

THE FIRST CRY FROM THE CROSS

NO. 897

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 24, 1869,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”
Luke 23:34.*

OUR Lord was at that moment enduring the first pains of crucifixion, the executioners had just then driven the nails through His hands and feet. He must have been, moreover, greatly depressed, and brought into a condition of extreme weakness by the agony of the night in Gethsemane, and by the scourging and cruel mockings which He had endured all through the morning, from Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and the Praetorian guards. Yet neither the weakness of the past, nor the pain of the present could prevent Him from continuing in prayer.

The Lamb of God was silent to men, but He was not silent to God. Dumb as a sheep before her shearers, He had not a word to say in His own defense to man, but He continues in His heart crying unto His Father, and no pain and no weakness can silence His holy supplications. Beloved, what an example our Lord here presents to us! Let us continue in prayer as long as our heart beats, let no excess of suffering drive us away from the throne of grace, but rather let it drive us closer to it—

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

To cease from prayer is to renounce the consolations which our case requires. Under all distractions of spirit, and overwhelms of heart, great God, help us still to pray, and never from the mercy seat may our footsteps be driven by despair. Our blessed Redeemer persevered in prayer even when the cruel iron rent His tender nerves, and blow after blow of the hammer jarred His whole frame with anguish, and this perseverance may be accounted for by the fact that He was so in the habit of prayer that He could not cease from it, He had acquired a mighty velocity of intercession which forbade Him to pause. Those long nights upon the cold mountain side, those many days which had been spent in solitude, those perpetual arrows of prayer which He was accustomed to dart up to heaven, all these had formed in Him a habit so powerful, that the severest torments could not slow its force.

Yet it was more than habit. Our Lord was baptized in the spirit of prayer, He lived in it, it lived in Him, it had come to be an element of His nature. He was like that precious spice, which, being bruised, does not cease to give forth its perfume, but rather yields it all the more abundantly because of the blows of the pestle, its fragrance is no outward and superficial quality, but an inward virtue essential to its nature, which the pounding does but fetch from it, causing it to reveal its secret soul of sweetness. So Jesus prays, even as a bundle of myrrh gives forth its smell, or as birds sing because they cannot do otherwise. Prayer wrapped His very soul as with a garment, and His heart went forth in such array. I repeat it, let this be our example—never, under any circumstances, however severe the trial, or depressing the difficulty, let us cease from prayer.

Observe further that our Lord, in the prayer before us, remains in the vigor of faith as to His Sonship. The extreme trial to which He now submitted Himself could not prevent His holding fast His Sonship. His prayer begins, “Father.” It was not without meaning that He taught us when we pray to say “Our Father,” for our prevalence in prayer will much depend upon our confidence in our relationship to God. Under great losses and crosses, one is apt to think that God is not dealing with us as a father with a child,

but rather as a severe judge with a condemned criminal, but the cry of Christ, when He is brought to an extremity which we shall never reach, betrays no faltering in the spirit of Sonship. In Gethsemane, when the bloody sweat fell fast upon the ground, His most bitter cry commenced with, "*My Father,*" asking that if it were possible the cup of gall might pass from Him, He pleaded with the Lord as His Father, even as He over and over again had called Him on that dark and doleful night.

Here, again, in this, the first of His seven expiring cries, it is "Father." O that the Spirit that makes us cry, "Abba, Father," may never cease His operations! May we never be brought into spiritual bondage by the suggestion, "If you are the Son of God," or if the tempter should so assail us, may we triumph as Jesus did in the hungry wilderness. May the Spirit which cries, "Abba, Father," repel each unbelieving fear when we are chastened, as we must be (for what son is there whom his father chastens not?) may we be in loving subjection to the Father of our spirits, and live, but never may we become captives to the spirit of bondage, so as to doubt the love of our gracious Father, or our share in His adoption.

More remarkable, however, is the fact that our Lord's prayer to His Father was not for Himself. He continued on the cross to pray for Himself, it is true, and His lamentable cry, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" shows the personality of His prayer, but the first of the seven great cries on the cross has scarcely even an indirect reference to Himself.

It is, "Father, forgive *them.*" The petition is altogether for others, and though there is an allusion to the cruelties which they were exercising upon Himself, yet it is remote, and you will observe, He does not say, "I forgive them"—that is taken for granted—He seems to lose sight of the fact that they were doing any wrong to Himself, it is the wrong which they were doing to the Father that is on His mind, the insult which they are paying to the Father, in the person of the Son, He thinks not of Himself at all.

The cry "Father, forgive them," is altogether unselfish. He Himself is, in the prayer, as though He were not, so complete is His self-annihilation, that He loses sight of Himself and His woes. My brethren, if there had ever been a time in the life of the Son of man when He might have rigidly confined His prayer to Himself, without anyone caviling thereat, surely it was when He was beginning His death throes.

We could not marvel, if any man here were fastened to the stake, or fixed to a cross, if his first, and even his last and all his prayers, were for support under so arduous a trial. But see, the Lord Jesus began His prayer by pleading for others. See you not what a great heart is here revealed! What a soul of compassion was in the Crucified! How Godlike, how divine! Was there ever such a one before Him who, even in the very pangs of death, offers as his first prayer an intercession for others? Let this unselfish spirit be in you also, my brethren. Look not every man upon his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Love your neighbors as yourselves, and as Christ has set before you this paragon of unselfishness, seek to follow Him, treading in His steps.

There is, however, a crowning jewel in this diadem of glorious love. The Sun of Righteousness sets upon Calvary in a wondrous splendor, but among the bright colors which glorify His departure, there is this one—the prayer was not alone for others, but it was for His cruelest enemies. His enemies, did I say, there is more than that to be considered. It was not a prayer for enemies who had done Him an ill deed years before, but for those who were then and there murdering Him.

Not in cold blood did the Savior pray, after He had forgotten the injury, and could the more easily forgive it, but while the first red drops of blood were spurting on the hands which drove the nails, while yet the hammer was stained with crimson gore, His blessed mouth poured out the fresh warm prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

I say not that that prayer was confined only to His immediate executioners. I believe that it was a far-reaching prayer, which included Scribes and Pharisees, Pilate and Herod, Jews and Gentiles—yea, the whole human race in a certain sense, since we were all concerned in that murder, but certainly the immediate persons, upon whom that prayer was poured like precious nard, were those who there and then were committing the brutal act of fastening Him to the accursed tree. How sublime is this prayer if viewed in such a light! It stands alone upon a mountain of solitary glory.

No other had prayer had been prayed like it before. It is true, Abraham, and Moses, and the prophets had prayed for the wicked, but not for wicked men who had pierced their hands and feet. It is true that Christians have since that day offered the same prayer, even as Stephen cried, “Lay not this sin to their charge,” and many a martyr has made his last words at the stake words of pitying intercession for his persecutors, but you know where they learned this, let me ask you where did *He* learn it? Was not Jesus the divine original? He learned it nowhere, it leaped up from His own Godlike nature. A Compassion peculiar to Himself dictated this originality of prayer, the inward royalty of His love suggested to Him so memorable an intercession, which may serve us for a pattern, but of which no pattern had existed before.

I feel as though I could better kneel before my Lord’s cross at this moment than stand in this pulpit to talk to you. I need to adore Him, I worship Him in heart for that prayer, if I knew nothing else of Him but this one prayer, I must adore Him, for that one matchless plea for mercy convinces me most overwhelmingly of the deity of Him who offered it, and fills my heart with reverent affection.

Thus have I introduced to you our Lord’s first vocal prayer upon the cross. I shall now, if we are helped by God’s Holy Spirit, make some use of it. First, we shall view it as *illustrative of our Savior’s intercession*, secondly, we shall regard the text as *instructive of the church’s work*, thirdly, we shall consider it as *suggestive to the unconverted*.

I. First, my dear brethren, let us look at this very wonderful text as ILLUSTRATIVE OF OUR LORD’S INTERCESSION.

He prayed for His enemies then, He is praying for His enemies now, the past on the cross was an earnest of the present on the throne. He is in a higher place, and in a nobler condition, but His occupation is the same, He continues still before the eternal throne to present pleas on the behalf of guilty men, crying, “Father, O forgive them.” All His intercession is in a measure, like the intercession on Calvary, and Calvary’s cries may help us to guess the character of the whole of His intercession above.

The first point in which we may see the character of His intercession is this—it is *most gracious*. Those, for whom our Lord prayed, according to the text, did not deserve His prayer. They had done nothing which could call forth from Him a benediction as a reward for their endeavors in His service, on the contrary, they were most undeserving persons, who had conspired to put Him to death. They had crucified Him, crucified Him wantonly and malignantly, they were even then taking away His innocent life. His clients were persons who, so far from being meritorious, were utterly undeserving of a single good wish from the Savior’s heart. They certainly never asked Him to pray for them—it was the last thought in their minds to say, “Intercede for us, You dying King! Offer petitions on our behalf, You Son of God!”

I will venture to believe the prayer itself, when they heard it, was either disregarded and passed over with contemptuous indifference or perhaps it was caught at as a theme for jest. I admit that it seems to be too severe upon humanity to suppose it possible that such a prayer could have been the theme for laughter, and yet there were other things enacted around the cross which were quite as brutal, and I can imagine that this also might have happened. Yet our Savior prayed for persons who did not deserve the prayer, but, on the contrary, merited a curse—persons who did not ask for the prayer, and even scoffed at it when they heard it. Even so in heaven there stands the great High Priest, who pleads for guilty men—for *guilty* men, my hearers.

There are none on earth who deserve His intercession. He pleads for none on the supposition that they do deserve it. He stands there to plead as the just One on the behalf of the unjust. Not if any man be righteous, but “if any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father.” Remember, too, that our great Intercessor pleads for such as never asked Him to plead for them. His elect, while yet dead in trespasses and sins, are the objects of His compassionate intercessions, and while they even scoff at His Gospel, His heart of love is entreating the favor of heaven on their behalf. See, then, beloved, if such be the truth, how sure are you to speed with God who earnestly asks the Lord Jesus Christ to plead for you.

Some of you with many tears and much earnestness have been beseeching the Savior to be your advocate. Will He refuse you? Stands it to reason that He can? He pleads for those that reject His pleadings, much more for you who prize them beyond gold. Remember, my dear hearer, if there be nothing good in you, and if there be everything conceivable that is malignant and bad, yet none of these things can be any barrier to prevent Christ's exercising the office of Intercessor for you. Even for you He will plead. Come, put your case into His hands, for you He will find pleas which you cannot discover for yourselves, and He will put the case to God for you as for His murderers, "Father, forgive them."

A second quality of His intercession is this—*its careful spirit*. You notice in the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," our Savior did as it were, look His enemies through and through to find something in them that He could urge in their favor, but He could see nothing until His wisely affectionate eye lit upon their ignorance, "they know not what they do." How carefully He surveyed the circumstances, and the characters of those for whom He persisted! Just so it is with Him in heaven. Christ is no careless advocate for His people. He knows your precise condition at this moment, and the exact state of your heart with regard to the temptation through which you are passing, more than that, He foresees the temptation which is awaiting you, and in His intercession He takes note of the future event which His prescient eye beholds. "Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not."

Oh, the condescending tenderness of our great High Priest! He knows us better than we know ourselves. He understands every secret grief and groan. You need not trouble yourself about the wording of your prayer, He will put the wording right. And even the understanding as to the exact petition, if you should fail in it, He cannot, for as He knows what is the mind of God, so He knows what is your mind also. He can spy out some reason for mercy in you which you cannot detect in yourselves, and when it is so dark and cloudy with your soul that you cannot discern a foothold for a plea that you may urge with heaven, the Lord Jesus has the pleas ready-framed, and petitions ready drawn up, and He can present them acceptable before the mercy seat. His intercession, then, you will observe is very gracious, and in the next place it is very thoughtful.

We must next note its *earnestness*. No one doubts who reads these words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," that they were heaven-piercing in their fervor. Brethren, you are certain, even without a thought that Christ was terribly in earnest in that prayer. But there is an argument to prove that. Earnest people are usually witty, and quick of understanding to discover anything which may serve their turn. If you are pleading for life, and an argument for your being spared is asked of you, I will warrant you that you will think of one when no one else might. Now, Jesus was so in earnest for the salvation of His enemies that He struck upon an argument for mercy which a less anxious spirit would not have thought of, "They know not what they do."

Why, sirs, that was in strictest justice but a scant reason for mercy, and indeed, ignorance, if it be willful, does not extenuate sin, and yet the ignorance of many who surrounded the cross was a willful ignorance. They might have known that He was the Lord of glory. Was not Moses plain enough! Had not Elijah been very bold in his speech? Were not the signs and tokens such that one might as well doubt which is the sun in the firmament as the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah? Yet, for all that, the Savior, with marvelous earnestness and consequent dexterity, turns what might not have been a plea into a plea, and puts it thus, "Father, forgive them, *for* they know not what they do."

Oh, how mighty are His pleas in heaven, then, in their earnestness! Do not suppose that He is less quick of understanding there, or less intense in the vehemence of His entreaties. No, my brethren, the heart of Christ still labors with the eternal God. He is no slumbering intercessor, but, for Zion's sake, He does not hold His peace, and for Jerusalem's sake, He does not cease, nor will He, till her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns.

It is interesting to note, in the fourth place, that the prayer here offered helps us to judge of His intercession in heaven as to its *continuance*, perseverance, and perpetuity. As I remarked before, if our Savior might have paused from intercessory prayer, it was surely when they fastened Him to the tree,

when they were guilty of direct acts of deadly violence to His divine person, He might then have ceased to present petitions on their behalf. But sin cannot tie the tongue of our interceding Friend.

Oh, what comfort is here! You have sinned, believer; you have grieved His Spirit, but you have not stopped that potent tongue which pleads for you. You have been unfruitful, perhaps, my brother, and like the barren tree, you deserve to be cut down, but your want of fruitfulness has not withdrawn the Intercessor from His place. He interposes at this moment, crying, "Spare it yet another year."

Sinner, you have provoked God by long rejecting His mercy, and going from bad to worse, but neither blasphemy nor unrighteousness, nor infidelity, shall stay the Christ of God from urging the suit of the very chief of sinners. He lives, and while He lives, He pleads, and while there is a sinner upon earth to be saved, there shall be an intercessor in heaven to plead for him. These are but fragments of thought, but they will help you, I hope, to realize the intercession of your great High Priest.

Think yet again, this prayer of our Lord on earth is like His prayer in heaven because of its *wisdom*. He seeks the best thing, and that which His clients most need, "Father, *forgive* them." That was the great point in hand, they wanted most of all there and then *forgiveness* from God. He does not say, "Father, enlighten them, for they know not what they do," for mere enlightenment would but have created torture of conscience and hastened on their hell, but He cries, "Father, forgive," and while He used His voice, the precious drops of blood which were then distilling from the nail wounds were pleading too, and God heard, and doubtless did forgive.

The first mercy which is needful to guilty sinners is forgiven sin. Christ wisely prays for the gift most wanted. It is so in heaven, He pleads wisely and prudently. Let Him alone, He knows what to ask for at the divine hand. Go to the mercy seat, and pour out your desires as best you can, but when you have done always put it thus, "O my Lord Jesus, answer no desire of mine if it is not according to Your judgment, and if in aught that I have asked I have failed to seek for what I want, amend my pleading, for You are infinitely wiser than I."

Oh, it is sweet to have a friend at court to perfect our petitions for us before they come unto the great King. I believe that there is never presented to God anything but a perfect prayer, I mean that before the Great Father of us all, no prayer of His people ever comes up imperfect. There is nothing left out, and there is nothing to be erased, and this, not because their prayers were originally perfect in themselves, but because the Mediator makes them perfect through His infinite wisdom, and they come up before the mercy seat molded according to the mind of God Himself, and He is sure to grant such prayers.

Once more, this memorable prayer of our crucified Lord was like to His universal intercession in the matter of its *prevalence*. Those for whom He prayed were many of them forgiven. Do you remember that He said to His disciples when He bade them preach, "beginning at Jerusalem," and on that day when Peter stood up with the eleven, and charged the people that with wicked hands they had crucified and slain the Savior, three thousand of these persons who were thus justly accused of His crucifixion became believers in Him, and were baptized in His name. That was an answer to Jesus' prayer.

The priests were at the bottom of our Lord's murder, they were the most guilty, but it is said, "a great company also of the priests believed." Here was another answer to the prayer. Since all men had their share representatively, Gentiles as well as Jews, in the death of Jesus, the Gospel was soon preached to the Jews, and within a short time it was preached to the Gentiles also.

Was not this prayer, "Father, forgive them," like a stone cast into a lake, forming at first a narrow circle, and then a wider ring, and soon a larger sphere, until the whole lake is covered with circling waves? Such a prayer as this, cast into the whole world, first created a little ring of Jewish converts and of priests, and then a wider circle of such as were beneath the Roman sway, and today its circumference is as wide as the globe itself, so that tens of thousands are saved through the prevalence of this one intercession, "Father, forgive them."

It is certainly so with Him in heaven, He never pleads in vain. With bleeding hands, He yet won the day, with feet fastened to the wood, He was yet victorious, forsaken of God and despised of the people, He was yet triumphant in His pleas. How much more so now the tiara is about His brow, His hand

grasps the universal scepter, and His feet are shod with silver sandals, and He is crowned King of kings, and Lord of lords! If tears and cries out of weakness were omnipotent, even more mighty if possible must be that sacred authority which as the risen Priest He claims when He stands before the Father's throne to mention the covenant which the Father made with Him.

O you trembling believers, trust Him with your concerns! Come hither, you guilty, and ask him to plead for you. O you that cannot pray, come, ask Him to intercede for you. Broken hearts and weary heads, and disconsolate bosoms, come to Him who into the golden censer will put His merits, and then place your prayers with them so that they shall come up as the smoke of perfume, even as a fragrant cloud into the nostrils of the Lord God of hosts, who will smell a sweet savor, and accept you and your prayers in the Beloved. We have now opened up more than enough room for your meditations at home this afternoon, and, therefore we leave this first point. We have had an illustration in the prayer of Christ on the cross of what His prayers always are in heaven.

II. Secondly, the text is INSTRUCTIVE OF THE CHURCH'S WORK.

As Christ was, so His church is to be in this world. Christ came into this world not to be ministered unto, but to minister, not to be honored, but to save others. His church, when she understands her work, will perceive that she is not here to gather to herself wealth or honor, or to seek any temporal aggrandizement and position, she is here unselfishly to live, and if necessary, unselfishly to die for the deliverance of the lost sheep, the salvation of lost men. Brethren, Christ's prayer on the cross I told you was altogether an unselfish one. He does not remember Himself in it. Such ought to be the church's life-prayer, the church's active interposition on the behalf of sinners. She ought to live never for her ministers, or for herself, but ever for the lost sons of men. Imagine you that churches are formed to maintain ministers? Do you conceive that the church exists in this land merely that so much salary may be given to bishops, and deans, and prebends, and curates, and I know not what?

My brethren, it were well if the whole thing were abolished if that were its only aim. The aim of the church is not to provide out-door relief for the younger sons of the nobility, when they have not brains enough to win anyhow else their livelihood, they are not stuck into family livings. Churches are not made that men of ready speech may stand up on Sundays and talk, and so win daily bread from their admirers. Nay, there is another end and aim from this. These places of worship are not built that you may sit here comfortably, and hear something that shall make you pass away your Sundays with pleasure.

A church in London which does not exist to do good in the slums, and dens, and kennels of the city, is a church that has no reason to justify its longer existing. A church that does not exist to reclaim heathenism, to fight with evil, to destroy error, to put down falsehood, a church that does not exist to take the side of the poor, to denounce injustice and to hold up righteousness, is a church that has no right to be.

Not for yourself, O church, do you exist, any more than Christ existed for Himself. His glory was that He laid aside His glory, and the glory of the church is when she lays aside her respectability and her dignity, and counts it to be her glory to gather together the outcasts, and her highest honor to seek amid the foulest mire the priceless jewels for which Jesus shed His blood. To rescue souls from hell, and lead them to God, to hope, to heaven, this is her heavenly occupation. O that the church would always feel this! Let her have her bishops and her preachers, and let them be supported, and let everything be done for Christ's sake decently and in order, but let the end be looked to, namely, the conversion of the wandering, the teaching of the ignorant, the help of the poor, the maintenance of the right, the putting down of the wrong, and the upholding at all hazards of the crown and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the prayer of Christ had a *great spirituality of aim*. You notice that nothing is sought for these people but that which concerns their souls, "Father *forgive* them." And I believe the church will do well when she recollects that she wrestles not with flesh and blood, nor with principalities and powers, but with spiritual wickedness, and that what she has to dispense is not the law and order by which magistrates may be upheld, or tyrannies pulled down, but the spiritual government by which hearts are

conquered to Christ, and judgments are brought into subjection to His truth. I believe that the more the church of God strains after, before God, the forgiveness of sinners, and the more she seeks in her life prayer to teach sinners what sin is, and what the blood of Christ is, and what the hell that must follow if sin is not washed out, and what the heaven is which will be ensured to all those who are cleansed from sin, the more she keeps to this the better.

Press forward as one man, my brethren, to secure the root of the matter in the forgiveness of sinners. As to all the evils that afflict humanity, by all means take your share in battling with them, let temperance be maintained, let education be supported, let reforms, political and ecclesiastical, be pushed forward as far as you have the time and effort to spare, but the first business of every Christian man and woman is with the hearts and consciences of men as they stand before the everlasting God. O let nothing turn you aside from your divine errand of mercy to undying souls.

This is your one business. Tell sinners that sin will damn them, that Christ alone can take away sin, and make this the one passion of your souls, "Father, forgive them, forgive them! Let them know how to be forgiven. Let them be actually forgiven, and let me never rest except as I am the means of bringing sinners to be forgiven, even the guiltiest of them."

Our Savior's prayer teaches the church that while her spirit should be unselfish, and her aim should be spiritual, *the range of her mission* is to be unlimited. Christ prayed for the wicked, what if I say the most wicked of the wicked, that ribald crew that had surrounded His cross! He prayed for the ignorant. Does He not say, "They know not what they do"? He prayed for His persecutors, the very persons who were most at enmity with Him, lay nearest to His heart.

Church of God, your mission is not to the respectable few who will gather about your ministers to listen respectfully to their words, your mission is not to the *elite* and the eclectic, the intelligent who will criticize your words and pass judgment upon every syllable of your teaching, your mission is not to those who treat you kindly, generously, affectionately, not to these I mean alone, though certainly to these as among the rest. But your great errand is to the harlot, to the thief, to the swearer, and the drunkard, to the most depraved and debauched.

If no one else cares for these, the church always must, and if there are any who are first in her prayers it should be these who alas! are generally last in our thoughts. The ignorant we ought diligently to consider. It is not enough for the preacher that he preaches so that those instructed from their youth up can understand him, he must think of those to whom the most common phrases of theological truth are as meaningless as the jargon of an unknown tongue, he must preach so as to reach the meanest comprehension, and if the ignorant many come not to hear him, he must use such means as best he may to induce them, nay, compel them to hear the good news.

The Gospel is meant also for those who persecute religion, it aims its arrows of love against the hearts of its foes. If there be any whom we should first seek to bring to Jesus, it should be just these who are the farthest off and most opposed to the Gospel of Christ. "Father, forgive *them*, if You pardon none besides, yet be pleased to forgive *them*."

So, too, the church should be *earnest* as Christ was, and if she be so, she will be quick to notice any ground of hope in those she deals with, quick to observe any plea that she may use with God for their salvation.

She must be *hopeful* too, and surely no church ever had a more hopeful sphere than the church of this present age. If ignorance is a plea with God, look on the heathen at this day—millions of them never heard Messiah's name. Forgive them, great God, indeed they know not what they do. If ignorance be some ground for hope, there is hope enough in this great city of London, for have we not around us hundreds of thousands to whom the simplest truths of the Gospel would be the greatest novelties? Brethren, it is sad to think that this country should still lie under such a pall of ignorance, but the sting of so dread a fact is blunted with hope when we read the Savior's prayer aright—it helps us to hope while we cry, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

It is the church's business to seek after the most fallen and the most ignorant, and to seek them perseveringly. She should never stay her hand from doing good. If the Lord be coming tomorrow, it is no reason why you Christian people should subside into mere talkers and readers, meeting together for mutual comfort, and forgetting the myriads of perishing souls. If it be true that this world is going to pieces in a fortnight, and that Louis Napoleon is the Apocalyptic beast, or even if it be not true, I care not a fig, it makes no difference to my duty, and does not change my service.

Let my Lord come when He will, while I labor for Him I am ready for His appearing. The business of the church is still to watch for the salvation of souls. If she stood gazing, as modern prophets would have her, if she gave up her mission to indulge in speculative interpretations, she might well be afraid of her Lord's coming, but if she goes about her work, and with incessant toil searches out her Lord's precious jewels, she shall not be ashamed when her Bridegroom comes.

My time has been much too short for so vast a subject as I have undertaken, but I wish I could speak words that were as loud as thunder, with a sense and earnestness as mighty as the lightning. I would fain excite every Christian here, and kindle in him a right idea of what his work is as a part of Christ's church. My brethren, you must not live to yourselves, the accumulation of money, the bringing up of your children, the building of houses, the earning of your daily bread, all this you may do, but there must be a greater objective than this if you are to be Christ-like, as you should be, since you are bought with Jesus' blood. Begin to live for others, make it apparent unto all men that you are not yourselves the end-all and be-all of your own existence, but that you are spending and being spent, that through the good you do to men God may be glorified, and Christ may see in you His own image and be satisfied.

III. Time fails me, but the last point was to be a word SUGGESTIVE TO THE UNCOVETED.

Listen attentively to these sentences. I will make them as terse and condensed as possible. Some of you here are not saved. Now, some of you have been very ignorant, and when you sinned you did not know what you did. You knew you were sinners, you knew that, but you did not know the far-reaching guilt of sin. You have not been attending the house of prayer long, you have not read your Bible, you have not Christian parents. Now you are beginning to be anxious about your souls.

Remember your ignorance does not excuse you, or else Christ would not say, "Forgive them," they must be forgiven, even those who know not what they do, hence they are individually guilty, but still that ignorance of yours gives you just a little gleam of hope. The times of your ignorance God winked at, but now commands all men everywhere to repent. Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance. The God whom you have ignorantly forgotten is willing to pardon, and ready to forgive. The Gospel is just this, trust Jesus Christ who died for the guilty, and you shall be saved. O may God help you to do so this very morning, and you will become new men and new women, a change will take place in you equal to a new birth, you will be new creatures in Christ Jesus.

But ah! my friends, there are some here for whom even Christ Himself could not pray this prayer, in the widest sense at any rate, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," for you have known what you did, and every sermon you hear, and especially every impression that is made upon your understanding and conscience by the Gospel adds to your responsibility, and takes away from you the excuse of not knowing what you do. Ah! sirs, you know that there is the world and Christ, and that you cannot have both. You know that there is sin and God, and that you cannot serve both. You know that there are the pleasures of evil and the pleasures of heaven, and that you cannot have both. Oh! in the light which God has given you, may His Spirit also come and help you to choose that which true wisdom would make you choose. Decide today for God, for Christ, for heaven. The Lord decide You for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 23:1-3

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.