lamb was slain.* Pharaoh held Israel captive during all the plagues, but he could not go beyond a certain point. On that same night when they saw the lamb slain, and roasted with fire, while they sat in their houses protected by the blood sprinkled upon the lintel, and the two side posts of their doors, that selfsame night they quitted Egypt. They went forth under that seal of redemption, the blood-red mark of substitutionary sacrifice. My dear hearer, perhaps this very night you will also go forth into glorious liberty. I know you will, if you will by faith look to Jesus as the Lamb slain for you. Will you now accept him as your own, and trust him to be your redemption? Behold, then, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world! Take his precious blood, and let it be sprinkled on your door, yea, and upon your own self, that the angel of vengeance may pass you by. Can you come and feed on Christ at once, as the Lamb of God's Passover? Do you say that this would be a bold and venturesome faith? Yet be so bold and venturesome. Blessed to the name of the Lord, none were ever rejected, who dared to trust Jesus! We will sing about you and others if you have faith in the great sacrifice, and this will be our song, "HE brought them forth."

Israel cannot remain under slavery to Egypt when once the redemption price has been accepted, and the blood has been sprinkled. None know freedom from sin but those who trust the atoning blood. God forbid that I should point you to any way of hope but this one path; for without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins!

I have perhaps said enough on this point; but assuredly I have fallen short, unless I have made you know each one that deliverance from sin is solely by the power of God. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Unless a supernatural power is put forth in it, any form of deliverance from sin is worth nothing. If you have been born again from below, you will go below; you must be born again from above if you are to go above. There is no true liberty but that

wherewith Christ make you free. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Do you know what it is, dear friends, to be brought out of prison by a miracle of grace, by a revelation of the Holy Ghost, by the blood of Jesus shed for many? If so, you will join with all the saints in singing, "As for his people, HE brought them forth."

But now we reach a very pleasing part of our theme, We have now to note that OUR DELIVERANCE WAS ATTENDED WITH ENRICHMENT: "He brought them forth *with silver and gold.*" "Oh!" says one, "I remember all that about that translation. That is the silver and gold which they borrowed from the Egyptians with no intent of repaying the loan. I have always thought that was a thievish trick." It was a very unfortunate mistake of our translators when they rendered the original by the word "borrowed", for it is not the correct word. Our Revised Version has it more accurately, "And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they asked of the Egyptians jewels of silver and jewels of Gold, and raiment: and the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked." Even if you were forced to read the word "borrowed", it might mean nothing amiss, for all borrowing and nonpayment is not thieving. "Oh!" say you, "that is a new doctrine." Let me state the case. If I borrow upon the security of my property, and leave the property in the hand of the lender, he will not complain if the security is worth more than the loan. These Israelites had lands and houses and other property which they could not carry with them, and now that their sudden removal involved a forced sale, they could say to those who lived near them, "Here is our land, what will you give us upon it?" The people took the immovable property of the Israelites, and they granted them a loan upon it, they were well aware of what they were doing, and were not defrauded. But we have no need thus to defend Israel. The Great Proprietor of all things bade them to ask, and influenced the minds of their neighbors to give. It was just that these poor people, who had been working without fee or reward, and had thereby screened the native Egyptians from much forced labor. The people of Egypt were, in part, afraid of them and of their God, and were also, in measure, sympathetic with them under their cruel oppression, and so they forced presents upon the Israelites hoping to get their blessing before they departed, to save them from further plague which might visit the land. The natives as good

as said, "Take whatever you please of us, for we have treated you ill. Only leave us alone; for plagues and deaths fall upon us thick and fast so long as Pharaoh detains you here." However, this is not my point. I am dealing with more spiritual things. When God brings his people out of bondage, they come out enriched in the best and most emphatic sense.

*This is very unlikely.* It looks to the afflicted as if they could not be profited by trials such as theirs. If they can only escape by the skin of their teeth, they will feel perfectly satisfied. Depressed spirits cannot lift their thought so high as to think of the gold of increased joy, or the silver of enlarged knowledge, or the jewels of holy graces. "I am," said one, "quite prepared to sit down behind the door in heaven, or at the feet of the least of the saints, so long as I may but get there." In some respects this is a very proper feeling. But this is not God's way of acting: he did not lead forth his people in a poverty-stricken way, but "He brought them forth also with silver and gold." Your Deliverer means to enrich you spiritually when he sets you free from your sorrow and trouble.

*It was very far from being the design of their enemies* to enrich Israel: Pharaoh had intended to work them down to the last ounce of strength, and keep them in abject poverty; in fact, one chief object of his oppression was to kill down the race, lest they should too greatly multiply. But the Lord turned the curse into a blessing; "The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew;" and the harder they worked, the healthier they became, so that "there was not one feeble person among their tribes." This was not according to their enemies' will; but the will of the Lord is paramount. Even so it is not the devil's will to drive a man nearer to Christ, but yet his temptations and assaults are often used of the Lord to make the best and most experienced Christians. Satan is the scullion in God's kitchen, and he has to scour the vessels of mercy. Trials and afflictions, which threaten to kill us, are made to sanctify us; and sanctification is the best form of enrichment. How much we owe to sorrow and sickness, crosses and losses! Our bondage ends in our coming forth with much that is better than silver and gold.

*Thus do we come forth from conviction of sin.* "Now tell me," says one, "what does man gain by being in a desponding, sorrowful condition, convinced of sin, and full of fears?" By the work of the Holy Spirit he will

gain much. He will obtain a clearer knowledge of the evil of sin. This is a rare thing nowadays, when we have so many believers who were never penitent. It is a great thing for a child, who has a habit of stealing apples, to get himself well filled with the sourest of them, and feel the gripes strong within him. He will never touch such fruit anymore. It is a great thing for a man, in his early days, to know what a sour apple sin is, and to feel heartache and soul-anguish because of the exceeding bitterness of his evil ways. It is a lasting lesson. As the burnt child dreads the fire, and the scalded dog is afraid even of cold water, so the discipline of conscience, through divine grace, breeds a holy caution, and even a hatred of sin. We have few Puritans because we have few penitents. An awful sense of guilt, an overwhelming conviction of sin, may be the foundation stone of a gloriously holy character.

The tried and tempted man will also see clearly that salvation is all of grace. He feels that, if he ever rises from his despondency, he can never dare to take an atom of the honor of deliverance to himself; it must be of free grace only. He can do nothing, and he knows it. When a child of God can spell GRACE, and can pronounce it clearly, as with the true Jerusalem accent, he has gained a great deal of spiritual silver and gold. I have heard a brother stutter over that word, "free grace", till it came out very like "free will." As for myself, that Shibboleth I pronounce without faltering, for my free will is that which I daily try to master and I bring into complete subjection to the will of God, and to free grace I owe everything. Blessed is that man, who, by his experience, has been made to know that free grace is the source of every blessing and privilege, and that salvation is all of grace from first to last. By a knowledge of the great gospel principle of grace, men are brought forth also with silver and gold.

Such persons gain by their soul trouble a fund of healthy experience. They have been in the prison, and have had their feet made fast in the stocks. "Well," says one, "I do not want to feel that sort of treatment." No, but suppose you had felt it, the next time you met with a brother who was locked up in the castle of the Giant Despair, you would know how to sympathize with him and help him. You who never felt a finger-ache cannot show much sympathy with broken bones. I take it to be a great gain to a man to be able to exhibit sympathy towards sufferers of all kinds, especially towards spiritual sufferers. If you can enter into the condition of

a bondsman, because you have yourself been a bondsman in Egypt, and God has brought you out, then you will be qualified to comfort those who mourn.

Thus, you see, in various ways, the Lord's people are enriched by the sorrows from which they are delivered by God. "HE brought them forth also with silver and gold." Persons who come to Christ suddenly, and find peace immediately, have much to be grateful for; and they may be helpful to others of a similar character; but those who suffer long law-work, and have deep searchings of the heart, before they can enter into rest, have equal reasons for thankfulness, since they obtain a fitness for dealing with special cases of distressed conscience. Where this is the result of severe trial, we may well say that the Lord has brought them forth with silver and gold.

*Thus do saints come out of persecution.* The church is refined by the fires of martyrdom. The heap on the Lord's threshing-floor is more largely made up of real wheat after the winnowing fan has been used upon it. Individual piety is also deeper, stronger, nobler in persecuting times than in other seasons. Eminent saints have usually been produced where the environment was opposed to truth and godliness. To this day the bride of Christ has for her fairest jewels the rubies of martyrdom. Out of each period of fierce persecution the Lord has brought forth his people the better for the fires. "HE brought them forth also with silver and gold."

*Thus do believers come out of daily afflictions.* They become wealthier in grace, and richer in experience. Have you noticed how real those men are who have known sharp trial? If you want an idle evening of chit-chat, go and talk to the gentleman with a regular income, constant good health, and admiring friends; he will amuse your leisure hour. But if you are sad and sorrowful, and need conversation that will bless you, steer clear of that man's door. Look into the faces of the frivolous, and turn away as a thirsty man from an empty cistern. He that has never had his own cheek wet with tears, cannot wipe my tears away. Where will you go in the day of trouble? Why, to that good old man whose sober experience has not robbed him of cheerfulness, though it has killed his sinful folly. He has been poor, and he knows the inconvenience of straightened means; he has been ill, and can bear with the infirmities of the sick; he has buried his

dearest ones, and has compassion for the bereaved. When he begins to talk, the tone of his voice is that of a sympathetic friend. His lips drop fatness of comfort. What a gain is his spiritual acquaintance! A man of God, whose life has been full of mental exercises and spiritual conflict, as well as outward tribulation, becomes, through divine grace, a man of a large wealth of knowledge, prudence, faith, foresight, and wisdom, and he is to the inexperienced like some great proprietor, by whom multitudes of the poorer classes are fed, and guided, housed and set to work. Those who have been much tried are in the peerage of the church. A man who has been in the furnace, and has come out of it, is a marked man. I think I should know Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego even now if I were to meet them. Though the smell of the fire had not passed upon them, I feel sure that it left a glow upon their countenances, and a glory upon their persons, which we find no where else. They are, henceforth called “the three holy children”: they were holy before, but now men own it. Do you not think that they were great gainers by the furnace, and is it not true of all the godly whose lives have been made memorable by special tribulation: “HE brought them forth also with silver and gold”?

When you and I reach the shores of heaven, *thus shall we come into glory*. When we come forth out of our graves, it will not be with loss, but with enrichment. We shall leave corruption and the worm behind us, and with them all that earthly grossness which made us groan in these mortal bodies. God will bring us forth also with silver and gold. What golden songs will we sing! What silver notes of gratitude will we pour forth! What jewels of communion with one another, and of communion with our Lord, will adorn our raiment! If we, too, have been men of sorrows and acquainted with grief, how much more fully shall we enter into the joy of our Lord, because we entered into his sorrow! We also have suffered for sin, and have done battle for God and for his truth against the enemy. We also have borne reproach. And become aliens to our mother’s children; we too have been bruised in the heel, and yet in death have conquered death, even as he did; only by his grace. Hence the joy of fellowship with him through eternity. What news we shall have to tell to angels, and principalities, and powers! The gems of our grateful history will be our trials and deliverances. Coming up from death to eternal life, this will be the sum of it, “HE brought them forth also with silver and gold.”

Dear friends, I am anxious to pass on to the third point, for time is flying fast; but I cannot neglect the application of what I have said. I beg those of you who are sad and despondent to notice the truths I have advanced. I want you to believe that your present affliction is for your enrichment. You will come out of this Egypt, with much profit of grace. "Let me out," cries one, "only let me out." I pray you, be not impatient. Why rush out naked, when a little patience will be repaid with silver and gold? If I were laboring in Egypt, and I heard that it was time for me to start for the land of Canaan, I should be eager to be gone at once; but if I found that I must be hindered for an hour or two, I should certainly utilize the delay by disposing of my lands, and endeavoring to get together treasures which I could carry with me. The delay would not be lost time. Therefore, beloved friend, if you cannot at once obtain comfort, make good use of your affliction. Be always more earnest to profit by your trials than to escape from them. Be more earnest after the heavenly silver and gold than about hurrying away from the scene of conflict and temptation.

Thirdly, here is a very wonderful thing. OUR DELIVERANCE IS ACCOMPANIED WITH HEALTH AND STRENGTH: "There was not one feeble person among their tribes." In the thousands of Israel there was not one person who could not march out of the land keeping rank as an efficient soldier. Everyone was fit for the journey through the wilderness. They numbered hard upon two millions, if not more; and it is a very surprising fact that there should not have been one feeble person among their tribes. Mark the word, no only no one sick, nut no one "feeble", none with the rheumatism, or other pains which enfeeble walking, or palsies which prevent bearing burdens. This was nothing less than a sanitary miracle, the like of which was never know in the natural order of things.

*This fact is typical of the health and strength of the newly saved.* The Lord's people, at conversion, are as a rule wonderfully strong in their love to Jesus, and their hatred of sin. In most cases our young converts, when they have truly come to Christ, even if they are a little timid, are vigorous, much in prayer, abounding in zeal, and earnest in speaking out the gospel. Many of them, I believe, would die at the stake readily enough, while they are in their first love. In their earliest days nothing is too hot or too heavy for them, for the sake of Jesus Christ, their Lord. If I want a bit of work to be done which requires dash and self-sacrifice, give me a set of Israelites



who have just come out of Egypt, for there is not one feeble person among their tribes. After they have gone some distance into the wilderness, they are apt to forget the right hand of the Lord, and to get fretting and worrying. Very soon many of them are sick, through being bitten by fiery serpents, or smitten with the plague. They begin grumbling and complaining, and run into all sorts of mischief in a short time; but when they first came out, they were so excellent that even the Lord said, "I remember thee, the love of thine espousals." I have know some of you, after you have been members of the church for a few months, greatly need a nice cushion to sit upon, and the cosy corner of the pew; whereas once you could stand in the aisle, and not know that you were standing. You have grown wonderfully particular about the singing, and the tunes, and the length of the prayer, and the preacher's attitude, and especially the respect paid to your own dear self. Only very choicest service suits you: it would almost insult you if you were put to common work. You were not like that when you were first converted. Do you recollect how the crowd pressed upon you, and yet you were so absorbed in listening to the preacher's voice that you never minded it? What walks you took then to reach the service! I notice, my friend, that when your grace grew short, the miles grew long. When you first joined the church, I said to you, "I fear you live too far off to attend regularly." But you took me up very quickly, and said, "Oh, that is nothing, sir! If I can only get spiritual food, distance is no object." When you get cold in hearts, you find it inconvenient to come so far, and you go to a fashionable place of worship, where your musical tastes can be gratified. Yes, when grace declines, fancy rules the mind, and love of ease controls the body, and the soul loses appetite, and grows greedy for empty phrases, and weary of the Word of God. May the Lord grant you grace to be among those of whom it is said, "There was not one feeble person among their tribes."

*Full often it is so with the persecuted.* I do not wish that any of you should experience persecution, but I am persuaded it would do some of you good to have a touch of it. A man who has fulfilled an apprenticeship to this hard master, is likely to be a man indeed. If he has endured hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, he will be fit to become an officer in the army, and an instructor of recruits. If I could, by the lifting of my finger, screen every believer from persecution at home and in the workshop, I

should hesitate long before I did it, since I am persuaded that the church is never more pure, more holy, more prayerful, or more powerful than when the world is raging against her. The dogs keep off the wolves. The hypocrite declines to enter the church where he will gain nothing by reproach, or worse. When there were the stakes at Smithfield, Protestantism meant heroism. When the Lord's covenanting people were meeting among the hills and mosses of Scotland, there were no "moderates" and "modern-thought" men among them. They knew and loved the truth for which they fought and that truth made them strong.

*It could be a glorious day if it were so with all God's people*, that there were none feeble. We should, as a church, labor to reach this high standard. We would have the weakest to be as David, and David as the angel of the Lord. We would have our babes become young men, and our young men fathers in Christ. Do we reach this standard at the Tabernacle? Alas! We do not, by a very long way. There are numbers of very feeble persons among our tribes. I will not say a word against them, dear hearts! For I trust they are sincere, though feeble. How greatly I wish that they were more concerned about their own feebleness, for it is a real loss to the cause we have at heart! The feeble hinder the strong. We want all the strength of the host for storming the enemies' ramparts, whereas some of us have to stop behind and nurse the infirm. We should not mind this so much, only these are the same poor creatures that were nursed twenty years ago, and they have not made no advance. May the Lord strengthen us all, till we shall all be made fit for the service of Jesus!

Oh, when we meet in the home country, when we once get to glory, what a delight it will be that *there will be no sin or weakness there!* When the Lord has once brought us forth from the world and all its troubles, then all sinful weakness shall be unknown. We shall all be raised in power, and shall be as angels of God. Are you going there, dear friends? "Yes," says one, "I hope that I am going there; but I am a feeble person." Thank God that you are on the right road, even if you limp. It is better to enter into life halt, and maimed, and feeble, than to run and leap in the way of death. If I can give a lift to anyone who is feeble, I am sure I will. At the same time, I would urge you to cry to the Lord to make you strong, and bid you trust in Christ for the power, which he alone can give, of faith to overcome doubts and fears.

If any of you have not believe unto eternal life, now put your trust in the Lord Jesus. They serve a good Master who trust alone in Jesus, and take up their cross and follow him. In him is life for the perishing, joy for the sorrowing, rest for the weary, and liberty for the captives. Are you shut up, like a prisoner in a castle? Do but trust in Jesus, and he will batter the dungeon door, and bring you out. Yea, and he will not give you a penniless liberty, a liberty to perish of want. No, it shall be said of you, and of others like you, “HE brought them forth also with silver and gold.” Amen, so be it! So be it, even at this moment, good Lord!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~PAST~~ Psalm 105

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 30, 116, 126.

# GOD'S WILL ABOUT THE FUTURE

SERMON NO. 2242

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
FEBRUARY 7TH, 1892,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON  
THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 16TH, 1890.

“Go to now, ye that say, to day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” — <sup>SOME</sup>James 4:13-17

MEN to-day are just the same as when these words were first written. We still find people saying what they are going to do to-day, to-morrow, or in six months time, at the end of another year, and perhaps still further. I have no doubt there are persons here who have their own career mapped out before them pretty distinctly, and they feel well-nigh certain that they will realize it all. We are like the men of the past; and this Book, though it has been written so long, might have been written yesterday, so exactly does it describe human nature as it is at the end of this nineteenth century.

The text applies with very peculiar force when our friends and fellow-workers are passing away from us. Sickness and death have been busy in our midst. Perhaps in our abundant service we have been reckoning what this brother would do this week, and what that sister would be doing next week, and so on. Even for God's work we have had our plans, dependent

in great measure on the presence of some beloved helpers. They have appeared amongst us in such buoyant health, that we have scarcely thought it possible that they would be struck down in a moment. Yet so it has often been. The uncertainty of life comes home to us when such things occur, and we begin to wonder that we have reckoned anything at all safe, or even probable, in such a shifting, changing world as this. With this in full view, I am going to talk about how we ought to behave with regard to the future, and attempt to draw some lessons for our own correction and instruction from the verses before us.

Following the line of the text, and keeping as close to it as we can, we will notice, first, that counting on the future is folly. *Then we will observe what is clear enough to us all, that* ignorance of the future is a matter of fact. In the third place, I shall set before you the main truth of this passage, that *recognition of God in the future is wisdom*, our fourth point shall be that *boasting of the future is sin*; and our final thought will be, that the *using of the present is a duty*.

To begin with, it will need but few words to convince you that COUNTING ON THE FUTURE IS FOLLY. The apostle says, "Go to now!" as if he meant, "you are actin absurdly. See how ridiculous your conduct is." "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will do such and such a thing." There is almost a touch of sarcasm in the words. The fact of frail, feeble man so proudly ordering his own life and forgetting God seems to the apostle James so preposterous that he scarcely deems it worth while to argue the point, he only says "Go to now!"

Let us first look at *the form of this folly*, and notice what it was that these people said when they were counting on the future. The text is very full of suggestions upon this matter.

They evidently thought everything was at their own disposal. They said "We will go, we will continue, we will buy, we will sell, we will get gain." But it is not foolish for a man to feel that he can do as he likes, and that everything will fall out as he desires; that he can both propose and dispose, and has not to ask God's consent at all? He makes up his mind, and he determines to do just what his mind suggests. Is it so, O man, that thy life is self governed? Is there not, after all, One greater than thyself? Is there not a higher power that can speed thee or stop thee? If thou dost not

know this, thou hast not yet learned the first letter of the alphabet of wisdom. May God teach thee that everything is not at your disposal; but that the Lord reigneth, the Lord sitteth King for ever and ever!

Notice, that these people, while they thought everything was at their disposal, used everything for worldly objects. What did they say? Did they determine with each other “We will to-day or to-morrow do such and such a thing for the glory of God, and for the extension of his kingdom”? Oh, no, there was not a word about God in it, from beginning to end! Therein they are only too truly the type of the bulk of men to-day. They said, “We will buy; then we will carry our goods to another market at a little distance; we will sell at a profit; and so we will get gain.” Their first and their last thoughts were of the earth earthy, and their one idea seemed to be that they might get sufficient to make them feel that they were rich and increased in goods. That was the highest ambition upon their minds. Are there not many who are living just in that way now? They think that they can map out their own life; and the one object of their efforts seems to be to buy and sell, and get gain; or else to obtain honor, or to enjoy pleasure. Their heart rises not into the serene air of heaven; they are still groveling here below.

All that these men of old spoke of doing was to be done entirely in their own strength. They said, “We will, we will.” They had no thought of asking the divine blessing, nor of entreating the help of the Most High. They did not care for that, they were self-contained; they called themselves “self-made men”; and they intended to make money. Who cannot make money who has made himself? Who cannot succeed in business who owes his character, and his present standing, entirely to his own exertions, and to his own brain? So they were full of self-confidence, and began reckoning for the future without a shadow of doubt as to their own ability. Alas, that men should do so even to-day, that, without seeking counsel of God, they should go forward in proud disdain, or in complete forgetfulness of “the arrow that flieth by day”, and “the pestilence that walked in darkness”, until they are suddenly overwhelmed in eternal ruin!

It is evident that to those men everything seemed certain. “We will go into such a city.” How did they know that they would ever get there? “We will

buy, and sell, and get gain.” Did they regulate the markets? Might there be no fall in prices? Oh, no! they looked upon the future as a dead certainty, and upon themselves as people who were sure to win, whatever might become of others.

They had also the foolish idea that they were immortal. If they had been asked whether men might not die, they would have said, “Yes, of course all men must die some time or other,” for all men count all men mortal; but in their hearts, they would have made an exception in their own case, if we may judge them by what we were apart from sovereign grace. “All men count all men mortal but themselves.” Without any saving clause, they said, “We will continue there a year.” How did they know that they would see a single quarter of that year through? But you must not press such men too closely with awkward questions. If you had done so, they would have said, “Do not talk about death; it makes one melancholy.”

Having looked at the form of this folly of counting on the future, let us speak a little on *the folly itself*. It is a great folly to build hopes on that which may never come. It is unwise to count your chickens before they are hatched; it is madness to risk everything on the unsubstantial future.

How do we know what will be on the morrow? It has grown into a proverb that we ought to expect the unexpected; for often the very thing happens which we thought would not happen. We are constantly surprised by the events which occur around us. In God’s great oratory of providence, there are passages of wondrous eloquence, because of the surprise-power that is in them. They come upon us at unawares, and overwhelm us. How can we reckon upon anything in a world like this, where nothing is certain but uncertainty?

Besides, the folly is seen in the fact of the frailty of our lives, and the brevity of them. “What is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time.” That cloud upon the mountain — you see it as you rise in the morning; you have scarcely dressed yourself before all trace of it has gone. Here in our streets, the other night, we came to worship through a thick fog, and found it here even in the house of prayer. But while we worshipped, there came a breath of wind; and on our way home a stranger would not have thought that London had been, but a few hours before, so dark with dirty mist; it had all disappeared. Life is even as a vapor.

Sometimes these vapours, especially at the time of sunset, are exceedingly brilliant. They seem to be magnificence itself, when the sun paints them with heavenly colors; but in a little while they are all gone, and the whole panorama of the sunset has disappeared. Such is our life. It may sometimes be very bright and glorious; but still it is only like a painted cloud, and very soon the cloud and the color on it are alike gone. We cannot reckon upon the clouds, their laws are so variable, and their conditions so obscure. Such also is our life.

Why, then, is it, that we are always counting upon what we are going to do? How is it that, instead of living in the eternal future, where we might deal with certainties, we continue to live in the more immediate future, where there can be nothing but uncertainties? Why do we choose to build upon clouds, and pile our palaces on vapor, to see them melt away, as aforetime they have often melted, instead of by faith getting where there is no failure, where God is all in all, and his sure promises make the foundations of eternal mansions? Oh! I would say with my strongest emphasis: Do not reckon upon the future. Young people, I would whisper this in your ears; Do not discount the days to come. Old men, whispering is not enough for you, I would say, with a voice of thunder: Count not on distant years; in the course of nature, your days must be few. Live in the present; live unto God; trust him now, and serve him now; for very soon your life on earth will be over.

We thus see that counting on the future is folly.

Secondly, **IGNORANCE OF THE FUTURE IS A MATTER OF FACT.** Whatever we may say about what we mean to do, we do not know anything about the future. The apostle, by the Spirit, speaks truly when he says, “Ye know not what shall be on the morrow.” Whether it will come to us laden with sickness or health, prosperity or adversity, we cannot tell. Tomorrow may mark the end of our life; possibly even the end of the age. Our ignorance of the future is certainly a fact.

*Only God knows the future.* All things are present to him; there is no past and no future to his all-seeing eyes. He dwells in the present tense evermore as the great I AM. He knows what will be on the morrow, and he alone knows. The whole course of the universe lies before him, like an open map. Men do not know what a day may bring forth, but Jehovah



knows the end from the beginning. There are two great certainties about things that shall come to pass — one is that God knows, and the other is that we do not know.

As the knowledge of the future is hidden from us, *we ought not pry into it*. It is perilous, it is wicked, to attempt to lift even a corner of the veil that hides us from things to come. Search into those things that are revealed in Holy Scripture, and know them, as far as you can; but be not so foolish as to think that any man or woman can tell you what is to happen on the morrow; and do not think so much of your own judgment and foresight as to say, “That is clear, I can predict that.” Never prophesy until after the event, and then, of course, you cannot prophesy; therefore never attempt to prophesy at all. You know not what shall be on the morrow, and you ought not to make any unhallowed attempt to obtain the knowledge. Let the doom of King Saul on Mount Gibeon warn you against such a terrible course.

Further, *we are benefited by our ignorance of the future*. It is hidden from us for our good. Suppose a certain man is to be very happy by-and-by. If he knows it, he will be discontented till the happy hour arrives. Suppose another man is to have great sorrow very soon. It is well that he does not know it, for now he can enjoy the present good. If we could have all our lives written in a book, with everything that was to happen to us recorded therein, and if the hand of Destiny should give us the book, we should be wise not to read it, but to put it by, and say:—

*“My God, I would not long to see  
My fate with curious eyes,  
What gloomy lines are writ for me,  
Or what bright lines arise.”*

It is sufficient that our heavenly Father knows; and his knowledge may well content us. Knowledge is not wisdom. His is wisest who does not wish to know what God has not revealed. Here, surely, ignorance is bliss: it would be folly to be wise.

Because we do not know what is to be on the morrow, *we should be greatly humbled by our ignorance*. We think we are so wise; do we now? And we make a calculation that we are sure is correct! We arrange that this is going to be done, and the other thing; but God puts forth his little finger,

and removes some friend, or changes some circumstance, and all our propositions fall to the ground. It is better for us, when we are low before the throne of God, than when we stand up and plume ourselves because we think we can say, "Oh, I knew it would be so! See how well I reckoned! With what wondrous forethought I provided for it all!" Had God blown upon our plans, they would have come to nought. We know nothing surely. Let that thought humble us greatly.

Seeing that these things are so, *we should remember the brevity, the frailty, and the end of our life.* We cannot be here long. If we live to the extreme age of men, how short our time is! But the most of us will never reach that period wherein we may say to one another, "My lease has run out." How frail is our hold on this world! In a moment we are gone, gone like the moth; you put your finger upon it; and it is crushed. Man is not great; man is less than little. He is as nothing; he is but a dream. Ere he can scarcely say that he is here, we are compelled to say that he is gone.

We are glad that we do not know when our friends are to die; and we feel thankful that we cannot foretell when we shall depart out of this life. What good would it do to us? Some who are in bondage through fear of death might be in greater bondage still, while those who are now careless about it would probably feel more content in their carelessness. If they had to live another twenty years, they would say, "At any rate, we may sport away nineteen of them." As for those of us to whom this world is a wilderness, and who count ourselves as pilgrims hurrying through it, we know enough when we know that this is not our rest, because it is polluted, and that the day will soon come when we shall enter the Canaan of our inheritance, and be "for ever with the Lord." Meanwhile, the presence of the Lord makes a heaven even of the wilderness. Since he is with us, we are content to leave the ordering of our lives to his unerring wisdom. We ought, for every reason, to be thankful that we do not know the future; but, at any rate, we can clearly see that to count on it is folly, and that ignorance of it is a matter of fact.

Thirdly, RECOGNITION OF GOD WITH REGARD TO THE FUTURE IS TRUE WISDOM. What says our text? "For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." I do not think that we need always, in every letter and in every handbill, put "If the Lord will"; yet I wish that

we oftener used those very words. The fashionable way is to put it in Latin, and even then to abbreviate it, and use only the consonants, “D.V.”, to express it. You know, it is a fine thing when you can put your religion into Latin, and make it very short. Then nobody knows what you mean by it; or, if they do, they can praise your scholarship, and admire your humility. I do not care about those letters “D.V.” I rather like what Fuller says when he describes himself as writing in the letter such passages as “God willing”, or “God lending me life.” He says, “I observe, Lord, that I can scarcely hold my hand from encircling these words in parenthesis, as if they were not essential to the sentence, but may as well be left out as put in. Whereas, indeed, they are not only of the commission at large, but so of the quorum, that without them all the rest is nothing; wherefore hereafter, I will write these words freely and fairly, without any enclosure about them. Let critics censure it for bad grammar, I am sure it is good divinity.” So he quaintly puts the matter. Still, whether you write, “If the Lord will”, or not, always let it be clearly understood; and let it be conspicuous in all your arrangements that you recognize that God is over all, and that you are under his control. When you say, “I will do this or that,” always add, in thought if not in word, “If the Lord will.” No harm can come to you if you bow to God’s sovereign sway.

We should recognize God in the affairs of the future, because, first, *there is a divine will which governs all things*. I believe that nothing happens apart from divine determination and decree; even the little things in life are not overlooked by the all-seeing eye. “The very hairs of your head are numbered.” The station of a rush by the river is as fixed and foreknown as the station of a king, and the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as much as the stars in their courses. All things are under regulation, and have an appointed place in God’s plan; and nothings happens, after all, but what he permits or ordains. Knowing that, we will not always say, “If the Lord will”; yet we will always feel it. Whatever our purposes may be, there is a higher power which we must ever acknowledge; and there is an omnipotent purpose, before which we must bow in lowliest reverence, saying, “If the Lord will.”

But while many of God’s purposes are hidden from us, *there is a revealed will which we must not violate*. It is chiefly in reference to this that the Christian should always say, “I will do this or that, provided that, when

the time comes, I shall see it to be consistent with the law of God, and with the precepts of the gospel." I say now, "I will do this or that," but certain other things may occur which will render it improper for me to do so. Hence, to be quite in accordance with the Word I so deeply reverence, I must always put in the saving clause, sometimes giving utterance to it, but in every case meaning, whether I put it into words or not, "I will do so and so, if it be right to do it; I will go, or I will stay, if it be the will of God."

In addition to this, *there is a providential will of God which we should always consult.* With this guidance, which comes from the circumstances that surround us, believers are familiar. Sometimes a thing may seem to us to be right enough morally, and yet we may not quite know whether we should do it or not. Or perhaps, there are two courses equally right, when judged by the Word of God, and you are uncertain which to follow. The highest wisdom, in such a case, is to wait for God to make a path plain by some act of providence. When you come where two roads meet, in your perplexity pull up,, kneel down, and lift your hearts to heaven, asking your Father the way. And whenever we are purposing what we should do — and we ought to make some purposes, for God's people are not to be without forethought or prudence — we should always say, or mean without saying, "All my plans must wait till the Lord sets before me an open door. If God permit, I will do this; but if the Lord will, I will stop, and do nothing. My strength shall be to sit still, unless the Master wishes me to go forward." May I whisper into the ear of some very quick, impetuous, and hasty people, that it would be greatly to their soul's benefit if they knew how to sit still? Many of us seem as if we must always do everything at once, and hence we make no end to muddle for ourselves. There is often a blessed discipline in postponement. It is a grand word, that word, "wait"; especially in this particular connection. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Be patient; sometimes even to be passive in the hand of God will be our strength, and to stand still until the cloudy, fiery pillar moves in front of us, will be our highest wisdom.

There is yet another sense I would give to this expression: *there is a royal will which we would seek to fulfill.* That will is that the Lord's people should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. So, as the servants of the Most High, we go forth to do this or that, "if the Lord

will", that is to say, if, by so doing, we can fulfill the great will of God in the salvation of men. I wish that this was the master-motive with all Christians; that we were each willing to say, "I will go and live in such a place, if there are souls to be saved there. I will take a house in such a street, if, by living there, I can be of service to my Lord and Master. I will go the China or Africa, or to the ends of the earth, if the Lord will; that is to say, if, by going there, I can be helping to answer that prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Dear Christian friends, do you put yourselves entirely at God's disposal? Are you really his, or have you kept back a bit of yourself from the surrender? If you have retained any portion for yourself, that little reserve that you have made will be the channel by which your life will bleed away. You say, "We are not our own; we are brought with a price:" but do you really mean it? I am afraid that there is a kind of mortgage on some Christians. They have some part they must give, as they fancy, to their own aggrandisement. They are not all for Christ. May the Lord bring us all to his feet in whole-hearted consecration, till we can say, "We will not go to that city unless we can serve God there. We will not buy, and we will not sell, unless we can glorify God by not buying and selling; and we will not wish even for the honest gain that comes of trading; unless we can be promoting the will of God by getting it. Our best profit will consist of doing God's will." A man can as much as serve God by measuring calico, or by weighing groceries, as he can by preaching the gospel, if he is called to do it, and if he does it in a right spirit. This should always be our aim, and we should put this ever in the forefront of our life. "I go or stay, I ascend or I descend, if the Lord will; the Lord's will shall be done in my mortal body whether I live or whether I die."

May this be your resolve, then; let this clause, "if the Lord will", be written across your life, and let us all set ourselves to the recognition of God in the future. It is a grand thing to be able to say, "Wherever I go, and whatever happens to me, I belong to God; and I can say that God will prepare my way as well when I am old and grey-headed as he did when I was a boy. He shall guide me all the way to my everlasting mansion in glory; he was the guide of my youth, he shall be the guide of my old age. I will leave everything to him, all the way from earth to heaven; and I will be content to live only a day at a time; and my happy song shall be —

*“So for to-morrow and its need  
I do not pray,  
But keep me, guide me, hold me, Lord,  
Just for to-day.”*

And now, fourthly, BOASTINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE ARE EVIL. “But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.” I will not say much upon this point, but briefly ask you to notice the various ways in which men boast about the future.

One man says, about a certain matter, “*I will do it, I have made up my mind,*” and he thinks, “You cannot turn me. I am a man who, when he has once put his foot down, is not to be shifted from his place.” Then he laughs, and prides himself upon the strength of his will; but his boasting is sheer arrogance. Yet he rejoices in it, and the Word of God is true of such a one: “All such rejoicing is evil.”

Another man says, “*I shall do it, the thing is certain;*” and when a difficulty is suggested, he answers, “Tut, do not tell me about my proposing and God’s disposing; I will propose, and I will also dispose; I do not see any difficulty. I shall carry it out, I tell you. I shall succeed.” Then he laughs in his foolish pride, and rejoices in his proud folly. All such rejoicings are evil. They are foolish; but, what is worse, they are wicked. Do I address myself to any who have no notion about heaven or the world to come, but who feel that they are perfect masters of this world, and, therefore talk in the manner I have indicated, and rejoice as they think how great they are? To such I will earnestly say, “All such rejoicing is evil.”

I heard a third man say, “*I can do it. I feel quite competent.*” To him the message is the same, his boasting is evil. Though he thinks of himself, “Whatever comes in my way, I am always ready for it,” he is greatly mistaken, and errs grievously. I have often been in the company of a gentleman of this sort, but only for a very little while; for I have generally got away from him as soon as I could. He knows a thing or two. He has got the great secret that so many are seeking in vain. All of you ordinary people, he just snuffs you out. If you had more sense, and could do as he does — well, then, you could be as well off as he is. Poor man! “Nobody needs to be poor,” says he. “Nobody needs to be poor. I was poor a little

while; but I made up my mind that I would not remain poor. I fought my own way, and I could begin again with a crust, and work myself up.” You will notice his frequent use of the capital I, but ah, dear sir, God has thunder-bolts for these great I’s! They offend him; they are a smoke in his nostrils. Pride is one of the things which his soul hates. No man should speak in such a strain: “All such rejoicing is evil.”

But that young man yonder talks in a different tone. He has been planning he will do when he succeeds; for, of course, he is going to succeed. Well, I hope that he may, He is going to buy, and sell, and get gain; and he says, “*I will do so and so when I am rich.*” He intends then to live his fling, and to enjoy himself; he laughs as he thinks what he will do when his toilsome beginnings are over, and he can have his own way. I would ask him to pause and consider his life in a more serious vein: “All such rejoicing is evil.”

There is, of course, a future concerning which you may be certain. There is a future in which you may rejoice. God has prepared for them that serve him a crown of life, and by humble hope you may wear the crown even now. You may, by the thoughts of such amazing bliss, begin to partake of the joy of heaven; and this will do you no harm. On the contrary, it will set your heart at rest concerning your brief stay on earth, for what will it matter to you whether your life is cloudy or bright, short or long, when eternity is secure? But concerning the uncertainties of this fleeting life, if you begin to rejoice, “All such rejoicing is evil.”

That brings me to my last and most practical point, which is this: THE USING OF THE PRESENT IS OUR DUTY. “Therefore to him that knoweth good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” I take this text with its context. It means that he who knows what he ought to do, and does not do it *at once*, to him it is sin. Tho text does not refer to men who live in guilty knowledge of duty, and neglect it; its message is to men who know the present duty, and who think that they will do it by-and-by.

In the first place, *it is sinful to defer obedience to the gospel.* “He that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Do you say, “I am going to repent”? Your duty is to repent now. “I am going to believe,” do you say? The command of Christ is, “Believe now.” “After I have believed,” says one, “I shall wait a long time before I make any

profession.” Another says, “I am a believer, and I shall be baptized some day.” But as baptism is according to the will of the Lord, you have no more right to postpone it than you have to postpone being honest or sober. All the commands of God to the characters to whom they are given come as a present demand. Obey them now. And if anyone here, knowing that God bids him to believe, refuses to believe, but says that he hopes to trust Christ one of these days, Let me read him this: “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not,” — this word is in the present tense, — “to him it is sin.”

In the next place, *it is sinful to neglect the common duties of life*, under the idea that we shall do something more by-and-by. You do not obey your parents, young man, and yet you are going to be a minister, are you? A pretty minister will you make! As an apprentice you are very dilatory and neglectful, and your master would be glad to see the back of you; he wishes that he could burn your indentures; and yet you have an idea you are going to be a missionary, I believe? A pretty missionary you would be! There is a mother at home, and when her children are neglected while she talks to her neighbors; but when her children are off her hands, she is going to be a true mother in Israel, and look after the souls of others. Such conduct is sin. Mind your children; darn the stockings, and attend your other home duties; and when you have done that, talk about doing something in other places. If present duties are neglected, you cannot make up for the omission by some future piece of quixotic endeavor to do what you were never called to do. If we could all be quiet enough to hear that clock tick, we should hear it say, “Now! Now! Now! Now!” The clock therein resembles the call of God in the daily duties of the hour. “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin,” even though he may dream of how he will, in years to come, make up for his present neglect.

Then, dear friends, *it is sinful to postpone purposes of service*. If you have some grand project and holy purpose, I would ask you not to delay it. My dear friend, Mr. William Olney, whose absence we all mourn to-night, was a very prompt, energetic man. He was here, he was there, he was everywhere, serving his Lord and master; and now that he is suddenly stricken down, his life cannot be said to be in any sense unfinished; there is nothing to be done in his business; there is nothing to be done in his



relation to this church. There is nothing left undone with regard to anybody. It is all as finished as if he had known that he was going to be struck down. Mr. Whitefield said that he would not go to bed unless he had put even his gloves in their right place. If he should die in the night; he would not like to have anybody asking, "Where did he leave his gloves?" that is the way for a Christian man always to live; have everything in order, even to a pair of gloves. Finish up your work every night; nay, finish up every minute. I have seen Mr. Wesley's Journal, though it is not exactly a "journal"; it does not give an account of what he did in a day, nor even what he did in an hour. He divided his time into portions of twenty minutes each; and I have seen the book in which there is the record of something done for his Lord and Master every twenty minutes of the day. So exactly did he live, that no single half-minute ever seemed to be wasted. I wish that we all lived in that way, so that we looked, not at projects in some distant future that never will be realized, but at something to be done now.

Last Thursday, when I was speaking, I said that some Christian people had never told out the story of the cross to others, and urged them to begin to do so at once. A young friend, sitting in this place, leaned over the front of the pew, and touched a friend sitting there, saying to her, "I would like to speak to you about that." He had never spoken to her before, he did not even know her, and he thus addressed her while the service was proceeding. A member of the church, sitting by her side, who heard what the young man said, was so pleased with his prompt action, that she stayed after the service to sympathize and help, while he explained the way of salvation. The young person, to whom he spoke, came to tell me, last Tuesday, that she had found the Savior through that well-timed effort. Dear friends, that is the way to serve the Lord. If we were to do things at the moment when they occurred to us, we should do them to purpose. But, oh, how many pretty things you have always meant to do, and have never even attempted! You have strangled the infant projects that have been born in your mind; you have not suffered them to live, and grow into manhood of real action. First thoughts are best in the service of God, and the carrying of them out would secure great benefit to others and much fruit for ourselves. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." God help us, if we are saved, to get at this holy business of serving

the Lord Christ, which as far exceeds buying and selling, and getting gain, as the heavens are higher than the earth. Let us do something for Christ at once. You young people that are newly converted, if you do not very soon begin to work for Christ, you will grow to be idle Christians, scarcely Christians at all; but I believe that to attempt something suited to your ability almost immediately, as God shall direct you, will put you on the line of a useful career. God will bless you, and enable you to do more as the years roll onwards.

I have this last word: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth is not, to him it is sin," that is, *it is sinful in proportion to our knowledge*. If there is any brother here, into whose mind God has put something fresh, something good, I pray him to translate it into action at once. "Oh, but nobody has done it before!" Somebody must be first, any why should not you be the first if you are sure that it is a good thing, and has come into your heart through God the Holy Ghost? But if you know to do good, and do not do it; it will be sin every minute that you leave it undone. Therefore get at it at once. And you, my sister, who to-night, while sitting here thinking of something you might have done which you have not yet attempted, attempt it at once. Do not let another sun rise, if you can help it, before you have begun the joyful and blessed service. "The time is short." Our opportunities are passing, "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Be up and doing. Soon we shall be gone. May we never hear the summons to go home while there is anything left undone that we ought to have done for our Lord and Master!

I am conscious of having spoken but very feebly and imperfectly; but, you know, my heart is heavy because of this sore trial which has come upon us through the stroke that has fallen on our beloved deacon, William Olney; and when the heart is so sad, the brain cannot be very lively. May God bless this word, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~SOOT~~ James 4


HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK" — 90, 39, 211

When last week's sermon was sent to the printers. Mr. Spurgeon was unable to write a letter to go at the end of it, for he was suffering so

severely that he could not even dictate a message to his sermon-readers. It was not then anticipated that his illness would take the terrible form it afterwards assumed: but on *Tuesday, January 26*, when the doctor came, he was obliged to report his patient's condition as "serious." Since then, the daily bulletins have carried the sad tidings far and wide; and most of the readers of the sermons probably know, by this time, that their beloved preacher has been suffering the same malady that so grievously afflicted him during last summer and autumn. His illness, on this occasion, has not developed exactly the same symptoms as before; but at the date of writing this note (Jan 31), the doctor reports that "*his condition gives cause for the greatest anxiety.*"

It is with profound regret that the Publishers record the death of the beloved Pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He was called to his rest, at Menton, on Sunday, January 31<sup>st</sup>, at 11 p.m.

To all who were privileged to know Mr. Spurgeon, this event has come as a great sorrow; a sorrow which will certainly be shared by every reader of the weekly sermons.

"I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." —  Revelation 14:13.

The weekly Sermon and *The Sword and the Trowel* will be continued as usual, the Publishers having a large quantity of manuscripts and Sermons hitherto unpublished.

# HIS OWN FUNERAL SERMON.\*

## SERMON NO. 2243

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
FEBRUARY 14TH, 1892,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON  
THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 19TH, 1890.**

\*This sermon was preached on the Lord's-day evening after Mr. William Olney "fell on sleep." Long before the beloved preacher was "called home," it was selected for publication this week. Mrs. Spurgeon feels that her dear husband could not have delivered a more suitable discourse for "his own funeral sermon." She has, therefore, given it that title in the hope that many will be blessed by the message which "he, being dead, yet speaketh." Believing that many friends will wish to have this sermon for widespread circulation, the publishers will at once issue it, in book form, price one penny.

*"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep." — ~~ACTS~~ Acts 13:36.*

It is remarkable that David should say, in the ~~16th~~ sixteenth Psalm,

*"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine  
Holy One to see corruption,"*

and yet that Paul should say concerning him, when preaching at Antioch, that he "saw corruption." The key to this apparent contradiction is the fact that David did not speak of himself, but of his Lord. Peter, in his memorable sermon on the day of Pentecost, quotes the words of the psalmist, applies them to his risen Redeemer, and distinctly affirms that, in the Psalm, "David speaketh concerning him."

It is worthy of notice that Peter and Paul both use the same argument about this statement of David. These two apostles did not always agree; but however much they might differ about other matters, they were of one mind about the resurrection of Christ. I hope that, whatever differences there may be among true preachers of the gospel, they will always be one in declaring the resurrection of our Lord. This corner-stone of the gospel must never be displaced or dishonored. The good news we are commissioned to declare is the same that Paul received and delivered, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” Chief among the Scriptures fulfilled by the resurrection of Christ stands this word, which David, inspired by the Holy Ghost, wrote so long before the event: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” The resurrection of Christ is the top-stone of our faith. Because “he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption,” Paul was able to say this to his hearers, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that before are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

The argument of the apostle is this. David could not have meant himself when he said, “Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption;” because David died, and his body was buried, and it did see corruption. He must therefore have referred to Christ, who is indeed God’s “Holy One.” Of him the prophetic word was true, for God did not suffer him “to see corruption.” He died, and was laid in the grave, but he rose again on the third day. In that climate there was, while Christ lay in the grave, plenty of time for his body to become corrupt. The spices with which they perfumed the precious body would not have sufficed to keep back corruption; they would have helped conceal the unpleasant odour which putrefaction brings, but they would not have stopped the process of decay. But Christ rose again, and no corruption had come to his body, for that body was a holy thing; it had no defect, nor taint of sin, as our bodies have. Begotten of the Holy Ghost, it was a pure thing; though born of the Virgin Mary, it was united to the Godhead, and not separated from it even in death; it saw no corruption. There is the apostle’s argument, then: David speaking not of himself, but of someone else, says that the Lord

will not suffer him to see corruption; and this he spake by the Spirit of the very Christ whom we preach to you as the Author and Finisher of salvation. He is living and reigning to-day, King of kings and Lord of lords; he that believeth in him, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and live for ever with his risen, reigning Redeemer.

While Paul was speaking in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, he incidentally used the words of our text: "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep." That is to be my subject on this occasion; forgetting for the present the main argument, I would only look at this eddy in the current, and draw your attention to the expression which dropped from Paul's lips concerning David. Let us ask, first, *What is it to serve our own generation?* Secondly, *What parts of our generation can we serve?* And, lastly, with tender memories of many who have gone from us, let us ask, *What will happen to us when our service is done?* Even that which happened to David; we shall, like him, "fall on sleep."

First, then, WHAT IS IT TO SERVE OUR OWN GENERATION? This is a question which ought to interest us all very deeply. We live in the midst of our own generation, and seeing that we are part of it, we should serve it, that the generation in which our children shall live may be better than our own. Though our citizenship is in heaven, yet as we live on earth, we should seek to serve our generation while we pass as pilgrims to the better country.

What, then, is it for a man to serve his own generation?

I note, first, that *it is not to be a slave to it*. It is not to drop into the habits, customs, and ideas of the generation in which we live. People talk nowadays about *Zeitgeist*, a German expression which need frighten nobody; and one of the papers says, "Spurgeon does not know whether there is such a thing." Well, whether he knows anything about *Zeitgeist* or not, he is not to serve this generation by yielding to any of its notions or ideas which are contrary to the Word of the Lord. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not only for one generation, it is for all generations. It is the faith which needed to be only "once for all delivered to the saints"; it was given stereotyped as it always is to be. It cannot change because it has been given of God, and is therefore perfect; to change it would be to make it

imperfect. It cannot change because it has been given to answer for ever the same purpose, namely, to save sinners from going down to the pit, and to fit them for going to heaven. That man serves his generation best who is not caught by every new current of opinion, but stands firmly by the truth of God, which is a solid, immovable rock. But to serve our own generation in the sense of being a slave to it, its vassal, and its valet — let those who care to do so go into such bondage and slavery if they will. Do you know what such a course involves? If any young man here shall begin to preach the doctrine and the thought of the age, within the next ten years, perhaps within the next ten months, he will have to eat his own words, and begin his work all over again. When he has got into the new style, and is beginning to serve the present world, he will within a short time have to contradict himself again, for this age, like every other, is “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” But if you begin with God’s Word, and pray God the Holy Ghost to reveal it to you till you really know it, then, if you are spared to teach for the next fifty years, your testimony at the close will not contradict your testimony at the beginning. You will ripen in experience; you will expand in your apprehension of the truth; you will become more clear in your utterance; but it will be the same truth all along. Is it not a grand thing to build up, from the beginning of life to the end of it, the same gospel? But to set up opinions to knock them down again, as though they were ninepins, is a poor business for any servant of Christ. David did not, in that way serve his own generation; he was the master of his age, and not its slave. I would urge every Christian man to rise to his true dignity, and be a blessing to those amongst whom he lives, as David was. Christ “hath made us kings and priests unto God his Father”; it is not meet that we should cringe before the spirit of the age, or lick the dust whereon “advanced thinkers” have chosen to tread. Beloved, see to this; and learn the distinction between serving your own generation and being a slave to it.

In the next place, in seeking to answer the question, “What is it to serve our own generation? I would say, *it is not to fly from it*. If any man says, “The world is so bad, that I will avoid coming into contact with it altogether; even the teaching of Christianity has become so diluted, and is so thoroughly on the Down-grade, that I will have nothing to do with it,” he is certainly not serving his own generation. If he shall shut himself up,

like a hermit, in his cave, and leave the world to go to ruin as it may, he will not be like David, for he *served* his own generation before he fell asleep. She that goes into a nunnery, and he that enters a monastery are like soldiers who run away, and hide among the baggage. You must not do anything of the sort. Come forward and fight evil, and triumph over it, whether it be evil of doctrine, evil of practice, or evil of any other kind. Be bold for Christ; bear your witness, and be not ashamed. If you do not take your stand in this way, it can never truly be said of you that you served your generation. Instead of that, the truth will be that you allowed your generation to make a coward of you, or, to muzzle you like a dog, and to send you out, into the streets neither to bark nor to bite, nor to do anything by which you might prove that there is a soul within you.

If we ask again, What is it to serve our generation? I answer, *it is to perform the common duties of life*, as David did. David was the son of a farmer, a sheep-owner, and he took first of all to the keeping of the sheep. Many young men do not like to do the common work of their own father's business. You do not want to drudge, you say, you want to be a king. Well, there are not many openings in that line of business; and I shall not recommend anyone to be eager to enter them if there were. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." Before David swayed the scepter, he grasped the shepherd's crook. He that at home cannot or will not undertake ordinary duties, will not be likely to serve his age. The girl who dreams about the foreign missionary field, but cannot darn her brother's stockings, will not be of service either at home or abroad. Do the commonplace things, the ordinary things that come in your way, and you will begin to serve your generation, as David served his.

But serving our generation means more than this. *It is to be ready for the occasion when it comes*. In the midst of the routine of daily life, we should, by diligence in duty, prepare for whatever may be our future opportunity, waiting patiently until it comes. Look at David's occasion of becoming famous. He never sought it. He did not go up and down among his sheep, sighing and crying, "Oh, that I could get away from this dull business of looking after these flocks! My brothers have gone to the camp; they will get on as soldiers; but here am I, buried among these rocks, too looks after these poor beasts." He was wiser than that; he quietly waited God's time. That is always a wise thing to do. If you are to serve God,



wait till he calls you to do his work; he knows where to find you when he wants you; you need not advertise yourself to his omniscience. At length the set time came for David. On a certain day, his father bade him go to his brethren, and take them some corn and some loaves, with cheeses for their captain; and he reached the camp just at the time when the giant Goliath was stalking forth, and defying all the armies of Israel to meet him. Now is David's time, and the young man is ready for it. If he had lost the opportunity he might have remained a shepherd all the rest of his days. He tells Saul how he slew both the lion and the bear, and prophesies that the uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he had defied the armies of the living God. Disdaining Saul's armor, he takes his sling, and his five smooth stones out of the brook, and soon he comes back with the gory head of the giant in his hand. If you want to serve the church and serve the age, beloved friend, be wide awake when the occasion comes. Jump into the saddle when the horse is at your door; and God will bless you if you are on the look-out for opportunities of serving him.

What is it, again to serve our generation? *It is to maintain true religion.* This David did. He had grave faults in his later life, which we will not extenuate; but he never swerved from his allegiance to Jehovah the true God. No word or action of his ever sanctioned anything like idolatry, or turning aside from the worship of Jehovah, the God of Israel. He bore a noble witness to his Lord. He said, "I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed;" and we may be sure that he was as good as his word, and that when he met with foreign potentates, he vindicated the living God before them. The whole set and current of his life, with the exception of his terrible fall, was to the glory of God in whom he trusted, and to the praise of that God who had delivered him. We, too, shall truly serve those amongst whom we dwell by maintaining true religion. Had ten righteous men been found in Sodom, it would have been spared, and the world to-day only escapes the righteous judgment of God because of the presence in it of those who fear him, and tremble at his word. The spread of "pure and undefiled religion" is a certain way to serve those around us. To help true religion, David wrote many Psalms, which were sung all over the land of Israel. A wonderful collection of poems they are; there is none like them under heaven. Not even a Milton, with all his mighty soarings, can equal David in the height of his adoration of God, and

the depth of his experience. That man does no mean service for his time who gives the people new songs which they can sing unto their God. While none can equal the inspired psalms of the Hebrew king, which must ever form the choicest praise-book of the church, other men may, in lesser degree serve their own generation, by the will of God, in a similar way, and be blessed in the deed.

To serve our own generation is not a single action, done at once, and over for ever; *it is to continue to serve all our life*. Notice well that David served “his own generation”; not only a part of it, but the whole of it. He began to serve God, and he kept on serving God. How many young men have I seen who were going to do wonders! Ah, me! They were as proud of the intention as though they had already done the deed. They took a front seat, and they seemed to think that everybody ought to admire them because of what they were going to do; but they were so pleased with the project that they never carried it out. They thought that they might meet with some mishap if they really attempted to do the thing, and the project was so beautiful that they preserved it under a glass shade, and there it is now. Nothing has been accomplished; nothing has been done, though much has been thought of. This is folly. Some, too, begin well, and they serve their God earnestly for a time, but on a sudden their service stops. One cannot quite tell how it happens, but we never hear of them afterwards. Men, as far as I know them, are wonderfully like horses. You get a horse, and you think, “This is a first-rate animal,” and so it is. It goes well for a while, but on a sudden it drops lame, and you have to get another. So it is with church-members. I notice that, every now and then, they get a singular lameness. To very many we have to say, even as Paul said to the Galatians, “Ye did run well; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth?” But David continually served God to the end of his life. May we all, by divine grace, thus serve our whole generation, too!

Yet more is included in this faithful serving of our generation. *It is to prepare for those who are to come after us*. David served his generation to the very end by providing for the next generation. He was not permitted to build the temple; but he stored up a great mass of gold and silver to enable his son Solomon to carry out his noble design, and build a house for God. This is real service; to begin to serve God in early youth; to keep on till old age shall come; and even then to say, “I cannot expect to serve the

Lord much longer, but I will prepare the way as far as I can for those who will come after me." Many years ago, Dr. Rippon, the minister of this church, which then worshipped in New Park Street, was wont to prophesy about his successor. When he was very old, after having been pastor for more than sixty years, it is in the memory of some still living that he was accustomed to pray for the minister who should come after him. The old man was looked forward to one who should come and carry on the work after he was obliged to leave it. So must you and I do. We must be looking ahead as far as ever we can, not with unbelieving anxiety or unholy curiosity; but after the fashion in which David prepared abundantly before his death. If we cannot find a successor to enter upon our service when we have to leave it, yet let us do all we can to make his work the easier when he comes to it.

In the second place, let us ask a question even more practical than the first, WHAT PARTS OF OUR GENERATION CAN WE SERVE? It is truly written, "None of us liveth to himself:" we either help or hinder those amongst whom we dwell. Let us see to it that we serve our age, and become stepping-stones rather than stumbling-blocks to those by whom we are surrounded. We shall serve our generation best by being definite in our aim. In trying to reach everybody we may help nobody. The wise man tries to serve somebody in particular: where, then, should we make the effort? In answering that question, I divide the generation in which we live into three parts.

First, there is *the part that is setting*. Some are like the sun going down in the west; they will be gone soon. Serve them, dear brethren. You that are in health and vigor, comfort them, strengthen them, and help them all you can. Be a joy to that dear old man, who has been spared to you even beyond the allotted threescore years and ten, and praise God for the grace that has upheld him through his long pilgrimage. Look on his grey hairs as a crown of glory; make his descent to the grave as easy as you can. He once was as young as you are; he once had the vigor that you have. Console him, cheer him, give him the respect that is due to his many years. Do not let him feel that you consider him an old fogey who lingers, superfluous, on the stage; but learn from his experience, imitate his perseverance, and ask God to be with you in your old age, as he is with him.

The second portion of our generation which we can serve is *the part that is shining*. I mean those in middle life, who are like the sun at its zenith. They are working hard, bearing the burden and heat of the day; as yet their bones are full of marrow, and they are strong men ready for service for the Lord. Seek to sustain their hands in every possible way. Help them all you can. As one of those in middle life, I especially ask the help of all my Christian brethren, members of this church, or of any other church, who can aid me by their sympathies and their prayers. Get closer to one another, and fill up the vacant spaces that death's arrows continue to make in our ranks. Suffer nothing to be left undone which may further the work of Christ, or help the people around you who are so quickly passing away. Many of us have been together for nearly forty years, and when, one after another, our dear brethren are taken away, let it be everybody's ambition to try to make up what shall be lacking through their departure. This is what is due to those who are like the shining part of our generation.

Specially, however, I want to speak to you about serving your own generation in *the part that is rising*; the young people who are like the sun in the east, as yet scarcely above the horizon. This part of our generation is specially the care of parents and Sunday-school teachers; but let us not leave it entirely to them. We can, most of us, do something to serve this portion of our generation before we fall asleep. Beloved, I commend to your care and attention the children and young people who abound in our midst. In them lies our hope for the future of God's cause on earth.

In the first place, they are the most reachable. Happily, we can get at the children. The mass of people in London go to no place of worship now; the old habit of attending church or chapel seems to have been given up; but the people will still let the children go to Sunday-school, even if they do it from no better motive than that of getting them out of the way in the afternoon, or in order that the house may be quiet without them. Anyhow, if you open a school anywhere in London, you can quickly get it filled with children. If you cannot do one thing, do another. If you cannot reach the fathers and the mothers, though you should earnestly try to get at them, yet, if you can reach the children, take care that you lose no opportunity of teaching them the things of God. This is the work that lies nearest to you; seek to accomplish it; and "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

Moreover, the children are the most impressible. What can we do with the man who is hardened in sin? The grace of God can reach him, I know; but the children as yet have not known these evil ways; they are horrified when they hear about them. Teach them. While yet the clay is soft, mould it for God. May the Lord himself help you, dear Sunday-school teachers, and others who labor amongst the children, to do your work right well! Nobly are you serving your own generation, and the generation to follow.

The salvation of the children ought to be sought with double diligence, for they will last the longest. If a man of sixty or seventy is converted, he will have only a short time for serving God here; for he will soon be gone. If a child is converted, a long life of usefulness may enrich the church of God. Therefore, look after the children. If you had a gathering of Christian men and women, and were to put the question to them, "How many of you were converted before you were one-and-twenty?" you would be greatly surprised to find that probably five out of six would answer that, in early years, they were led to know the grace of God, and trust in Christ as their Savior. I tried the experiment one evening with a number of friends who had come together from different places. "How many of you owe your salvation to your father's prayers, your mother's instruction, or your Sunday-school teachers' influence in youth?" I asked; and almost every one out of a company of about five-and-twenty said that it was in early youth that God blessed some instrumentality to their conversion.

Remember, too, that those who are converted when children usually make the best saints. These of whom I have just spoken, who gave the answer that they were converted in their youth, were ministers of the gospel. I do not know whether the same rule is true among ordinary Christians; but among those who have become leaders of men, in nearly every case they yielded to Christ while they were young. Our thoughts at this time cannot but be occupied with our dear friend, William Olney, who has just been taken from us so suddenly, to our unutterable grief. He was as earnest as a youth as he was when he became an old man. Indeed, I never knew a moment when he was not earnest. I never even knew him to be dull or depressed; he seemed to be always joyous and glad. He would almost frighten me sometimes with his jubilation under pain; for when he was in agonies of suffering, and could only sit on the platform for a short time, there was never anything like depression about him. He was just as glad

and happy as if he had been in perfect health. I wish that it were so with all of us. Young Christians do become the best Christians. Early piety is usually eminent piety; so seek to catch the children while they are young, and train them for the Lord, then they will be ready to serve their generation in their turn.

We ought to look after the children, again, for they are specially named by Christ. He said, "Feed my sheep;" but he also said, "Feed my lambs." I would almost be inclined to say that the Lord made the same division of the generation as I have done. When he said, the first time, "Feed my sheep," he may have meant the old sheep. When he said, the second time, "Feed my sheep," he may have had specially in mind the middle-aged ones. There is no doubt that when he said, "Feed my lambs," he meant the young people. Christ gave the lambs a place all to themselves: "Feed my lambs." I wish Christians would consider more seriously how the children ought to be looked after by the church. I read, the other day, of a boy who wished to join in membership with the people of God. His father said that he was too young, and kept him back. He was big enough, however, to be sent out to fold the sheep one night. When he came in, his father said, "Jack have you folded the sheep?" "Yes," he said; "I folded all the *sheep*," laying great stress on the last word. "And did you put the lambs in?" asked his father. "No," he replied, "I left the lambs outside; they were too young to go in." "Oh, boy!" said the father; "you know more than I do, after all; they were the very ones that needed most to be folded. You may go and see the minister about joining the church as soon as you like." If any believers in Christ need specially to be taken into the church, it is those who have come to Jesus in their youth. I pray you, serve your generation by giving the children and young people your most loving attention and care.

Look after the children of this generation, again, for the dangers around them at the present time are almost innumerable. What a time this is for boys! You cannot read the daily papers without being shocked by the amounts of wrong-doing of mere boys. This is an age which seems to make snares on purpose to entrap them. There are "penny dreadfuls" enough to poison the whole generation; they are full of stories of crime with a false halo about it, so that it is made to seem like heroism. These vile stories are everywhere; perhaps your own boy has one, unknown to you, and is

reading it while you are sitting here. Everywhere traps are laid for the feet of our boys. Serve your generation by warning them of their danger and trying to keep them free from the evils by which they are surrounded. Satan gets the advantage over many a young life by causing even right things to be put to wrong uses; and in all sorts of ways he lays traps for young people. Oh, parents and teachers, do try to give your boys a backbone of moral honesty! Try to show them that they have not come into this world merely to please themselves; that there is something better to be done than that. Do not rest till you have led them to the Savior, for no boy is safe until he is converted. No girl is safe in the streets of this city till she has a new heart and a right spirit. The times are perilous; yet if we speak a word of warning. We are called sour Puritans. It always makes me laugh when I am called a sour Puritan, because you know there is nobody with a quicker eye for fun, or with a deeper vein of mirth than I have. At the same time, I like to have humor, and anything of cheerfulness and brightness in life, consecrated to God. But when mirth is made a plank on which a man can go into sin and iniquity, then we will saw that plank into pieces. You must be saved from sin, young men; you must be kept from evil, young women, if you are to be truly happy. May God's grace put in your way wise, godly friends, parents, and teachers, who shall serve their generation by leading you in the paths of peace!

Now, I have done when I have tried, for just a minute or two, to answer this question: WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US WHEN OUR SAVIOR IS DONE? "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep." The day's work is done; the worker is weary; he falls on sleep: what can he do better? It was all "by the will of God.: To what part of the sentence do you think that clause belongs? Did David serve his generation by the will of God; or did he fall asleep by the will of God? Both. Guided by the will of God, he did his work on earth; and calmly resigned to the will of God, he prepared to die. Even when passing away, he served his generation by giving Solomon some last charges concerning the kingdom, saying, "I go the way of the earth; be thou strong, and show thyself a man." Over both his life and his death may be written the words, "By the will of God." Oh, that we may all so live, that even in death we may serve our generation; may it be true of us that "whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore

or die, we are the Lord's"! Thus, "the will of God" shall be done both in our service and in our sleep.

David is an example of what will befall those who know Christ, at the end of their service. *He did not go to sleep till his work was done.* "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep." Do not want to die till you have done your work. When brethren say, "Oh, I wish I could go to heaven! Oh, when shall I get home?" they remind me of a man who, when he begins work on Monday, says, "I wish it was Saturday night." We do not want servants like that, nor does God either. Be willing to live for two hundred and fifty years, if God wills it. Be willing to live until strength fails you, if God wills it; you can still bear your dying testimony to the Lord's faithful and unchanging love. Do not be in a hurry to go home to heaven. Do not want to go to sleep till you also have served your generation well. When David had served his generation, he fell on sleep. We are told that, in the early days of Christianity, when believers were falling asleep in Jesus, their friends did not bid them "good-bye," but "good-night." So we say, in the words of that beautiful hymn —

*"Sleep on beloved, sleep, and take thy rest;  
Lay down thy head upon thy Savior's breast:  
We love thee well; but Jesus loves thee best —  
Good-night! Good-night! Good-night!"*

*Only 'good-night,' beloved — not 'farewell'!  
A little while, and all his saints shall dwell  
In hallowed union, indivisible —  
Good-night!"*

*Until we meet again before his throne,  
Clothed in the spotless robe he gives his own,  
Until we know even as we are known —  
Good-night!"*

But, next we are told that *when his work was done, he fell on sleep.* Did his soul sleep? By no means. It was not his soul that is spoken of here, for we read that he "saw corruption." Souls do not see corruption. Paul is speaking of David's body. "He fell on sleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption." His body fell into its last, long sleep, and saw corruption. If you like to take the words in the wider sense, he was asleep as far as the world is concerned; he had done with it. No sorrow came to



him, no earthly joy, no mingling with the strife of tongues, no girding his harness for the war. "He fell on sleep." He had nothing to do with anything that was under the sun. And that is the case with our dear friend whom we miss from his place to-day, and it will soon be the case also with you and with me. There is not much here worth stopping for; and when our work is finished, like David, we shall fall on sleep. We shall then be asleep to all the declensions of the age, all the strifes of men, and all else which gives us sorrow of heart.

Does this word further mean that *his dying was like going to sleep*? It usually is so with God's people. Some die with a considerable measure of pain; but, as a rule, when believers pass away, they just shut their eyes, and open them in heaven. I have had infinitely more pleasure at death-beds than I have had at weddings. I have been to many marriage-feasts, I have gone there at duty's call; but I can confirm what Solomon said, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for it is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." I am not aware that I have gained anything at a wedding, but I have gained much at the dying bed, as I have seen the joy and peace and rapture of girls and youths, and men and women, passing away joyfully to be "forever with the Lord." I have known some of our number here who were too bashful and backward to ever say much for Christ when they were well; but when I sent to see them die, there was not a bit of bashfulness about them. They spoke out so boldly that I have said to them, "Why, if you get better, you must preach for me one of these Sundays"; and they have smiled and said that they would never get better. They have known this, and they have rejoiced to think that they were going where they would not need any preacher, but would see their Lord Jesus face to face. How they have brightened up at the mention of his dear name! Some of them have sung then, though I never knew them to sing before; and some of them have told of things which they seemed to see and hear, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, till God has revealed them to the departing spirit. You remember such dying beds, do you not? Was it your mother, or your father, who passed away in that glorious style? Perhaps it was a brother beloved, or a sister, or a friend. Well, if we know Christ, it shall be ours by-and-by to sleep in him. You who believe in Christ ought no more to dread death than you dread going to sleep at night. You will, ere you sleep, commit yourself

to God, and as you put your head on the pillow, the similitude of death will be upon you, even sleep which one has called “death’s cousin.” You will not be afraid of that. Why, then, should any dismay seize you in prospect of that which is but another sleep? Rather sing to yourself: —

*“Since Jesus is mine, I’ll not fear undressing,  
But gladly put off these garments of clay;  
To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,  
Since Jesus to glory through death lead the way.”*

Let us follow where he leads. Perchance some of us may tarry until he comes again. There will be no death for such; they will but change the service of their generation for the service of the glorified. “Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” Then, when the trumpet shall sound, this corruptible shall put on incorruption, those who sleep in Christ shall awake in resurrection splendor, and together we shall serve our Lord day and night in his temple for ever. Meanwhile, serve you own generation by the will of God; and if the Lord tarry, you will fall on sleep, even as David did. May God bless you who believe in Jesus, and save the unsaved who are in our midst, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~ACTS~~ Acts 13:14-43

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 879, 694, 844.

The note at the end of last week’s sermon informed all readers that the long-dreaded blow had at length fallen, and that their much-loved preacher had been called to his heavenly home. His voice shall no more be heard on earth; but he will continue to speak for his Lord through the press, and especially by his sermons.

Attention has been already directed to the overruling hand of God in the selection of the sermons to be published at this memorable time. The one for next week will be the third in the series preached in connection with the death of the late Mr. William Olney, the text being ~~EPH~~ Ephesians 5:30; and the following week, the address by Mr. Spurgeon, at Mr. William Olney’s funeral service in the Tabernacle, will be published. A considerable portion of this address was *revised by Mr. Spurgeon’s own*

*hand*. With it the publishers will give a *portrait of the beloved preacher*, and also a portrait of the late Mr. W. Olney.

The revision of the weekly sermons, and the editorship of *The Sword and the Trowel* will remain in the hands of those who have carried on the work during Mr. Spurgeon's long illness. He was only able, personally, to revise two sermons throughout the many months that he was laid aside. These will now have a special value in the estimation of his many friends. They are the two entitled, "Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave" (No. 2237), and "A Stanza of Deliverance" (No. 2241).

There is not much that can be recorded here concerning Mr. Spurgeon's last illness, and his falling asleep in Jesus. *The Sword and the Trowel* for March will contain an account of the varying experiences in the sunny land, from the time when he delivered his two New Years addresses until all that remained of him was borne away to the railway-station, *en route* for England, amid tokens of widespread sorrow and sympathy. Amongst other items of interest will be reports of the last two Sabbath evening services conducted by Mr. Spurgeon at the Hotel Beau Rivage; and later numbers of *The Sword and the Trowel* will furnish the readers with descriptions of "Mr. Spurgeon's last drives at Menton", with reproductions of photographs taken under his personal supervision.

# MEMBERS OF CHRIST

## SERMON NO. 2244

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
FEBRUARY 21ST, 1892,**

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON  
THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 23RD, 1890.**

*“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” —*  
*~~all~~ Ephesians 5:30.*

YESTERDAY, when I had the painful task of speaking at the funeral of our dear friend, Mr. William Olney, I took the text which I am going to take again now. I am using it again because I did not then really preach from it at all, but simply reminded you of a favorite expression of his, which I heard from his lips many times in prayer. He very frequently spoke of our being one with Christ in “living, loving, lasting union” — three words which, in addition to being alliterative, are very comprehensive as to the nature of our union with Christ. Those three words, you will remember, were the heads of my discourse, in the presence of that remarkable gathering which crowded this place to do honor to the memory of our brother, whose highest ambition was always to honor his Lord, whom he so faithfully served.

Paul here speaks only of true believers. Men who are quickened by divine grace and made alive unto God. Of them, he says, not by way of romance, nor of poetical exaggeration, but as an undisputed matter of fact, “We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” That there is a true union between Christ and his people in no fiction or dream of a heated imagination. Sin separated us from God, and in undoing what sin has done, Christ joins us to himself in a union more real than any other in the whole world.

This union is very near, and very dear, and very complete. We are so near to Christ, that we cannot be nearer; for we are one with him. We are so dear to Christ, that we cannot be dearer. Consider how close and tender is the tie when it is true that Christ loved us, and gave himself for us. It is a union more intimate than any other which exists among men; for “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” We were his enemies when Christ died for us, that he might save us, and make us so one with himself, that from him our life should be drawn, and that in him our life should be hid. It is, then, a very near and dear union which Christ has established between himself and his redeemed; and this union could not be more complete than it is.

It is, also, a most wonderful union. The more you think of it, the more you will be astonished, and stand in sacred awe before such a marvel of grace. Well did Kent say —

*“O sacred union, firm and strong,  
How great the grace, how sweet the song,  
That worms of earth should ever be  
One with Incarnate Deity!”*

But so it is. Even the incarnation of Christ is not more wonderful than his living union with his people. It is a thing to be considered often; it is the wonder of the skies; and is chief among those things which “the angels desire to look into.” On the surface of this truth you may not see much; but the longer you gaze, and the more the Holy Spirit assists you in your meditation, the more you will see in this wonderful sea of glass mingled with fire. My soul exults in the doctrine that Christ and his people are everlastingly one.

This is a very cheering doctrine. He that understands it has an ocean of music in his soul. He that can really grasp and feed upon it will often sit in the heavenly places with his Lord, and anticipate the day when he shall be with him, and shall be like him. Even now, since we are one with him, there is no distance between us, we are nearer to him than anything else can ever be. The very idea of union makes us forget all distance: indeed distance is altogether annihilated. Love joins us so closely with Christ, that he becomes more to us than our very selves; and though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

In passing, I may say that this doctrine is very practical. It is not merely a piece of sugar for your mouth; it is a light for your path, for “he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked.” We must take care that the love that was round about Christ’s feet, is always shining on our path. We must go about doing good, following in the steps of our Lord. It would be giving the lie to this doctrine if we lived in sin; for, if we are one with him, then we must be in this world even as he was; and being filled with his Spirit, must seek to reproduce his life before the world.

These thought may serve as an introduction to a fuller consideration of this great subject; and I shall begin by saying that, in Holy Scripture, *the union between Christ and his people is set forth under various forms*. Then I will try to show you that *the metaphor in our text is full of meaning*; and, in the third place, I will prove to you that *the doctrine of our union with Christ has its practical lessons*. As we delight our hearts in the glorious truth that “we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his “bones,” may we determine to live as those who are this closely joined to the Lord of life!

Our first thought is, that THIS UNION IS SET FORTH UNDER SEVERAL FORMS. The blessed fact is almost beyond our highest thought: what wonder, then that language fails adequately to describe it! Simile after simile is used. I am only going to mention four of them.

The union between Christ and the believer is described as the union of *the foundation and the stone*. “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house.” We are built on Christ, and built up into him. We lie upon him just as the stone rests on the foundation. Well may we sing —

*“All my hope on thee is stayed,  
All my help from thee I bring”!*

The stone is one with the foundation in its dependence. In the time of our need we press the closer to Christ; the heavier our hearts, the more we bear our weight upon him. It is the heavy stone that clings to the foundation; the light stone, perchance, might be blown away. But we cling

at all times, depending wholly upon him, even as the stone rests upon the rock beneath. The stone does not bear up its own weight: it just rests where it is put. So do we rest on Christ. He is the foundation, and we repose on him.

Again, the stone is one with the foundation in its adhesion. In the course of time, the stone becomes more and more knit to it. When first the mortar is placed there, and is wet, you might also shake the stone. But, by-and-by, the mortar dries, and the stone seems to bite into the foundation, and holds fast to it. In old Roman walls, you cannot get a stone away; for the cement, which joins the stone to its fellows is as strong as the stone itself; and, truly, that which joins us to Christ is stronger than we are. We might be broken, but the bond of love, which holds us like a mighty cement to Christ, who is our foundation, can never be broken away. We have actually become one with him, as I have often seen stones in the walls of an old castle become one with each other. You could not get them away; they are part and parcel of the wall, and it would have been necessary to blow the wall to pieces before you could separate the stones from one another. So have we, by God's grace, become one with Christ, experimentally and indissolubly. The course of years has bound us still faster to him.

The stone is one with the foundation, moreover, in its design. The architect, in placing the stone, was following out his plan. He planned the foundation, and thought of every course; and the stone is essential to the wall, even as the foundation is essential to the stone. Thus we are one with Christ in the design of God. Reverently we saw it, that God's purpose comprehends not only Christ, but the whole company of his elect; and without his chosen people, the design of Jehovah can never be accomplished. He is building a temple to his praise; but a temple cannot be all foundation. There is a necessity for every stone in the wall; in the divine purpose, there is a necessity that such a one should be a living stone, and such a one should be another living stone. The weakest and the meanest of the Lord's people are as necessary as the noblest and the most beautiful, though indeed all are without any praise until they are built into the wall. He that chose Christ, chose all his people; he arranged that they should be built up together, and in him "all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." Oh, I like to think of

each one of us, however insignificant we may appear to be, as being bricks or stones in that great temple of almighty grace! Perhaps some of us may stand where everybody can see us; but what does it matter? If we are in the wall at all, it is well. Wherever you are placed, we are joined to Christ; and therefore no one has a pre-eminence over any other, because we are all alike built upon the one foundation, even Jesus Christ our Lord, into whom we daily grow, pressing closer and closer to him in experience, and holding tighter and tighter to him by faith.

The second aspect in which our union with Christ is represented in the Scripture, is that of *the vine and the branches*. "I am the vine, ye are the branches," is the word of Christ to his disciples. The former simile of the foundation and the stone does not suggest any idea of life. Hence, the apostle, in using it, had to speak of Christ as a living stone, and of us as living stones. It is a somewhat odd figure, and yet it is strictly true; for you and I have no more spiritual life in us than stones, except as a miracle makes us live; and then, though we are living, yet like stones, we are apparently inert and lifeless, albeit we are really quickened by a supernatural work, and made living stones. But the figure is not congruous.

The second simile, however, conveys to us the idea of life, for a vine is no vine if it is dead, and its branches are no true branches unless they are alive. There is a living union between Christ and his people; and I hope that I can appeal to the experience of many here present who know that there is a living union between them and Christ. Happy is the man who can say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."!

The union is even more than a union of life; it is a union of derived life. The branch is in such union with the stem that it receives all its sap from it; it could not live unless the living juices flowed from the stem into it. And such is our life. Christ pours his lifeblood into us. Perpetually, as long as he exists, he seems to be oozing out into his people. In fact, when his wounds were open, he bled life into us; and when his heart was burst, he changed our hearts, and gave them life, though they once were hearts of stone. We are so one with Christ, that we at first received our life from him, and we continue to receive it from him every moment.



In consequence of the life of Christ in us, we grow. The growing of the branch is really the growing of the vine. It is because the stem grows that it sends its growth into the branch, and manifests it there. As Christ pours his life-force into us, he makes us grow, to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Fruit-bearing is the ultimate end of our union to Christ. We are one with him that we may bring forth fruit unto his praise. Dear friends, are we really doing this? Are we not satisfied with a nominal union to Christ, even though we bear no fruit to his honor? We ought to be very distressed when we are barren and unfruitful; remembering that the great Husbandman has a sharp knife, and that it is written, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." Oh, that none of my hearers may ever be in Christ in that false way, but may we all be in him in a union so true and vital as shall cause us to bear fruit to his praise; for then, though we shall be pruned, we shall never be cut from the vine!

The third metaphor which the Savior deigns to give of this union in that of *the husband and the wife*. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church." Here you have a union, not only of life, but also of love. It is worthy of notice that the two words, "live" and "love", should be so like each other. In spiritual things, the two things are not only similar, they are exactly alike. Love is the life; and life is always first sent, and chiefly sent in the form of love.

With the true husband, his wife is himself. The Scripture saith, "He that loveth his wife loveth himself;" and I believe that Christ considers that, when he loves his church, he loves himself. His care for us is now his care for himself. Since he has taken us to be in eternal wedded union with himself, he regards us as himself, and he cares for us as he cares from himself: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." No sane man will injure his own flesh. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church." So Christ takes care of his people, because he regards them as being bound to himself by those bonds which make them to be as himself. Hence we are kept as the apple of his eye.

Remember that, in every family, the wife is the mother of the children; and so it is in the church of Christ. He would have us all bear unto him a holy

spiritual seed. If we abide in him, we shall be able to propagate our faith, and bring others into the church. Every believer should have this object before him as the joy of his life; for thus shall Christ “see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”

The wife, too, is the keeper of the house. She takes care of the household concerns of her husband. And so would the Lord Christ have his people care for his interests, and for all that belongs to him; for he has committed these things unto us, as the husband commits his treasures to his wife. He has left us in custody of all that he has. In one sense we are the stewards of his household, but in another and a clearer sense, we are united to him by marriage bonds which can never be broken. It is a sweet subject; but I cannot linger upon it. You must let your own thoughts be fragrant with its aroma. However close may be the union of husband and wife, the union between the believer and Christ is closer still. Oh, to realize more and more of it each day!

*“O Jesus! Make thyself to me  
A living, bright reality;  
More present to faith’s vision keen  
More than any outward object seen.  
More dear, more intimately nigh,  
Than e’en the sweetest earthly tie!”*

All human imagery fails to set forth the union between Christ and his people; but the figure in our text is that of *the head and the member*. The apostle says of Christ, that “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” Christ is the Head, and we are members of his body.

Wonderful union this! In the first metaphor, the foundation and the stone, we had the idea of rest; in the second, the vine and the branches, the idea of life; the union of the husband and wife gave us the thought of love; now here we have the suggestion of identity. There are two lives in the husband and the wife, but there is only one life in the head and the body; and in this respect this metaphor brings out the true relation of Christ to his people more clearly than any other.

There is a wonderful union between the head and the members of the body. It is a union of life, and a union of the body which always continues. The husband may have to travel miles away from the wife; but it can never be that the head can travel away from the body. If I were to

hear of any man whose head was a foot, or even an inch away from his body, I should say that he was dead. There must be perpetual union between the head and the members, or else death follows; and the death, mark you, not only of the body, but of the head as well. They are dead when they are divided. How glorious is this thought when we apply it to the Lord, and his redeemed people! Their union is everlasting. They would die if separated from him, and even he would cease to be did he lose them; for, somehow or other, they are so joined, that he will not be without them: he cannot be without them, for that were for the Head of the church to be divided from the members of his mystical body. Thus is we are able to sing —

*“And this I do find, were two so joined,  
He’ll not be in glory, and leave me behind.”*

Having thus shown you these four figures — and there are others, but I have not time to speak upon them — I now come to the one before us in the text, and remark that THIS METAPHOR IS FULL OF MEANING: “We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” There are seven points to which I would ask your attention.

There is here *union of life, union of relationship, and union of service*. See what I mean. Your hand never studies what it can do for the head; but when the head wishes the hand uplifted, immediately up goes the hand; and when the head wishes that the hand should go down, down it goes in an instant. There is no deliberation or discussion about the matter. The head and the members, in a healthy body, are practically one. If you happen to be ill, it may be different. I have sometimes seen, in a person semi-paralyzed, the leg throw itself out without any guidance from the head; and sometimes — how often has it happened to me! — the head has willed that the hand should turn the pages of a book, and the hand has been unable to do it. Did you ever notice when you are falling, how, without thought, your hands always try to save your head? If any person were about to strike you, you would not deliberate; but up would go your arm to protect your head. This law is also true in spiritual life. All true Christians will do anything to save their Head. He saved us, and now our desire is to save him. We cannot bear that he should be insulted, that his gospel should be despised, or that anything would be done against his

sacred dignity. We are so one with our glorious Head, that the moment anyone strikes at him, up goes our hand immediately in his defense. Oh! I trust that you know what this means; if you are ever put up to the pain of hearing Christ's gospel falsely preached, or seeing professedly Christian men bringing disgrace upon his dear name, you feel at once that you would rather bear any pain, or any reproach, than that Christ should be injured. The hand is so one with the head, that it endeavors to screen it.

Between the head and the members there is also *union of feeling*. If the head aches, you feel it all over, you are altogether ill; and if your finger aches, your head does not feel well. There is such a sympathy between all parts of the body that, "whether one member suffer, a;; members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now, ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Christ is our Head, and the Head specially suffers with the members. I do not know whether it is always so clear that one hand suffers with another hand, as it is clear that the head suffers with either hand. So is it with the church. It may not always be clear that all the members sympathize with each other, but it is always clear that Christ sympathizes with each one of his people. There is a quicker way, somehow, from the head to the hand, than there is from one hand to the other, and there is a keener sympathy between Christ and his people than there often is between one of his servants and another. It is written concerning his people that "In all their affliction he was afflicted." In all thy sorrows, child of God thy heavenly Head feels the pain!

There is, moreover, *a union of mutual necessity* between the members and the head. The head wants the body. Now, I must speak very guardedly here, when I refer to the thought to Christ, but still it is true. What would my head be without my body? It would be a ghastly sight. And Christ without his people would be incomplete. A dying Christ, redeeming nobody! A living Christ, with no one to live by his life, would be a grin failure! Christ on Calvary, and souls going down to hell, with none saved by his precious blood! Christ incarnate on the cross, without a single man saved by his incarnation and his death! It would be a fearful sight. The church is said to be Christ's fullness — "The church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." This is a wonderful expression. Now, the fullness of the head is the body; take the body away from the head, what is it? As to the body, what could it be without the head? If

your head were gone, you could not have swiftness of foot, or deftness of hand, or strength of heart. No; there remains nothing for the head if it is severed from the body; and nothing for the body if it is separated from the head. There is between them a union of mutual necessity.

There is, farther, between the head and the members *a union of nature*. I will not attempt to describe the chemical composition of human flesh; but it is quite clear that my head is made of the same flesh as my members. There is no difference between the flesh of one and the flesh of the other. So, though our covenant Head is now in heaven, and his feet are on earth, yet still Christ is so one by nature with his people, that he is very man of very man, as much as he is very God of very God. If you deny his humanity, I do not think you till long hold his divinity. And if you deny his Deity, you have sadly destroyed the perfection of his humanity; for a perfect man he could not be if he so acted as to make men think that he was God, when he was not. To us he is God-Man in one person, whom we love and adore; his nature is the same as our nature, and we art joined to him forever.

*“Lord Jesus, are we ONE with thee?  
Oh, height! Oh depth of love!  
With thee we died upon the tree,  
In thee we live above.*

*“Oh, teach us, Lord, to know and own  
This wondrous mystery,  
That thou with us art truly ONE,  
And we are ONE with thee!”*

Between Christ and his people there is also a *union of possession*. Nothing belongs to my head that does not belong to my hand. Whatever my head can claim as its own, my hand may claim as its own. Whatever belongs to Christ belongs to you, poor believer! Christ is rich, can you be poor? Even his Father is you Father, and his heaven is your heaven; for you are so one with him that all the broad possession of his infinite wealth are given freely to you. He bestows upon you his bounty, not only “to the half of the kingdom”, but the whole of it. Joined to him, all that he has is yours.

Between the Lord and his church there is also a *union of present condition*. Christ is very dear to his Father’s heart. “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” was the word which came from the opened

heaven concerning Christ; and as God delights in Christ, so is he also well pleased with you who are in Christ. Yes, he is as pleased with you as he is with Christ; for he sees you in Christ, and Christ in you. God makes no division between you and him to whom he has joined you. "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Certainly God will never separate that which he has united in Christ. Do not put yourself asunder from Christ, even in your thoughts, by supposing that you are not well-beloved of God even as his own covenant Head.

Last of all, there is a *union of future destiny*. Whatever Christ is to be, you are to be a sharer of it all. How can you die while Jesus lives? How can the body die, while the head lives? If we go through the waters, they cannot overflow us until they overflow our head. While a man's head is above water, he cannot be drowned. And Christ up yonder, in the eternities of glory, can never be conquered: neither can those be vanquished who are one with him. For ever and for ever, till the Christ shall die, till the immortal Son of God expires, you who are united to him in the purpose of God, and in faith which now lays hold of him, shall live and reign.

"Because I live, ye shall live also." Is it not that a quietus to every fear of destruction? You are so one with him that, when the sun becomes a burnt-out coal, and the moon is turned into a clot of blood, when the stars fall as the leaves of autumn, and the heaven and earth shall melt away, going back into nothingness from which Omnipotence hath called them, you shall live, for he shall live who is your Head. "We believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death shall have no dominion over him." Where he goes we shall follow. I have heard it said, that when a thief is able to get his head through the bars of the window, his body can easily follow. I am not sure of that; but I know that where my lord has gone, his members shall surely be. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore," is a word that is meant for your consolation. Take it home. "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," and, as Doddridge sings —

*"Since Christ and we are one,  
Why should I doubt or fear?  
If he in heaven hath fixed his throne,  
He'll fix his members there."*

Lastly, and briefly, THIS DOCTRINE HAS ITS PRACTICAL LESSONS, which I will try to set forth plainly so that those of us who are members of Christ may bring greater joy and glory to our Head than we have brought aforetime.

To begin with, I would say, if we are indeed one with Christ, *we should have no doubt about it*. It used to be a fashion, and I fear in some quarters still, to think that mistrust of our own condition, and doubt concerning our own salvation, is a kind of virtue. I have met with good people, who would not say that they were saved; they “hoped” that they were; and I have met with others who were not sure that they were cleansed by the precious blood of Christ; they “trusted” that they were. This state of mind is not a credit either to Christ, or to ourselves. If I told my son something, and he were to say to me, “I hope you will keep your word, father,” I should not feel that he treated me as he ought. Surely, to believe Christ up to the hilt is the way to honor him. If we are one with him, we lose the comfort of it if we do not know certainly the fact of our blessed union; we miss much of the confidence that comes of it if we do not clearly apprehend the reality; and we are robbed of much of the joy which it brings, and how little of the meaning of that word “the joy of the Lord is your strength,” unless we believe simply like children, and take the word to mean what it says, and are certain about it. This is an age of doubt; but, as for me, I will have none of it; I have doubted enough, and more than enough; I have done with it long ago; and I can say with Paul, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep which I have committed unto him against that day.” Salvation is by faith. Damnation comes by doubt. Doubt is the death of all comfort, the destruction of all force, the enemy of God and man.

If we are one with Christ, *we should go through the world like princes*; we should be like Abraham among his fellows, who claimed no principedom, and wore no crown, yet who could say to the King of Sodom what he had already vowed to God, “I will not take from a thread unto a shoe-latchet, and I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.” If you are one with Christ, treat the world in that way. O world, thou canst not bless me! God hath blessed me. Thou canst not curse me! God hath blessed me. Dost thou laugh? Laugh if it pleaseth thee. Dost thou frown? What signifieth it to me? If God has smiled upon me,

thou mayest spurn me. If I am one with Christ, I expect that thou shouldest think little of me; for thou didst spurn my Head. Should the body of Christ expect better treatment than the Head received?

If we are one with Christ, we shall remember that *to dishonor ourselves is to implicate our Lord*. If I dishonor any part of my body, my head feels the shame of it; and since we are the members of Christ, we should be very careful how to behave, lest we should cause him pain. Men will judge Christ by his people. If I caught sight of a pair of legs very unsteadily walking along the street, I should be inclined to say that they belongs to a drunken head. If our walk among men is not such “as becometh the gospel”, what hard thoughts those around us may have of our Savior! Of course, we know that any ill estimate of him will be false, for he is all fair, and there is no spot in him; but still his name and his cause will suffer dishonor. Let us not, then, injure or defile ourselves, lest we should bring reproach upon him whom we love!

In the next place, if we are one with him, *to think of him should be very natural*. There are many of us who could say, without any exaggeration, that though we do not think so much of our Lord as we should, and are not so much with him in contemplation as we desire, yet we have spent more time with him than we have spent with anybody else. Little as we know compared with what we hope to know, yet his love has become to us now the brightest, the most conspicuous fact in all our history. We know but few things; but we know that we are one with Christ in a union never to be broken. We know him, too, by our intercourse with him. We saw him this morning; we have seen him during the day; we shall see him again to-night. I should not like to go to bed with any other thought upon my mind than this —

*“Sprinkled afresh with pardoning blood,  
I lay me down to rest,  
As in the embraces of my God,  
Or on my Savior’s breast.”*

If we are one with him, *to live with him should be the most natural thing in our lives*. Have I not heard, however, of some professors who have not had communion with Christ for many a day? I talked once with a brother, who said a great deal about many things; and when he had complained of



this and of that, I leant forward to him, and said, "Brother, how long is it since you have had close fellowship with Christ?" He answered, "Oh, there you have got me!" When I asked him, "What do you mean by that?" he answered, "I am afraid that I have not had fellowship with Christ for months." I had suspected that it must have been so, or else his conversation would not have been of the kind it was. What a sad thing it must be for a wife to live in her husband's house, and not speak to him for weeks! But how much worse it is for us to profess to be one with Christ, and yet have no sort of communication with him by the month together! This is something perfectly horrible. God save us all from such a thing! May we think continually of our Lord, and ever live with him, because we are one with him!

Again, being one with Christ, *to serve him should be very natural*. Indeed we exist, but to do his will, and to glorify his name. Of what use are my hands and feet unless they move at the impulse of my head? They are but encumbrances unless they are ready to obey the bidding of my mind. If your arms hang helpless, you do not know what to do with them; whichever side you turn, they are in the way. To be paralyzed is most unnatural, yet I fear me there are many of us of but little use to our Master. We hear his word, but do not obey it; he calls for helpers, and we run not at his bidding! Come, come, this will not do. We are members of Christ, and the one purpose of our life should be to serve our Head. God help us all to do it!

I will not continue longer. I leave you to draw the many inferences which naturally spring from our being one with Christ. Our heaven lies in our union with him. Ay, and sometimes when we realize our oneness with Christ, we can hardly think that we should be happier in heaven than we are now! May you all have this enjoyment! Oh, you would think that we raved, if we told you the unspeakable delight, the immeasurable bliss, which communion with Christ has brought into our souls. I desire that all of you should know the same rapture. I never enjoy a thing without wishing everybody to enjoy it; therefore when I come to this point of being one with Christ, and the delight it brings, I would to God that you all knew it, too! But alas! You do not; some of you do not even desire it. I have been talking something like Dutch to some of you to-night; you have not comprehended my language at all. May the very fact that you have not

understood it, or cared about it, lead you to suspect that there is a joy which you have not known, and a life which you have not found; and when you know that it is son, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.” If you seek him with all your heart, you will surely find him; and very soon you also will be brought into “living, loving, lasting union” with Christ.

Remember that the least touch of faith is sufficient to save the soul. That poor woman, who came behind Christ in the throng, only touched the hem of his garment, yet that timid touch brought healing and health to her. Virtue went out of him into her, and she was made whole of her plague. If thou canst only touch the Lord by the finger of thy faith, ay, though it be thy little finger; it shall be well with thee; though thy hand be quivering with the palsy of unbelief, yet, still, if thou hast faith enough to touch him, to come into contact with him, thou hast set the whole machinery of salvation in motion. God give thee to find eternal life even now! Why not? If my dear friend were here, of whom this drapery is a memorial, he would say unto me, “Oh, tell them to taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are all they that trust in him!” You know how fond he was of that verse we sang yesterday —

*“Oh make but a trial of his love;  
Experience will decide  
How blest are they, and only they,  
Who in his truth confide!”*

God bless you all, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  Ephesians 5

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 760, 761, 762.

Readers of the Sermons have probably all seen the very full reports, published in the daily and weekly newspapers, of the memorial and funeral service relating to their now glorified preacher. Those who took part in the impressive meetings at the Tabernacle, or gazed upon the almost countless multitude that thronged the road from Newington to Norwood, or formed part of the privileged company that gathered around the grave, must have felt that they were spectators of a scene without parallel in the history of this generation, at least. Comparatively few were

able to hear all the tributes of love to the dear departed one, the gospel he so faithfully preached, and the Savior he so fondly loved. Many will be glad to know, therefore, that a *Memorial Volume* will be issued, as soon as possible, containing a complete report of all the public services of the past week. Full particulars will be announced in due course.

Mrs. Spurgeon, and all the members of the bereaved family, as well as the officers and members of Tabernacle Church, as deeply grateful for the almost innumerable expressions of sympathy which they have received from all parts of the world, and all sections of the Church. They cannot attempt to acknowledge these communications personally; but through various channels they have sought to convey the assurance of their heartfelt gratitude; and Mrs. Spurgeon has written a special "Message of Thanks" for the March issue of *The Sword and the Trowel*, which will be a Memorial number, containing all that can be recorded at present concerning its late beloved Editor. Mrs. Spurgeon continues to be very graciously upheld under her sore bereavement; but she is not yet strong enough to return home.

# “LIVING, LOVING, LASTING UNION.”

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY,  
FEBRUARY 28TH 1892.

AT THE FUNERAL OF MR. WILLIAM OLNEY,  
OCTOBER 22ND, 1890.

*“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” —*  
*Ephesians 5:30.*

BEFORE the funeral, at Norwood Cemetery, of the late Mr. William Olney, senior deacon of the church at the metropolitan Tabernacle, a service was held in the Tabernacle. The building was crowded with sympathizing friends, who came to testify the affection they bore to the beloved deacon who had been so suddenly called from their midst. The senior Pastor presided.

The hymn, “They are gathering homeward one by one,” was sung, and Pastor James A. Spurgeon offered prayer. The hymn “why do we mourn departing friends?” followed, and C.H. Spurgeon then read and expounded 1 Corinthians 15. The Rev. Burman Cassin, Rector of St. George’s. Southwark, briefly engaged in prayer, and the assembly sang the thirty-fourth Psalm, in the version beginning —

*“Through all the changing scenes of life,  
In trouble and in joy,  
The praises of my God shall still  
My heart and tongue employ.”*

The hymn commencing, “For ever with the Lord!” was sung, and a concluding prayer was offered by Mr. James Spurgeon.

Pastor C.H. Spurgeon then rose, and said: — As I am in a very unfit condition to speak to you this morning, I shall try for once to keep away from my subject; for if I dwell upon it; it will master me, and I shall not be

able to speak to you at all. I am trying to suppress my feelings, that I may be able to find words.

I am going to speak about the favorite expression of my brother William Olney, which he frequently used in prayer. I wonder whether you will agree with me as to what it was. As my memory serves me, I have heard him a score of times, at least, use the following sentence when he drew very near to the Lord his God in prayer. He said, “*Lord Jesus, we are one with thee. We feel that we have a living, loving, lasting union with thee.*” I think that you must remember that gem of his. Those three words have stuck by me; and ever since he has gone, I have found myself repeating them to myself quite involuntarily — “a living, loving, lasting union.” He owed everything to that. He consciously enjoyed a living, loving, lasting union with the Lord Jesus Christ; and if you and I have that, we have all that we want for time and for eternity. If we have it not, we have nothing. Take any one of us by himself alone; he is lost, ruined, and undone. Take that same person linked with Christ by a living, loving, lasting union, and he is a saint — saved, sanctified, and sure to be glorified.

I have taken for my text the words which occur in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the ~~th~~<sup>th</sup> thirtieth verse. Concerning our Lord Jesus, the apostle Paul says,

**We are members of his body, of his faith, and of his bones.”**

“We”, that is his believing people, “are members of his body, and of his flesh, and of his bones.” He is our Head, and we are the members of the body, and so we are joined to him by a living, loving, lasting union.

I am not going beyond those three words; they shall be my three points, but at the same time I will keep to my text.

BETWEEN THE BELIEVER AND CHRIST THERE IS A LIVING UNION. There was just that between my brother William Olney and his Lord. A living union! When he joined the church of Christ, he did not offer it the distinguished honor of his name, and then slip away, and give his life to politics, or to business, or to amusement; but when the church has his name on its roll, it receive the whole of the man, body, soul, and spirit; and this because there was life in him.

His union to Christ was not nominal, but actual. He was not merely covered with the Christian name, but he had the Christian spirit and the Christian life within him. Yes, his union to Christ was a living union; not merely that of reliance, by which the stone leans upon the foundation; though he had that, for never man, understood more clearly the doctrine of faith in Christ. Christ was his only trust and confidence, and he came to him as the stones come home to the foundation stone. But it was a living union in his case, for the fruits of life were produced. It was the union of the branch to the stem in that blessed vine which Christ himself, even as he says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches."

Now what does this living union to Christ mean?

It means, first of all, *Christ's life laying hold of us*. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." He is full of life, and when he takes hold of us, and raises our life into his, there is truly a living union between him and us.

But, further, this living union is *Christ's life in us*. It is given to him, not only to take us in our feebleness; but it is his divine prerogative to impart life to us, and to call dead men, and to make them live. "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." This is how we come to have life in connection with him. His life flows into us, as out of the tree into the branches: so that we can truly say, with the apostle, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith to the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." The living union begins with our Lord's life, and then that life flows into us, and we begin to live also.

It was so with our friend, whom we so sadly miss from our midst to-day. A new life, a life of holiness, a life of service, a life of communion with God, began in him, by oneness with Christ, and it was continued in him by the same means. There was a living union: the life of Christ had begotten life in him, and this was seen continually in the fruit that he bore. I should not know, if I had to describe my departed brother, which word to associate most fully with him, "life" or "love." He was as full of life as ever he could be. He used to amaze me by his energy — I mean not merely physical or even mental energy, but his never-ceasing, overflowing spiritual energy. If any of us were dull, *he* never was; and he would not let

us be dull for long. He would often tell us, when we were not well, that he thought we looked amazingly well, and he would try to cheer us up somehow or other, for he himself never seemed to lack for life, or fire, or force. I might almost say that, up to the last moment, he was energetic; he died full of life. He was intense in the very highest degree until struck down; and he was thus intense, not because of mere mental activity, but because of the burning zeal for God that was in his soul, and this zeal was the result of his living union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of this life of Christ which was in him, he bore suffering without flinching. If there was anything that could equal the industry of his work; it was the heroism of his patience. He has often amazed us by his fortitude. We have admired the way in which he has triumphed in Christ in spite of his sufferings; but we have felt that we could scarcely hope to imitate him to the letter. He went as far in the way of bearing pain with patience as he went in the direction of serving Christ with enthusiasm; and this is saying a very great deal for any man. Therefore I do not say it for the man; but in praise of the grace of God which helped him, whether he was active or passive, still to be buoyant and bright because of the living union which subsisted between him and Christ. A verse of the Psalms we have just sung, which was a great favorite of his, truly describes the resolution of his life: —

*“Of his deliverance I will boast,  
Till all that are distress’d,  
From my example comfort take,  
And charm their griefs to rest.”*

Christ dwelling in him in fullness could both work and suffer. The fact that Christ lives in the believer is as real as that he once lived on earth in a human body. He came then with a double-handed blessing. He came both to do his Father’s will and to bear the burden of the souls of men. He was active in doing good; and when the appointed time came, he as willingly bore the burden of the sins of men, and suffered to the death without complaint. In like manner Christ lived in our dear friend, making him strong both to do and to suffer. God grant also to you and to me to have such a living union to Christ!

Do you know anything of this experience, my dear friends? Many of you do; it is your life to be one with Christ. But to some of you I must be talking an unmeaning jargon. O souls, if the life of Christ is not in you, you are dead while you live, and you will die for ever when you die! Unless you get linked to Christ, you will be driven from the presence of God, and away from all that makes true life and joy. Lay hold on Christ, and you will “lay hold on eternal life”; for he is “that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us,” and living contact with him is our only hope either for the present or for the future. If you are vitally joined to Christ, it is well with your soul; but if you are divided from Immanuel, and have no living union to Christ, there is no eternal life for you. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

*“Living or dying, Lord,  
I ask but to be thine,  
My life in thee, thy life in me,  
Makes heaven for ever mine.”*

The next word to “living”, in my dear brother’s frequent use, was “loving.” BETWEEN THE TRUE BELIEVER AND CHRIST THERE IS A LOVING UNION. And oh, the union of a soul to Christ is made so sweet because it is as loving as it is living! My brother William Olney truly loved. He seemed to have a love to everybody. He never was so pleased as when he was pleasing other people; and he would go a long way, sometimes, to try and please people who would not be pleased. But still, his great ambition in life was to love others, and to make others love Christ. Love ruled supreme in his actions. His union to Christ was not cold, and formal, stiff and narrow; he had a union to Christ that was warm, human, intense, fervent, loving. There was fire in that man, and the fire was the ardent flame of great affection to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would like to have a talk about this loving union to Christ on some other occasion, when I could trust myself more than I can do now at this very solemn service. Still, there are a few things that may be said upon this subject even now.

*Christ’s love to us begins this loving union.* Its source is not in ourselves; but in love eternal, love immeasurable, love which caused itself, free-grace



love, love to the unworthy, love to enemies, love to those who had no life, no strength, and no hope apart from him. Christ loved us so that he deigned to join himself to us in eternal union. The great Artesian well from which we drink, and which has tapped the divine fountains, is the love of Christ. This is where all our hope, and our joy, and our love begin. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." In connection with this same truth of union with Christ, and fruitbearing as the result of it, our Lord himself says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." When this love thus made choice of us, he entered into covenant with his Father concerning his people; and before we were born he identified himself with us, so that in the purpose of God from all eternity we were accepted in him. But union with us meant union with our sins; and though the Son of God could never be overcome of evil, or become a sharer in human guilt, yet by the blessed mystery of his unity with his people, he could take their sin upon himself, and bear it in his own body on the tree. Thus, as there is no past or future to the eyes of him before whom all events are spread out in one eternal "now", the Son of God was able to atone for the iniquities of those who, through all the ages, would be truly joined to him. His love that chose us did not shrink back from the awful payment which our debt rendered necessary: it was stronger than death, and mightier than the grave. Many waters could not quench it; many floods could not drown it; nor will it cease to exert its blessed influence over us until it shall bring us home to the mansions above; and not even then, for Christ's love is everlasting. By this loving union Christ brings us safely through all the temptations of life; the ransomed spirits of such as are joined to him are taken to be with Christ the instant they are absent from the body; and at last out of the tomb that same love shall call the body, and on the glad day of resurrection it shall be clearly seen how wonderful is the love which made our Lord so one with us. This, then, is the way in which we came to a loving union with Christ; he began to love us with a love that had no beginning, which has no measure, and which shall know no change nor end, and therefore he united himself to us for ever. Well might Kent praise the name of the Lord for the wonders wrought by such love as this as he sang: —

*“Heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus,  
 Long ere time its race begun;  
 To his name eternal praises!  
 Oh! What wonders love hath done!  
 One with Jesus  
 By eternal union one.”*

*Our love to Christ completes this loving union.* We first learn of his love to us, and then as the result of that, we are brought to love him. Ours is a poor little love, not worthy of his acceptance; but, such as it is, we give it all to him; and he will not refuse it, or despise it. Oh, that we all might be joined to Christ in love now! I am sure that my brother, who has gone from us, knew this union more than most of us. When we once got upon this glorious theme in private conversation, or when he touched upon it himself in his own public prayers, how his spirit seemed to burn and glow! He was always at home when speaking of the love of Christ, or of the love of Christ's people to their Lord. He could truly say, as I trust many of us will truly say now, —

*“I give my heart to thee,  
 O Jesus, most desired!  
 And heart for heart the gift shall be,  
 For thou my soul hast fired:  
 Thou hearts alone would'st move,  
 Thou only hearts dost love;  
 I would love thee as thou lov'st me,  
 O Jesus most desired!”*

In this loving union, *Christ's love to us and our love to Christ flow in the same channel.* Together they make a stream of love of a glorious kind. We love one another for Christ's sake; we love sinners for Christ's sake. We love the truth as Christ loves the truth. We love the Father in the same manner that Christ loves the Father, though not to the same degree. There is, in fact, but one love in the Head and in all the members. What the Head loves all the body loves. As one man we go with Christ. Being united to him, his desires and longings become our desires and longings too; we grow into his likeness, and “are changes into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Do you know anything about loving union to Christ? I feel sure that the great mass of those assembled here both know it and rejoice in it. Oh, to

know it more! Oh, that his love were shed abroad more richly in our hearts! Now, by the Holy Ghost that is given to us, may we experience, not only the tiny rivulets of love that some of us have had in the past days, but may we get to the torrents of love, may we be swept away by it, till, like a mighty ocean, it covers all our nature, and becomes to us a very heaven begun below!

Our third part is that, BETWEEN THE TRUE BELIEVERS AND CHRIST THERE IS A LASTING UNION. The whole phrase which our dear departed friend used so frequently was “living, loving, lasting union.” O friends, what a sad thing it would be for anyone to have only a temporary union with Christ! If I am speaking to any who were members of this church years ago, but who are not even professors now — if I am addressing some who seemed to be earnest Christians once, but who have gone back from following Christ — I would earnestly remind you that no union with Christ is living and loving unless it is also lasting.

*The man who is truly united to Christ does not become apostate.* It is all in vain to seem to put on Christ for a time, and then, after a little while, to put him off again. That is the religion of the hypocrite, or of the merely temporary professor. But not so was it with our dear brother who is sleeping yonder. When he joined the church — I think that it is rather more than fifty-four years ago — he gave himself to the Lord, and he has been kept and sustained and upheld until now. Why, there are some of you who have been members of four or five denominations during that time! You have changed your views with the varying seasons, and have altered oftener than we care to remember, while here was he, keeping steadfast and immovable all the time, remaining ever a member of the same church, and going on steadily with his work. It seems to me that some of you build for a year, and pull down, then build again, and pull down once more. Why, you are not building at all unless your building stands; and you are not truly in union with Christ unless the union is lasting union; and it will not be unless it is a living union! Your profession of Christ will be a lie, and will help to sink you lower than the lowest hell unless you endure to the end. Make sure work with what you do in religion. Do not play at being a Christian. If you are converted, be converted with your whole heart. If you have faith in Christ, have vital faith, or do not pretend to have any. Be real; be true to the core. Be satisfied with nothing short of

that union which the Spirit of God works in the hearts of those who, without reserve, yield to his power; else that which you seem to have will not be a lasting thing with you, and at the end you will be utterly cast off.

Now think of the joy of this fact. *Our union with Christ is not only lasting, it is everlasting.* With great boldness we utter the challenge. “Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” It is true that we hold Christ, and that we will hold him tighter still; but the greater mercy is that he holds us, and he will never let us go. Does he not say concerning his sheep, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand”? And will he not be true to his word? You may take Christ from our hand, but you cannot take us from Christ’s hand; he holdeth us fast; he is married to us, and he himself declares, “The Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away.” He will have no divorce between our soul and himself. This living, loving, lasting union, which we have already found to be such a glorious reality, is to last for ever and ever, blessed be the name of the Lord!

I want you, beloved friends, to draw much comfort from this truth, and then I will have done. *Christ will not lose his members.* My head would not willingly lose a little finger, and Christ our Head will not lose one of us if “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” Think you that Christ can be mutilated? Think you that he will lose even the least joint of the least finger? Never shall that be true. The word written of his body of flesh is equally true concerning his mystical body, which is his church. “A bone of him shall not be broken.” Not even the smallest and most insignificant believer in Christ shall be lost, else would his body be incomplete. He is a perfect Christ, and you that are members of his body shall never be cut away from his by the wounds of Satan’s sword, the surgery of infidelity, or any earthly accident or diabolical temptation. If you are one with him, you will be one with him for ever, for the union between you and your Lord is an eternal union, and to break it would be to disfigure and mutilate the Christ of God.

Furthermore, in that we are one with Christ, *he will raise our bodies.* “We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones;” and, though I do not insist upon it, this verse has to me a kind of ring about it, which would

lead us to believe that if we are members of his body, he will taken even our bodies to be members of himself. Christ will not leave our brother in the grave. His body will see corruption; but the tomb shall only be like a refining pot, to separate the precious from the vile. When Moses brought Israel out of Egypt, he said, "There shall not a hoof be left behind;" and when that One who is greater than Moses shall bring forth his people from their graves, there shall not a bone or a piece of a bone of his redeemed be left in the region of death. When the angel brought Peter out of prison, he told him to put his shoes on. "Bind on thy sandals," was the angelic direction. He would not leave even an old pair of slippers in the prison when he brought Peter out. The deliverance was to be absolutely complete. Thus, too, when Christ shall bid us put on our garments which he shall prepare for us in the resurrection, no integral part of the man shall be left behind. O grave, thou must give up thy prey! O death, thou must yield up thy spoils! Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and therefore they as well as our souls must be set free from the power of the last enemy. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words," whether it be concerning your own death, or the death of this dear friend, on whose coffin we look just now.

Beloved, we are parting with our brother, William Olney, for a while; but *we shall meet again*. We are so one with each other in truth and experience, that we cannot be separated. He was a member of Christ's body, and of his flesh, and of his bones; so am I; and so are you, my fellow-believer. The members of one body must be one. And we shall meet our departed friend again before long. Perhaps another week, some of us may see his face. I wonder what he has been doing already in that land of light and liberty. Mr. Fullerton writes me, saying that he would not wonder if he spent last Sunday telling the spirits above how he had spent the Sunday previous, and making them all wonder at what the grace of God had done among poor sinners down here on earth. He could tell the tale of Haddon Hall, and of this Tabernacle, recounting the story of what the Lord has done in saving men and women; and I do not think the angels and the redeemed could be better occupied than in hearing what the Lord has been doing in his new creation here below. Very probably the conjecture is right, for the grace of God reaches us "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the

church the manifold wisdom of God.” When they hear the story yonder, they will take down their harps, and raise new hallelujahs to God, and to the Lamb. Think not that I talk strangely. The angels rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, and they will yet more rejoice when one messenger. Newly come from the midst to God’s salvation-work, shall tell the, of scores that have been brought to the Savior’s feet.

Beloved friends, *eternity is ours*; and a joyous eternity it will be to those who are one with Jesus Christ, in “living, loving, lasting union.” We shall ascend to “the realms of the blest” soon. There is a ladder waiting for us to climb; and when we mount it, we shall have no reason to mourn. It is but for a little time that we shall have to keep the night-watched. The watchman of the night doth cry, “The morning cometh.” The night of weeping will soon be past. “Until the day beaks, and the shadows flee away,” be of good courage. Patiently hope, “and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” He will surely come again; and even the tears of to-day shall be recompensed to you abundantly.

I pray that every blessing may rest upon every mourner this day. Indeed, dear friends, while we mourn with you, we cannot but congratulate you that you have had such a husband, such a father, such a brother, as our friend who is now taken home. I will not say that you have lost him, for that would not be true. God lent him to you for a long time, and now he has taken him back. I think that it is about fifteen years ago, since, in the ordinary course of things, he might have been expected to have died; at least, so it seemed at the time he was so sick; yet with many tears and intercessions we prayed him back, and God has given him something like Hezekiah’s extra portion of life. We ought to be very thankful for that. In those fifteen years, how much has he done? How much has God done by him for us all! Wherefore we will not sorrow so as to complain, but we will sorrow only so as to submit. The Lord be with you evermore! Amen.

# COME FROM THE FOUR WINDS, O BREATH!

SERMON NO. 2246

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
MARCH 6TH, 1892,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON  
THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 15TH, 1890.

“Thou wilt say unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

—  Ezekiel 37:9.

ACCORDING to some commentators, this vision in the valley of dry bones may refer to three forms of resurrection. Holy Scripture is so marvellously full of meaning, that one interpretation seldom exhausts its message to us. The chapter before us is an excellent example of this fact; and supplies an illustration of several Scriptural truths.

Some think they see here a parable of the resurrection of the dead. Assuredly, Ezekiel's vision pictures what will happen in the day when “the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised.” No matter how dry the bones may be, the bodies of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall rise again. that which was sown shall spring up from the grave; and, in the case of the children of God, it shall wear a new glory. At the word of Christ is shall come to pass: “For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.”

Others see here the resurrection of the almost destroyed host of Israel, which had been divided into two companies, and carried away captive into

Babylon. Plague and pestilence and the sword of the Chaldean had gone far to cut off the chosen nation; but God promised to restore his people, thus mingling mercy with judgment, and again setting in the cloud the bow of his everlasting covenant. A partial fulfillment of this promise was given when, for a while, the Lord set up again the tribes of Israel at Jerusalem, and they had a happy rest before the coming of Christ. But Israel's full restoration is yet to be accomplished. The people shall be gathered out of the graves in which, as a nation, they have so long lain buried, and shall be placed in their own land, and then will come to pass the word of Jehovah: "Then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord."

There are others who, looking beyond the literal for the spiritual teaching, see, and I think, rightly see, that here is a picture of the recovery of ungodly men from their spiritual death and corruption — a parable of the way in which sinners are brought up from their hopeless, spiritually dead condition, and made to live by the power of the Holy Ghost. I shall, at any rate, use the text in this sense, for I am not now aiming at the interpretation of prophesy, nor concerned greatly with what is to happen in the future. Neither do I wish to conduct you into the deep things of God; but I am just now thinking of practical uses to which I can put this incident, in order to stir up God's people to deal with the Holy Spirit as he should be dealt with, and to urge the unconverted to seek the Lord, in the hope that some of them, as dead and dry as the bones in the valley of vision, may be made to live by his divine power.

Nothing gave me greater comfort, this week, than when I received a note from one saying that, last Thursday night, while I was preaching from the text "Let your soul delight itself in fatness," she was enabled to lay hold on Christ. I had rather have such tidings than to hear the gladdest news of a worldly kind that could be brought to me. Oh, that now also some poor heart may find rest in Christ while we are talking of that divine Spirit who becomes a Comforter to all those to whom he has been first a Quickener! May he come and cause men to live, and then afterwards make them full of gladness! It is his blessed office first to bestow life, and then to give light. Living unto God is the earliest experience of the redeemed, afterwards comes joy in God by the Holy Ghost.



Now, first, in using this text, as I have said, for practical purposes, I am going to make this remark upon it: WE ARE NOTHING WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT. I speak, my brethren, now, to you who love the souls of men. I know that there are some among you here who preach and teach with all earnestness, with broken-hearted love; and for the glory of Christ you try to bring men to believe in Jesus. In thus endeavoring to save the souls of the lost, and ruined men, you are engaged in a noble work. But I dare say that you have often felt, what I also fully realize, that you have not gone far in your holy service before you are brought face to face with the fact that, in itself, the work you propose to do is an utter impossibility. We begin our labor according to the Word of the Lord, and we prophesy. God helping us, we can do that; and, though the burden of the Lord be heavy, yet if we are told to prophesy again, we can, by his grace, do that also. We can prophesy to dry bones, or prophesy to the wind, according to God's commandment. We are not afraid of seeming to be foolish, since we know that, when "the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." But when we preach the Word, and, as the result of our preaching expect men to be saved, and so saved that we may know it, we come all of a sudden upon an iron-bound coast, and can get no further. We find that men are dead; what is wanted is that they shall be quickened; and we cannot quicken them. There are a great many things we can do — and God forbid that we should leave one of them undone! — but when we come to the creation of life, we have reached a mysterious region into which we cannot penetrate; we have entered the realm of miracles, where Jehovah reigns supreme. The prerogative to give life or to take it away must remain with the Most High; the wit and wisdom of man are altogether powerless to bestow life upon even the tiniest insect. We know of a surety, doctrinally, and we know it with equal certainty by experience, that we can do nothing towards the quickening of men apart from the Spirit of God. If he does not come, and give life, we may preach till we have not another breath left, but we shall not raise from the tomb of sin even the soul of a little child, or bring a single sinner to the feet of Christ.

How, then, should this fact affect us? Because of our powerlessness, shall we sit still, doing nothing, and caring nothing? Shall we say, "the Spirit of God must do the work, therefore I may fold my arms, and take things

easily”? Beloved, we cannot do that. Our heart’s desire and prayer for our fellow-men is that they might be saved; and we have sometimes felt that, for their sakes, we could almost be willing to be accursed, if we might bring eternal life to them. We cannot sit still: we do not believe that it was God’s intent that any truth should ever lead us into sloth: at any rate, it has not so led us; it has carried us in quite the opposite direction. Let us try to be as practical in this matter as we are in material things. We cannot rule the winds, nor create them. A whole parliament of philosophers could not cause a capful of wind to blow. The sailor knows that he can neither stop the tempest nor raise it. What then? Does he sit still? By no means. He has all kinds of sails of different cuts and forms to enable him to use every ounce of wind that comes; and he knows how to reef or furl them in case the tempest becomes too strong for his barque. Though he cannot control the movement of the wind, he can use what it pleases God to send. The miller cannot divert that great stream of water out of its channel, but he knows how to utilize it; he makes it turn his mill-wheel. Though he cannot resist the law of gravitation, for there seems to be an almost omnipotent force in it, yet he uses that law, and yokes it to his chariot. Thus, though we cannot command that mighty influence which streams from the omnipotent Spirit of God; though we cannot turn it which way we will, for “the wind bloweth where it listeth,” yet we can make use of it; and in our inability to save men, we turn to God, and lay hold of his power.

What, then, are we to do? Face to face with spiritual death, conscious of the fact that we cannot remove it, and fully aware that only the Holy Spirit can quicken dead souls, what shall we do? There are certain ways and means by which we can act properly towards this divine Person; certain attitudes of heart which it would be well for us to take up; and certain results which will follow from a clear apprehension of the true state of the case.

First, by this fact, *we must feel deeply humbled, emptied, and cut adrift from self*. Look you, sir, you may study your sermon; you may examine the original of your text; you may critically follow it out in all its bearings; you may go and preach it with great correctness of expression; but you cannot quicken a soul by that sermon. You may go up into your pulpit; you may illustrate, explain, and enforce the truth; with mighty rhetoric

you may charm your hearers; you may hold them spellbound; but no eloquence of yours can raise the dead. Demosthenes might stand for a century between the jaws of death; but the monster would not be moved by anything he or all human orators might say. Another voice than ours must be heard; other power than that of thought or suasion must be brought into the work, or it will not be done. You may organize your societies, you may have excellent methods, you may diligently pursue this course and that; but when you have done all, nothing comes of it if the effort stands by itself. Only as the Spirit of God shall bless men by you, shall they receive a blessing through you. Whatever your ability or experience, it is the Spirit of God, who must bless your labor. Therefore, never go to this service with a boast upon you lip of what you can do, or with the slightest trace of self-confidence; else will you go in a spirit which will prevent the Holy Ghost from working with or through you.

O brethren, think nothing of us who preach to you! If ever you do, our power will be gone. If you begin to suppose that such and such a minister having been blessed of God to so many thousands will necessarily be the means of the conversion of your friend, you are imputing to a son of man what belongs only to the Son of God; and you will assuredly so that pastor or that minister a serious mischief by tolerating in your heart so idolatrous a thought. We are nothing; you are nothing. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts," is a message that should make us lie in the dust and utterly despair of doing anything in and of ourselves, seeing that all the power is of God alone. It will do us good to be very empty, to be very weak, to be very distrustful of self, and so to go about our Master's work.

Next, because of our absolute need of the Holy Spirit, *we must give ourselves to prayer before our work, and after our work.* A man who believes that, so what he may, no soul will be quickened apart from the work of the Spirit of God, and who has a longing desire that he may save souls, will not venture to his pulpit without prayer. He will not deliver his message without a thousand groans and cries to God for help in every sentence that he utters; and when the sermon is done, his work will not be done; it will have scarcely begun. His sermons will be but a text for long-continued prayer. He will be crying to God continually, to anoint him with the heavenly oil. His prayer will be "Let the Spirit of God be upon me,

that I may preach deliverance to the captives; else men will still remain in the prisonhouse in spite of all my toil." And you, beloved, as you believe that doctrine, will not allow the preacher to go to his work without your prayers. You will bear him up in your supplications, feeling that your attendances at the house of God will all be vanity, and the coming together of the people will be as nothing, unless God the Holy Ghost is pleased to bless the Word. This thought will drive you to besiege the throne of grace with strong crying and tears that God would quicken the dead sons of men. If any of you are working without prayer, I will not advise you to cease your work; but I will urge you to begin to pray, not merely as a matter of form, but as the very life of your labors. Let the habit of prayer be constant with you, so that you neither begin any service for God, nor carry it on, nor conclude it, without crying to the Lord for his holy Spirit to make the work effectual by his almighty power.

We have already gathered much instruction from this truth, if we have learnt to lie low before the Lord, and before the mercy seat.

But we must go a little further. Since everything depends upon the Spirit of God, *we must be very careful to be such men as the Spirit of God can use.* We may not judge others; but have you not met with men whom you could not think the Spirit of God would be likely to bless? If a man is self-sufficient, can the Spirit of God to any large degree bless him? If a man is inconsistent in his daily life, if there is no earnestness about him, if you cannot tell when he is in character or creed, if he contradicts one day what he said the day before, if he is vain-glorious and boastful, is it likely that the Spirit of God will bless him? If any of us should become lazy, indolent, or self-indulgent, we cannot expect the Spirit, whose one end is to glorify Christ, to work with us. If we should become proud, domineering, hectoring how could the gentle Dove abide with us? If we should become despondent, having little or no faith in what we preach, and not expecting the power of the Holy Spirit to be with us, is it likely that God will bless us? Believe me, dear friends, that a vessel fit for the Master's use must be very clean. It need not be of silver or of gold; it may be but a common earthen vessel; but it must be very clean, for our God is a jealous God. He can spy a finger-mark where our eyes could not see it, even with a microscope; and he will not drink out of a vessel which a moment before was at the lips of Satan. He will not use us if we have been

used by self, or if we have allowed ourselves to be used by the world. Oh, how clean should we be in our private life as well as in our ordinary walk and conversation! This is no small thing. See to it, my brethren and sisters, for much of the promises blessing may depend upon your carefulness.

Next, since we depend wholly upon the Spirit, *we must be most anxious to use the Word, and to keep close to the truth*, in all our work for Christ among men. The Word of God is the Holy Spirit's sword; he will not wield our wooden weapon. He will only use this true Jerusalem blade of God's own fashioning. Let us, then, set high value on the inspired Word; we shall defeat our adversaries by that sword-thrust, "It is written." So spake the Christ; and so he conquered Satan. So also the Holy Spirit speaketh. Be wise, therefore, and let your reliance be not on your own wisdom, but on the word to which you can add, "Thus saith the Lord." If our preaching is of that kind, the Holy Ghost will always set his seal to it. But if you have thought it out, and it is your own production, go, good sir, to Her Majesty's offices, and get letters patent for your invention; but the Holy Ghost will have nothing to do with it. He cares nothing about your "original mind." Our Lord Jesus laid aside all originality, and spake only the words of his Father, the words which the Holy Ghost brought to him. He said to his disciples, in that memorable discourse, before he went out to Gethsemane, "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." Let us try to imitate him, being willing not to think our own thoughts, or to speak our own words, but those which God shall give to us. I would rather speak five words out of this Book than fifty thousand words of the philosophers. I had rather be a fool with God than be a wise man with the sagest scientist, for "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." You cannot work for Christ except by the Spirit of Christ, and you cannot teach for Christ except you teach Christ; your work will have no blessing upon it, unless it be God's Word spoken through your lips to the sons of men. If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God's Word into our sermons; even if we paraphrase it into our own words, it must still be his Word upon which we place our reliance, for the only power which will bless men lies in that. It is God's Word that saves souls, not our comment upon it, however correct that comment may be. Let us, then, be

scrupulously careful to honor the Holy Spirit by taking the weapon which he has prepared for us, believing in the full inspiration of the sacred Scriptures, and expecting that God will prove their inspiration by their effect upon the minds and hearts of men.

Again, since we are nothing without the Holy Spirit, *we must avoid in our work anything that is not of him*. We want these dead people raised, and we cannot raise them; only the Spirit of God can do that. Now, in our part of the work, for which God condescendingly uses us, let us take care that there is nothing which would grieve the Spirit, or cause him to go away from us. I believe that, in places where the work of conversion goes on largely, God is much more jealous than he is anywhere else. He watches his church and if he sees, in the officers of the church, or in the workers, something unholy; if he beholds practices tolerated that are not according to his pure mind; and if, when they are noticed, these evils are winked at, and still further indulged, he will withdraw his blessing until we cease to have a controversy with him. Possibly he might give his blessing to a church which was worse than this in many respects, while he might withdraw it from this church, which has already been so highly favored, if it countenanced anything contrary to his Word. An ordinary subject her Majesty might say certain things about her for which he would never be brought to book; but a favorite at court must mind how he behaves. So must we be very sensitive in this divine employment in which we come nearest to Christ; we must be careful to co-operate with him in our work of seeing to pluck brands from the burning. We must mind how we do it, for we may, perhaps, be led to adopt ways and methods which may grieve him; and if we persevere in those ways and methods, after we have learned that they are not according to his will, the Spirit of God will leave us, lest he should seem to be setting his seal upon that of which he does not approve. A headlong zeal even for Christ may leap into a ditch. What we think to be very wise may be very unwise; and where we deem that at least a little “policy” may come in, that little policy may taint the whole, and make a nauseous stench which God will not endure. You must have the Spirit of God; you can do nothing without him; therefore do nothing that would cause him to depart from you.

Moreover, *we must be ever ready to obey the Holy Spirit’s gentlest monitions*; by which I mean the monitions which are in God’s Word, and

also — but putting this in the second place — such inward whispers as he accords to those who dwell near to him. I believe that the Holy Spirit does still speak to his chosen in a very remarkable way. Men of the world might ridicule this truth, and therefore we speak little of it; but the child of God knows that there are at times distinct movements of the Holy Spirit upon his mind leading him in such and such ways. Be very tender of these touches of God. Some people do not feel these movements; but perhaps if they, with a more perfect heart, feared the Lord, his secret might be revealed to them. That great ship at sea will not be moved by a ripple; even an ordinary wave will not stir it; it is big and heavy. But that cork, out yonder, goes up and down with every ripple of the water. Should a great wave come, it will be raised to the crest of it, and carried wherever the current compels. Let your spirit be little before God, and easily moved, so that you may recognize every impulse of the Spirit, and obey it at once, whatever it may be. When the Holy Ghost moves thee to give up such and such a thing, yield to it instantly, lest you lose his presence; when he impels thee to fulfill such and such a duty, be not disobedient to the heavenly vision; or if he suggests to thee to praise God for such and such a favor, give thyself to thanksgiving. Yield thyself wholly to his guidance. You who are workers, do ask for the wisdom of the Spirit carefully and believingly. I do not understand a man going into the pulpit, and praying the Spirit of God to guide him in what he shall say, and then pulling it out of his pocket in manuscript. It looks to me as if he shut the Spirit of God out of any special operation; at least, all the help he can expect to have from the Spirit at that particular time must be in the manner of his reading, though of course he may have been guided in that he has written. Still there is but scant room for the Spirit to manifest his power. In the same way, if you make up your mind how you will deal with people, and what you will say, it may often happen that, in the process, if you forget all you meant to say, it would be the best thing that could happen to you; and if you said exactly what you did not think it would be prudent to say; the unaccustomed method might be the thing the Spirit of God would bless. Keep yourself, therefore, before that valley of dry bones free to do just what the Spirit of God would have you do, that he, through you, may raise the dead.

Once more: since, apart from the Spirit, we are powerless, *we must value greatly every movement of his power*. Notice, in this account of the vision in the valley, how the prophet draws attention to the fact of the shaking and the noises, and the coming of the sinews and the flesh, even before there was any sign of life. I think that, if we want the Spirit of God to bless us, we must be on the watch to notice everything he does. Look out for the first desire, the first fear! Be glad of anything happening to your people that looks as if it were the work of the Holy Spirit; and, if you value him in his earlier works, he is likely to go on and to do more and more, till at last he will give the breath, and the slain host shall arise, and become an army for God. Only you cannot expect the Spirit of God to come and work by you if you are half asleep. You cannot expect the Spirit of God to put forth his power if you are in such a condition that, if he saved half your congregation, you would not know it, and if he saved nobody, you would not fret about it. God will not bless you when you are not all awake. The Spirit of God does not work by sleepy men. He loves to have us alive ourselves, and then he will make others alive by us. See to this, dear friends. If we had more time at our disposal, I would speak longer on this part of the subject; but I have said enough now, if God the Holy Spirit blesses it, upon this first great truth that we are nothing without the Holy Spirit.

Now, secondly, we may learn, from the action of Ezekiel on this occasion, that WE MAY SO ACT AS TO HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT. When he first saw the dry bones, there was no wind nor breath; yet, obeying the voice of the Lord in the vision, the breath came, and life followed. How, then, shall we act? I will only give you in brief a few of the conditions to be observed by us.

If we want the Holy Spirit to be surely with us, to give us a blessing, *we must, in the power of the Spirit, realize the scene in which we are to labor*. In this case, the Holy Spirit took the prophet, and carried him out, and set him down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. This is just a type of what will happen to every man whom the Spirit means to use. Do you want to save people in the slums? Then, you must go into the slums. Do you want to save sinners broken down under a sense of sin? You must be broken down yourself; at least, you must get near to them in their brokenness of heart; and be able to sympathize with them. I believe that



no man will command power over a people whom he does not understand. If you have never been to a certain place, you do not know the road; but if you have been there yourself, and you come upon a person who has lost his way, you are the man to direct him. When you have been through the same perplexities that trouble others, you can say to them, "I have been there myself: I know all about it. By God's blessing I can conduct you out of this maze." Dear friend, we must have greater sympathy with sinners. You cannot pluck the brand out of the burning if you are afraid of being singed yourself; you must be willing to smut your fingers on the bars of the grate if you would do it. If there is a diamond dropped into a ditch, you must thrust your arm up to your elbow in the mud, or else you cannot expect to pick the jewel out of the mire. The Holy Spirit, when he blesses a man, sets him down in the midst of the valley full of bones, and causes him to pass by then round about until he fully comprehends the greatness and the difficulty of the work to be accomplished, even as the prophet said, "Behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry."

Next, if the Holy Spirit is to be with us, *we must speak in the power of faith*. If Ezekiel had not had faith, he certainly would not have preached to dry bones; they make a wretched congregation; and he certainly would not have preached to the wind, for it must have been a fickle listener. Who but a fool would behave in this manner unless faith entered into action? If preaching is not a supernatural exercise, it is a useless procedure. God the Holy Ghost must be with us, or else we might as well go and stand on the tops of the hills of Scotland, and shout to the east wind. There is nothing in all our eloquence unless we believe in the Holy Spirit making use of the truth which we preach for the quickening of the souls of men. Our prophesying must be an act of faith. We must preach by faith as much as Noah built the ark by faith; and just as the walls of Jericho were brought down, by faith, men's hearts are to be broken by faithful preaching, that is, preaching full of faith.

In addition to this, if we desire to have the Spirit of God with us, *we must prophesy according to God's command*. By prophesying, I do not mean foretelling future events; but simply uttering the message which we have received from the Lord, proclaiming it aloud so that all may hear. You will notice how it is twice said, in almost the same words, "So I prophesied as

he commanded me.” God will bless the prophesying that he commands, and not any other; so we must keep clear of that which is contrary to his Word, and speak the truth that he gives to us to declare. As Jonah, the second time he was told to go to Ninevah, was hidden by the Lord to “preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee,” so must we do if we would have our word believed even as his was. Our message is received when it is the Word of God through us. When the Lord describes the blessing that comes upon the earth by the rain and snow from heaven, he saith, “So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth.” Let us see to it that, before the word goes forth out of our mouth, we have received it from the mouth of God. Then we may hope and expect that the people will receive it also from us. The Spirit of God, that is, the breath of God, goes with the Word of God, and with that alone.

Notice, next, that if we would have the Spirit of God with us, *we must break out in vehemency of desire*. The prophet is to prophesy to the bones; but he does not begin in a formal manner by saying, “Only the winds coming can bring breath to these slain persons.” No, he breaks out with an interjection, and with his whole soul heaving with a ground-swell of great desire, he cries, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live!” He has the people before him in his eye, and in his heart; and he appeals, with mighty desire, to the Spirit of God, that he would come and make them live. You will generally find, in our service to-day, that the men who yearn over the souls of their fellow-men are those whom the Spirit of God uses. A man of no desire gets what he longs for; and that is nothing at all.

Then, if we would have more of the power of the Spirit of God with us, *we must see only the divine purpose, the divine power, and the divine working*. God will have his Spirit to go forth with those who see his hand. “When I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.” It is not my plan that God is going to work out; it is his own. It is not my purpose that the Holy Spirit is going to carry out; it is the purpose of the eternal Jehovah. It is not my power, or my experience, or my mode of thought, which will bring men from death to life; it is the Holy Spirit who will do it, and he only. We

must apprehend this fact, and get to work in this spirit, and then God the Holy Spirit will be with us.

Bear with me, if I fill up all my time, or if I should even stray beyond it. I want now to address unconverted persons, or those who are afraid that they are still unsaved; and with the text before us, **WE WOULD SPEAK DIFFERENTLY TO OUR HEARERS.**

You who are not yet quickened by the divine life, or are afraid you are not, *we would exhort you to hear the Word of the Lord.* Though you feel that you are as dead as these dry bones, yet if you want to be saved, be frequent in hearing the Word. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” If you wish to find the divine life, thank God that you have that wish, and frequent those houses where Christ is much spoken of, and where the way of eternal life is very plainly set forth. When you mingle with the worshippers, listen with both your ears; try to remember what you hear; and pray all the while that God will bless it to you. “O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord!”

Next, *we could remind you of your absolute need of life from the Spirit of God.* Put it in what shape you like, you cannot be saved except you are born again; and the new birth is not a matter within your own power. “Ye must be born again,” — “from above,” as the margin reads, in the third chapter of John’s gospel. All the religion of which you are capable will not save you, do what you will; strive as you may with outward ceremonies, or religious observances, there is no hope for you but in the Holy Ghost. There is something to be done for you which you cannot do for yourself. We will not water down that truth, but give it to you just as it stands in the Scriptures; we want you to feel its power.

But *we would have you note what the Holy Spirit has done for others.* There are some of your friends who have been born again. They were as hopeless as you are; but they are now saved. You know they are, for you have seen their lives. Take note of them, for what the Holy Spirit can work in one he can work in another. Let the grace of God in others comfort you concerning yourself, especially when you hear of great drunkards, or great swearers, or very vicious persons, who have been transformed into saints. Say to yourself, “If the Holy Spirit could make a saint out of such a sinner as that, surely he can make a saint out of me.” As you see the

flesh and sinews on others who were once as dry as bare bones, be encouraged to hope that it may be even so with you ere long.

May I go a little further, and say that, *we would have you observe carefully what is done in yourself?* I think I am speaking to some here who have already undergone a remarkable change. You cannot say that you have spiritual life; you are afraid that you have not. Still, you are not what you used to be. You have put away many things from you that were once a pleasure to you, and now you take delight in many things which you once despised. There is some hope in that, though it may be nothing more than the sinews coming on the bones, and the flesh upon the sinews. Yet I notice that, where the Holy Ghost begins, he does not leave off till he has finished his work. God takes such a delight in his work, that, having begun it, he completes it. Well did Job say, “Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.” Now, what he has done for you already, encourages me, and should encourage you, to hope that he will yet do much more, continuing his gracious work until life eternal is bestowed upon you.

Furthermore, *we would remind you that faith in Jesus is a sign of life.* If in your heart you can trust yourself to Christ, and believe in him that he can save you, you have eternal life already. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” If thou canst now, though it be for the first time, trust thyself alone on Christ, faith is the surest evidence of the work of the Holy Ghost. Thou “hast passed from death unto life” already. Thou canst not see the Spirit any more than thou canst see the wind; but, if thou hast faith, that is a blessed vane that turns in the way the Spirit of God blows. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.” If thou believest, this is true of thee, and if thou dost cast thyself wholly upon Christ, remember that it is written, “He that believeth on him is not condemned;” wherefore be of good cheer.

*We beg you not to be led aside to the discussion of difficulties.* There are a great many difficulties. To tell dry bones to live, is a very unreasonable sort of thing when tried by rules of logic; and for me to tell you, a dead sinner, to believe in Christ, may seem perfectly unjustifiable by the same rule. But I do not need to justify it. If I find it in God’s Word, that is quite enough for me; and if the preacher does not feel any difficulty in the matter, why should you? There is a difficulty, but you have nothing to do

with it. There are difficulties everywhere. There is a difficulty in explaining how it is that bread sustains your body; and how that bread, sustaining your body, can be the means of prolonging your life. We cannot understand how the material can impinge upon the spiritual; and there are difficulties in almost everything connected with life. If a man will not do anything till he has solved every difficulty, we had better dig his grave. And you will be in hell if you will not go to heaven without having every difficulty solved for you. Leave the difficulties; there will be time enough to settle them when we get to heaven; meanwhile, if life comes through Jesus Christ, let us have it, and have done with nursing our doubts.

Further, *we would have you long for the visitation of God, the Holy Spirit.* Join with us in the prayer, “Come Holy Spirit, come with all thy power; come from the four winds, O breath!” One wind will not do it, it must come from all quarters. Your heart, filled with all sorts of evil, wants breaking; it wants throwing down like the house of Job’s son when Job’s children were in it, and “there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell.” Oh, for a wind from the four quarters of heaven, to smite the four corners of the house of your sin, and lay it low! “Come from the four winds, O breath!” As the poet sings

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*“Lifeless in the valley,  
Come, O breath, and breathe!  
New-create and rally!  
Come, O breath, and breathe!  
Blowing where thou listest,  
Thou the word assistest,  
Thou death’s power resistest,  
Come, O breath, and breathe!”*

Be willing to have the Holy Spirit as he wills to come. Let him come as a north wind, cold and cutting, or as a south wind, sweet and melting. Say, “Come, from any of the four winds, O breath! Only come.” He can come unexpectedly upon you in the pew during these five minutes that remain. You are perhaps thinking about whether you can catch an early train, and get home. May the Holy Spirit lay hold of you before you leave the building, and get you home in real earnest to you God and to your Father! He can come very mightily. There is a great deal about you that would shut him out. But it is hard to keep the wind out when it blows in the

fullness of its strength. You may fill up the crevices of the door as you please, but still the wind gets in. Thus, too, is it with the Spirit of God: he comes in might; and he can also come very sweetly. Be not afraid of the Holy Spirit. He can charm you to Christ, as well as drive you to Christ. May he enter your heart even now!

*We yearn to see all of you thus made to live.* I am praying in my very soul that he would come to every one of you. I do not read that Ezekiel saw part of the valley of dry bones live, and the rest remain dry bones; but that they all lived, and stood upon their feet an exceeding great army. I long to see you all blessed at this service. Why should it not be so? Oh, that the Spirit of God would come and touch everyone of us! Many of you are alive already, blessed be his name! Well, you can have more life, for Christ has come not only that you might have life, but that you “might have it more abundantly.” Let the blessed Spirit enter into greater fullness, I beseech you. But pray mightily, that every soul here that is dead may now feel the sacred breath, and begin to live. Then I shall not only hear of one, as last Thursday, but news shall be brought of many upon whom the divine Spirit has sweetly come and led them to Jesus, to be saved now, and to be saved for ever. God grant it! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — ~~250~~ Ezekiel 37.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 464, 461, 451.

# PRAISE FOR THE GIFT OF GIFTS

## SERMON NO. 2247

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
MARCH 13TH, 1892,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON  
LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JULY 27TH, 1890.

*“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” —  2 Corinthians 9:15.*

IN the chapter from which my text is taken, Paul is stirring up the Christians at Corinth to be ready with liberal gifts for the poor saints at Jerusalem. He finishes by reminding them of a greater gift that any they could bring, and by this one short word of praise, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,” he sets all their hearts a-singing. Let men give as liberally as they may, you can always proclaim the value of their gift; you can cast it up, and reckon its worth; but God’s gift is unspeakable, unreckonable. You cannot fully estimate the value of what God gives. The gospel is a gospel of giving and forgiving. We may sum it up in those two words; and hence, when the true spirit of it works upon the Christian, he forgives freely, and he also gives freely. The large heart of God breeds large hearts in men, and they who live upon his bounty are led by his Spirit to imitate that bounty, according to their power.

However, I am not going, on the present occasion, to say anything upon the subject of liberality. I must get straight away to the text, hoping that we may really drink in the spirit of it, and out of full hearts use the apostle’s language with intenser meaning than ever as we repeat his words: “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” I shall commence by saying that *salvation is altogether the gift of God*, and as such is to be received by us freely. Then I shall try to show that *this gift is unspeakable*; and, in the third place, that *for this gift thanks should be rendered to God*. Though it is unspeakable, yet we should speak our

praise of it. In this way you will see, as of old preachers used to say, the text naturally falls apart.

We begin with the thought that SALVATION IS ALTOGETHER THE GIFT OF GOD. Paul said, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Over and over and over again, have we to proclaim that salvation is wholly of grace: not of works nor of wages, but it is the gift of God's great bounty to undeserving men. Often as we have preached this truth, we shall have to keep on doing so as long as there are men in the world who are self-righteous, and as long as there are minds in the world so slow to grasp the meaning of the word "grace", that is, "free favor", and as long as there are memories that find it difficult to retain the idea of salvation being God's free gift.

Let us say simply and plainly, that salvation must come to us as a gift from God, for salvation comes to us by the Lord Jesus, and *what else could Jesus be?* The essence of salvation is the gift of God's Only-begotten Son to die for us, that we might live through him. I think you will agree with me that it is inconceivable that men should ever have merited that God should give his Only-begotten Son to the,. To give Christ to us, in any sense, must have been an act of divine charity; but to give him up to die on yonder cruel and bloody tree, to yield him up as a sacrifice for sin, must be a free favor, passing the limits of thought. It is not supposable that any man could deserve such love. It is plain that if man's sins needed a sacrifice, he did not deserve that a sacrifice should be found for him. The fact that his need proves his demerit and his guiltiness. He deserves to die; he may be rescued by Another dying for him; but he certainly cannot claim that the eternal God should take from his bosom his Only-begotten and Well-beloved Son, and put him to death. The more you look that thought in the face, the more you will reject the idea that, by any possible sorrow, or by any possible labor, or by any possible promise, a man could put himself into the position of deserving to have Christ to die for him. If Christ is to come to save sinners, it must be as a gift, a free gift of God. The argument, to my mind, is conclusive.

Besides that, over and over again, in God's Word, *we are told that salvation is not of works*. Although there are many who cling to the notion of man's works as a ground of salvation, yet as long as this Book stands,



and there are eyes to read it; it will bear witness against the idea of human merit, and it will speak out plainly for the doctrine that men are saved by faith, and not by works. Not once only, but often it is written, "The just shall live by faith;" moreover, we are told, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." The very choice of the way of salvation by believing, rather than by works, is made by God on purpose that he might show that grace is a gift. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt: but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Faith is that virtue, that grace, which is chosen to bring us salvation, because it never takes any of the glory to itself. Faith is simply the hand that takes. When the beggar receives alms, he does not bless the hand that takes, but blesses the hand that gives; therefore we do not praise the faith that receiveth, but the God who giveth the unspeakable gift. Faith is the eye that sees. When we see an object, we delight in the object, rather than in the eye that sees it; therefore do we glory, not in our faith, but in the salvation which God bestows. Faith is appointed as the porter to open the gate of salvation, because that gate turns upon the hinges of free grace.

In the next place, be it always remembered, that we cannot be saved by the merit of our own works, because *holy works are themselves a gift*, the work of the grace of God. If thou hast faith, and joy, and hope, who gave them to thee? These did not spring up spontaneously in thy heart. They were sown there by the hand of love. If thou hast lived a godly life for years, if thou hast been a diligent servant of the church and of thy God, in whose strength hast thou done it? Is there not One who works all our works in us? Could you work out your salvation with fear and trembling if God did not first work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure? How can that, then, claim a reward, which is, in itself, the gift of God? I think the ground is cut right away from those who would put confidence in human merit, when we show, first of all, that, in Scripture, salvation is clearly said to be "not of works, lest any man should boast"; and, secondly, that even the good works of believers are the fruit of a renewed life; for "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

***“All that I was, my sin, my guilt,  
My death, was all mine own;  
All that I am, I own to thee,  
My gracious God, alone.”***

Further, if salvation were not a free gift, *how else could a sinner get it?* I will pass over some of you, who fancy that you are the best people in the world. It is sheer fancy, mark you, without any truth in it. But I will say nothing about you. There are, however, some of us, who know that we were not the best people in the world; we who sinned against God, and knew it, and who were broken into pieces under a sense of our guilt. I know, for one, that there would have been no hope of heaven for me, if salvation had not been a free gift of God to those who deserved it not. After ministering among you for nearly thirty-seven years, I stand exactly where I stood when first I came to Christ, a poor sinner and nothing at all, but taking Christ as the free gift of God to me, as I took him at first, when, yet but a lad, I fled to him for salvation. Ask any of the people of God who have been abundant in service, and constant in prayer, whether they deserve aught at the hand of God, and those who have most to be thankful for will tell you that they have nothing that they have not received. Ask these, whom God has honored to the conversion of many, whether they lay any claim to the grace of God, whether they have any merit, and whether in their hand they dare bring a price, and seek to buy of God his love; they will loathe the very thought. There is no way to heaven for you and me, my friends convinced of sin, unless all the way we are led by grace, and unless salvation is the gift of God.

But, once more: *look at the privileges which come to us through salvation!* I cannot, as I value those privileges, conceive for a minute that they are purchasable, or that they come to us as the result of our desert. They must be a gift; they are so many and so glorious as to be altogether outside the limit of our furthest search, and beyond the height of our utmost reach. We cannot by our efforts compass any salvation of any sort; but if we could, it certainly would not be such a salvation as this. Let us look, then, at our privileges.

Here comes, first, “the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” He that believes in Christ has no sin. His sin is blotted out. It has

ceased to be. Christ has finished it, and he is unto God as though he had never sinned. Can any sinner deserve that?

*“Here’s pardon for transgressions past,  
It matters not how black their cast,  
And oh, my soul, with wonder view,  
For sins to come, here’s pardon too!”*

Can any sinner bring a price that will purchase such a boon as that? No; such mercy must be a gift.

Next, everyone that believes in Christ is justified, and looked upon by God as being perfectly righteous. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is “accepted in the Beloved.” By this he becomes not only innocent, that is pardoned, but he becomes praiseworthy before God. This is justification. Can any guilty man deserve that? Why, he is covered with sin, defiled from head to foot! Can he deserve to be arrayed in the sumptuous robe of the divine righteousness of Christ, and “be made the righteousness of God in him”? It is inconceivable. Such a blessing must be the gift of infinite bounty, or it can never come to man.

Furthermore, beloved, remember that “now we are the sons of God.” Can you realize that truth? As others are not, believers are, the sons of God. He is their Father, and the spirit of adoption breathes within their heart. They are the children of his family, and come to him as children come to a father, with loving confidence. Think of being made a son of God, a son of him that made the heavens, a son of him who is God over all, blessed for ever. Can any man deserve that? Certainly not; this must also come as a gift.

Sonship leads on to heirship. “If children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” My brother, if thou art a believer, all things are thine, this world, and the worlds to come. Could you ever deserve all that? Could such an inheritance have come to you through any merits of your own? No, it must be a gift. Look at it, and the blaze of its splendor will strike all idea of merit blind.

Further than that, we are now made one with Christ. Oh, tell everywhere this wonder which God hath wrought for his people! It is not to be understood; it is an abyss too deep for a finite mind to sound. Every

believer is truly united to Christ: “For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones.” Every believer is married to Christ, and none of them shall ever be separated from him. Seeing, then, that there is such a union between us and Christ, can you suppose that any man can have any claim to such a position apart from the grace of God? By what merit, even of a perfect man, could we deserve to become one with Christ in an endless unity? Such a surpassing privilege is out of the line of purchase. It is, and can only be, the gift of God. Oneness with Christ cannot come to us in any other way.

Listen yet again. In consequence of our union with Christ, God the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. Our bodies are his temple. God dwelleth in us, and we dwell in God. Can we deserve that? Even a perfect keeping of the law would not have brought to men the abiding of the Holy Ghost in them. It is a blessing that rises higher than the law could ever reach, even if it had been kept.

Let me say, furthermore, that if you possess a blessed peace, as I trust you do, if you can say —

*“My heart is resting, O my God;  
I will give thanks and sing;  
My heart is at the secret source  
Of every precious thing;”*

that divine peace must surely be the gift of God. If there is a great calm within your soul, an entire satisfaction with Christ your Lord, you never deserved that precious boon. It is the work of his Holy Spirit, and must be his free gift.

And when you come to die, as you may — unless the Lord comes, as he will — the grace that will enable you fearlessly to face the last enemy will not be yours by any right of your own. If you fall asleep, as I have seen many a Christian pass away, with songs of triumph, with the light of heaven shining on your brow, almost in glory while yet you are in your bed, why, you cannot deserve that! Such a death-bed must be the free gift of God’s almighty grace. It cannot be earned by any merit; indeed, it is just then that every thought of merit melts away, and the soul hides itself in Christ, and triumphs there.

If this does not convince you, look once more. Let a window be opened in heaven. See the long line of white-robed saints. Hark to their hallelujahs. Behold their endless, measureless delight. Did they deserve to come there? Did they come to their thrones and to their palms of victory by their own merits? Their answer is, “We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;” and from them all comes the harmonious anthem, “Non nobis, Domine,” — “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us; but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and thy truth’s sake.” From first to last, then, we see that salvation is all the gift of God. And what can be freer than a gift, or more glorious than the gift of God? No prize can approach it in excellence, no merit can be mentioned in the same hour. O my brethren, we are debtors indeed to the mercy of God! We have received much, and there is more to follow; but it is all of grace from first to last. We know but little yet at what a cost these gifts were purchased for us; but we shall know it better by-and-by, as McCheyne so sweetly sings: —

*“When this passing world is done,  
When has sunk yon glaring sun;  
When I stand with Christ in glory,  
Looking o’er life’s finished story,  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know —  
Not till then, how much I owe.  
When I stand before the throne,  
Dressed in beauty not my own;  
When I see thee as thou art,  
Love thee with unsinning heart;  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,  
Not till then, how much I owe.”*

Now I would try to lead your thoughts in another direction as we consider that THIS GIFT IS UNSPEAKABLE. Do not think it means that we cannot speak about this gift. Ah, how many times have I, for one, spoken upon this gift during the last forty years! I have spoken of little else. I heard of one who said, “I suppose Spurgeon is preaching that old story over again.” Yes, that is what he is doing; and if he lives another twenty years, and you come here, it will be “the old, old story” still, for there is nothing like it. It is inexhaustible; it is like an Artesian well that springeth up for ever and ever. We can speak about it; yet it is unspeakable. What mean we, then, by saying it is unspeakable? Well, as I have said already, Christ Jesus our

Lord is the sum and substance of salvation, and of God's gift. O God, this gift of thine is unspeakable, and it includes all other gifts beside!

*“Thou didst not spare thine only Son,  
But gav'st him for a world undone,  
And freely with that Blessed One —  
Thou givest all.”*

Consider, first, that Christ is unspeakable *in his person*. He is perfect man, and glorious God. No tongue of seraph, or of cherub, can ever describe the full nature of him whose name is “Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace.” This is he whom the Father gave “for us men, and for our sakes.” He was the Creator of all things, for “without him was not anything made that was made,” yet he was “made of flesh and dwelt among us.” He filleth all things by his omnipresence; yet he came and tabernacled on the earth. This is that Jesus, who was born of Mary, yet who lived before all worlds. He was that Word, who “was in the beginning with God, and the Word was God.” He is unspeakable. It is not possible to put into human language the divine mystery of his sacred being, truly man and yet truly God. But how great the wonder of it! Soul, God gave God for thee! Dost thou hear it? To redeem thee, O believing man, God gave himself to be thy Savior; surely, that is an unspeakable gift.

Christ is unspeakable, next, *in his condescension*. Can any one measure or describe how far Christ stooped, when, from the throne of splendor, he came to a manger to be swaddled and lie where the horned oxen fed. Oh, what a stoop of condescension was that! The Infinite becomes an infant. The Eternal is dandled on a woman's knee. He is there in the carpenter's shop, obedient to his parents; there in the temple sitting among the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions; there in poverty, crying, “The Son of man hath not where to lay his head;” and there, in thirst, asking of a guilty woman a drink of water. It is unspeakable. That he, before whom all the hosts of heaven veiled their faces, should come here among men, and among the poorest of the poor — that he who dwelt amidst the glory and the bliss of the land of light, should deign to be a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, passes human thought! Such a Savior is a gift unspeakable.

But if unspeakable so far, what shall I say of the fashion of Christ *in his death*? Beloved, I cannot speak adequately of Gethsemane and the bloody sweat, nor of the Judas kiss, nor of the traitorous flight of the disciples. It is unspeakable. That binding, scourging, plucking of the beard, and spitting in the face! Man's tongue cannot utter the horror of it. I cannot tell you truly the weight of the false accusations, the slanders, and the blasphemies that were heaped on him; nor would I wish to picture the old soldier's cloak flung over his bleeding shoulders, and the crown of thorns, the buffeting, the mailed fists, and the shame and sorrow he endured, as he was thrust out to execution. Do you wish to follow him along the streets, where weeping women lifted up their hearts in tender sympathy for the Lord of love about to die? If you do, it must be in silence, for words but feebly tell how much he bore on the way to the cross.

*“Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
And shut his glories in,  
When God, the mighty Maker died  
For man, the creature's sin.”*

Oh, it was terrible that HE should be nailed to the gibbet, that HE should hang there to be ridiculed by all the mob of Jerusalem! The objects flouted him, the meanest thought him meaner than themselves. Even dying thieves upbraided him. His eyes are choked, they become dim with blood. He must die. He says, “It is finished.” He bows his head. The glorious Victim has yielded up his life to put away his people's sin. This is God's gift to you, divine, unspeakable, O ye sons of men!

But it is not all. Christ is unspeakable *in his glory*. When we think of his resurrection, of his ascending to heaven, and of his glory at the right hand of God, words languish on our lips; but in everyone of these positions, he is the gift of God to us, and when he shall come with all the glory of the Father, he will still be to his people the *Theo-dora*. the gift of God, the great unspeakable benediction to the sons of men. I wish that the people of Christ had this aspect of the Lord's glory more continually on their hearts, for though he seems to tarry, yet will he come again the second time, as he promised.

*“With that blessed hope before us,  
 Let no harp remain unstrung;  
 Let the mighty Advent chorus  
 Onward roll on every tongue.  
 Maranatha,  
 Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come!”*

To me, one of the most wonderful aspects of this gift is Christ *in his chosen*; all the Father gave him, all for whom he died, these he will glorify with himself, and they shall be with him where he is. Oh, what a sight will that be when we shall see the King in his beauty, and all his saints beautiful in his glory, shining like so many stars around him who is the Sun of them all! Then, indeed, shall we see what an unspeakable gift did God gave to men, when through that gift, he makes his saints all glorious, even as he predestined them, “to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the Firstborn of many brethren.”

But we do not need to wait until we see his face to know his glory. Brethren, Christ is unspeakable as the gift of God *in the heart here*. “Oh,” say you, “I trust I have felt the love of God shed abroad in my heart!” I rejoice with you, but could you speak it? Often, when I have tried to preach the love to Christ, I have not been able to preach it rightly, because I did not feel it as I ought; but oftener still, I have not been able to tell it out because I have felt it so much. I would fain preach in that manner always, and feel Christ’s love so much that I could speak it but little. Oh, child of God, if you have known much of Christ, you have often had to weep out your joys instead of speaking them, to lay your finger on your mouth, and be silent because you were overpowered by his glory. See how it was with John: “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.” Why did you not preach, John? If he were here to-night, he would say, “I could not preach then, the splendor of the Lord made me dumb. I fell at his feet as dead.” This is one reason why the gift of God is unspeakable, because, the more you know about it, the less you can say about it. Christ overpowers us; he makes us tongue-tied with his wondrous revelations. When he reveals himself in full, we are like men that are blinded with excess of vision. Like Paul, on the Damascus road, we are forced to confess, “I could not see for the glory of that light.” We cannot speak of it fully. All the apostles and prophets and saints of God have been trying to speak out the love of God as manifested in Christ; but yet they have all failed. I say,



with great reverence, that the Holy Ghost himself seems to have labored for expression, and, as he had to use human pens and mortal tongues, even he has never spoken to the full the measure and value of God's unspeakable gift. It is unspeakable to men by God himself. God can give it; but he cannot make us fully understand it. We have need to be like God himself to comprehend the greatness of his gift when he gives us his Son.

Though we make constant effort, it is unspeakable, even *throughout a long life*. Do you ministers, who have been a long time in one place, ever say to yourselves, "We shall run dry for subjects by-and-by"? If you preach Christ, you will never run short. If you have preached ten thousand sermons about Christ, you have not yet left the shore; you are not out in the deep sea yet. Dive, my brother! With splendor of thought, plunge into this great mystery of free grace and dying love; and when you have dived the farthest, you will perceive that you are as far off the bottom as when you first touched the surface. It is an endless theme; it is unspeakable!

*"Oh, could I speak the matchless worth,  
Oh, could I sound the glories forth  
Which in my Savior shine!  
I'd soar and touch the heavenly strings,  
And vie with Gabriel while he sings  
In notes almost divine."*

But I can neither speak it nor sing it as I ought; yet would I finish Medley's hymn, and say, —

*"Well, the delightful day will come  
When my dear Lord will bring me home,  
And I shall see his face;  
Then with my Savior, Brother, Friend,  
A blest eternity I'll spend,  
Triumphant in his grace."*

But, even then, Christ will be still *in heaven for ever* a gift unspeakable. Perhaps we shall have another talk together, friends, on this subject when we get there. One good woman said to me, "We shall have more time in eternity than we have now;" to which I replied, "I do not know whether there is any time in eternity, the words look like a contradiction." "Oh, but," said she, "I shall get a talk with you, anyhow; I have never had one yet." Well, I dare say we shall commune up there of these blessed things,

when we shall know more about them. As we are to be there for ever and ever, we shall need some great subjects with which to keep up the conversation: what vaster theme can we have than this? Addison, in one of her verses, says —

*“But, oh! Eternity’s too short  
To utter half thy praise.”*

And I have heard simpletons say that the couplet was very faulty; “you cannot make eternity short,” they say. That shows the difference between a poet and a critic. A critic is a being all teeth, without any heart; and a poet is one who has much heart, and who sometimes finds that human language is not sufficient to express his thoughts. We shall never have done with Christ in heaven. Oh, my Lord, thy presence will make my heaven!

*“Millions of years my wondering eyes,  
Shall o’er thy beauties rove;  
And endless ages I’ll adore  
The glories of thy love.”*

This wondrous gift of God is an utterly inexhaustible, unspeakable subject.

Now, lastly, I come to this point, that FOR THIS GIFT THANKS SHOULD BE RENDERED. The text says, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” By this the apostle not only meant that he gave thanks for Christ; but he thus calls upon the church, and upon every individual believer, to join him in his praise. Here do I adopt his language, and praise God on my own behalf, calling upon all of you who know the preciousness of Christ, the gift of God, to unite with me in thanksgiving. Let us as with one heart say it now, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

Some cannot say this, for they never think of the gift of God. You who never think of God, how can you thank God? There must be “think” at the bottom of “thank.” Whenever we think, we ought to thank. But some never think, and therefore never thank. Beloved friend, what are you at? That Christ should die; is it nothing to you? That God “gave his Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;” is that nothing to you? Let the question drop into your heart. Press it home upon yourself. Will you say that you have no share in this gift? Will you deliberately give up any hope you may have of ever

partaking of the grace of God? Are you determined now to say, "I do not care about Christ"? Well, you would hardly like to say that; but why do you practically declare this to be your intention, if you do not want to say it? Oh, that you might now so think of Christ as to trust him at once, and begin to raise this note of praise!

Some, on the other hand, do not thank God because they are always delaying. Have I not hearers here to-night who were here ten years ago, and were rather more hopeful then than they are now? "There is plenty of time," say you; but you do not say this about other matters. I admired the children, the other day, when the teacher said, "Dear children, the weather is unsettled. You can go out next Wednesday; but do you not think it would be better to stop a month, so that we could go when the weather is more settled?" There was not a child that voted for stopping a month. All the hands we up for going next Wednesday. Now, imitate the children in that. Do not make it seem as if you were in a no hurry to be happy; for as he that believeth in Christ hath eternal life, to postpone having it is an unworthy as well as unwise thing to do. No, you will have it, I hope, at once. There is a man here who is going to be a very rich man when his old aunt dies. You do not wish that she should die, I am sure; but you sometimes wonder why some people are spared to be ninety, do you not? You are very poor now, and you wish that some of this money cold come to you at once; you are not for putting that off. Why should you put off heavenly riches and eternal life? I beseech you to believe in Christ now; then you will be willed with thankfulness and joy.

Some cannot say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift," for they do not know whether they have it or not. They sometimes think that they have; they oftener fear that they have not. Never tolerate a doubt on this subject, I implore you. Get full assurance. "Lay hold on eternal life." Get a grip of it. Know Christ; trust Christ wholly: and you have God's word for it, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Then you can say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Now, dear friends, let me ask you to join in this exercise. Let us first unitedly thank God for this gift. Put out of your mind the idea that you

ought to thank Christ, but not thank the Father. It was the Father that gave Christ. Christ did not die to make his Father love us, as some say that we preach. We have always preached the very opposite, and we have quoted that verse of Kent —

*‘Twas not to make Jehovah’s love  
Towards the sinner flame,  
That Jesus, from his throne above,  
A suffering man became.  
‘Twas not the death which he endured,  
Nor all the pangs he bore,  
That God’s eternal love procured,  
For God was love before.”*

He gave his Son because he already loved us. Christ is the exhibition of the Father’s love, and the revelation of Christ is made because of “the love of the Spirit.” Therefore, “Thanks be unto God” — the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost — “for his unspeakable gift.”

While you saved ones, every one, raise your note of gratitude, be very careful to *thank God only*. Do not be thinking by whose means you were converted, and begin to thank the servant instead of the Lord whom he serves. Let the man who was used as the instrument in God’s hand be told, for his comfort, of the blessing God sent you through him; but thank God, and thank only God, that you were led to lay hold of Christ, who is his unspeakable gift.

Moreover, *thank God spontaneously*. Look at the apostle, and imitate him. When he sounded this peal of praise, his mind was occupied at the time about the collection for the poor saints; but, collection or no collection, he will thank God for his unspeakable gift. I like to see thanks to God come up at what might be an untimely moment, When a man does not feel just as happy as he might be, and yet says, “Thank God,” it sounds refreshingly real. I like to hear such a bubbling up of praise as in the case of old father Taylor, of New York, when he broke down in the middle of a sentence. Looking up at the people, he said, “There now! The nominative has lost its verb; but, hallelujah! I am on the way to glory;” and so he went on again. Sometime we ought to do just like that. Take an opportunity, when there comes a little interval, just to say, “Whether this is in tune or not, I cannot help it: thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

Lastly, as you receive the precious gift, *thank God practically*. Thank God by doing something to prove your thanks. It is a poor gratitude which only effervesces in words, and skirts deeds of kindness. Real thankfulness will not be in word only, but in deed too, and so it will prove that it is in the truth.

“Well, what could I do that would please God?” you say. First, I should think you could look for his lost children. That is a sure way to please him. Go to-night, and see whether you cannot find one of the erring whom you might bring back to the fold. Would you not please a mother, if she had lost her baby, and you set to work to find it? We want to please God. Seek the lost ones, and bring them in.

If you want to please God, next, succor his poor saints. If you know anything of them, help them. Do something for them for Christ’s sake. I knew a woman who used always to relieve anybody that came to her door in the dress of a sailor. I do not think that half those who came to her ever had been to sea at all; but, still, if they came to the door as sailors, she used to say, “Ah! my dear boy was a sailor. I have not seen him for years. He is lost somewhere at sea; but for dear Jack’s sake, I always help every sailor that comes to my door.” It is a right feeling, is it not? I remember, when I first came to London from my country charge, I used to think of that, if I came across a dog or a cat that came from Waterbeach, I would like to feed it. So, for the love of Christ, love Christ’s poor people. Whenever you find them, say, “My Lord was poor, and so are you, and for his dear sake I will help you.”

If you want to please God, next, bear with the evil ones. Do not lose your temper; I mean, by that, do not get angry with the unthankful and the evil. Let your anger be lost in praise for the gift unspeakable. Please God by bearing with evil men, as he bears with you. But if you have a very bad temper, I hope that, in another sense, you may lose it, and never find it any more.

And lastly, if you want to please God, watch, like the Thessalonians, “for his Son from heaven.” The Lord Jesus is coming again, in like manner as he departed, and there is no attitude with which God is more delighted in his saved people than with that of watching for the time when “unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin unto salvation.”

Beloved, may God help you thus to magnify his Son; and to him shall be all the praise! Let us again lift up our glad hallelujah: “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —  2 Corinthians 9.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 534, 236, 428.