

DIVINE LOVE AND ITS GIFTS

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A SERMON
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“Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which has loved us, and has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work.”
2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17.

THE Thessalonians had been much disturbed by the predictions of different persons that the day of Christ was at hand. There always have been pretenders to prophetic knowledge, who have fixed dates for the end of the world, and by their fanaticism, have driven many into lunatic asylums and disturbed the peace of others; some of this band had worried the saints at Thessalonica. The Apostle, after beseeching them not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled by such follies, went on to beg them not to be deceived by forged letters or pretended prophets, and then prayed for them that they might possess abiding consolation, which would keep them calmly persevering in holiness. His prayer is singularly emphatic; he cries to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and to God, even our Father, to comfort their hearts, that by such consolations they may be so confirmed that nothing may cause them to decline from any holy enterprise or testimony. Perhaps, during their fright some of them had ceased from service, reckoning it vain to go on with anything when the world was so near its end; therefore, Paul would have them calmed in spirit that they might diligently persevere in their Christian course. That which frightens us from duty cannot be a good thing; true comfort establishes us in every good word and work.

It is an ill wind which blows no one any good. We owe to the needless alarms of the Thessalonians this prayer, which while it was useful for them, is also instructive for us, and I pray that while we look into it, we may be led into deep thoughts of the love of God, and not into thoughts only, but into a personal enjoyment of that love, so that this morning the love of God may be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us. To hear of the love of God is sweet—to believe it most precious—but to enjoy it is Paradise below the skies! May God grant us a taste this morning.

I shall first call your earnest attention to the *blessed fact* recorded in our text, that “our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, loved us.” Then we will dwell upon the *past manifestations* of that love—“He has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” And then we shall dwell for a while upon *the prayer* which Paul based upon this love and its manifestation, “that God would comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work.”

I. First, then, dear brethren, let me ask your hearts, as well as your minds, to consider THIS GLORIOUS FACT—“Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, has loved us.” I cannot help repeating my frequent remark that the love of God is a theme more fit for the solitary contemplation of each person, than for public utterance or explanation. It is to be felt, but it never can be uttered. Who can speak of love? In what language shall we sing its sweetness? No other word, nor set of words, can utter its meaning. You may go round about, and make a long definition, but you have not defined it—and he who never felt his heart glow with it will remain an utter stranger to it, depict it as you may. Love must be felt in the heart; it cannot be learned from a dictionary. “God has loved us.” I want you not so much to follow what I shall have to say upon that wonderful fact, as to try and think over this thought for yourselves. God has loved us. Drink into that truth. Take the word, lay it under your tongue, and let it dissolve like a wafer made with honey till it sweetens all your soul.

God has *loved* us? Let me remark that it does not say, “He pitied us.” That would be true, for, “Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him.” Pity is one degree below love, and often leads to it, but it is not love—you may pity a person whom apart from his sufferings, you would heartily dislike. You cannot endure the man, yet you are sorrowful that he should be so pained. Nor does the text declare that God has had mercy upon us. I could comprehend that, yes, and bless God forever, because His mercy endures forever. It is, to my mind, quite understandable that the good and gracious God should be merciful towards His creatures—but it is a far greater thing that He should *love* them. Love is a feeling vastly more to be valued than mere mercy. Merciful is a man to his beast, but he does not love it! Merciful has many a man been to his enemies for whom he has had no degree of affection. But God does not merely pity us, and have mercy upon us, He *loves* us. Neither can this word be bartered for that of benevolence. There is an aspect under which God is love to all His creatures because He is benevolent, and wishes well towards all things that He has made. But Paul was not thinking of that when he said, “God has loved us, and given us everlasting consolation.” A mother is not said to be benevolent towards her child, nor a husband coldly benevolent towards his bride; benevolence would be a poor, poor substitute for love! Love is as infinitely beyond benevolence as the gold of kings in value exceeds the stone of the quarry. We have frequently heard theologians declare that the love of God towards His elect is the love of complacency, and the statement, though perhaps true, is most frosty. One would not like to strike out the word, “love,” and put in its place the word, “complacency.” It would be like setting up a globe of ice in the place of the sun. Love glows with sunlight—complacency has, at best, but cold moon-like beams. No, we must hold to the words, “has *loved* us.” Truly, the Lord has complacency in His people as He sees them in Christ, but He has much more than that. He is benevolent towards His people, and towards all creatures, but He is much more than that towards us! He is merciful, He is pitiful, He is everything that is good, but He is more than that—He “has *loved* us.” You know, mother, how you look upon that dear child of yours as you hold it in your arms. Why, it seems a part of you. You love it as you love yourself, and your thoughts of it do not differ from your thoughts about your own welfare—the child is intertwined with your very being. Now God also has united us to Himself by cords of love, and bonds of affection, and He thinks of us as He thinks of Himself. I can express this, but I cannot explain it. Even now I feel much more inclined to sit down and weep for joy of heart that God could ever love me than to try and speak to you. He made the heavens, and I am less than the smallest speck—yet He loves me. It is His eternal arm that has held up the universe in all ages, and I am as a leaf of the forest, green a while, but soon to grow yellow and to be buried with my fellows, yet the Eternal *loves* me, and always will love me. With His great infinite heart He loves me! As a God He loves me, divinely loves me. It is a conquering thought; it utterly overcomes us, and crushes us with its weight of joy; it bows us to the ground, and casts us into a swoon of ecstasy when it is realized by the mind, “God, even our Father, has loved us.”

Now, permit the other side of the thought to shine upon your minds. The marvel is not merely that God has loved, but that he has loved *us!* And we are so insignificant, so frail, so foolish, and let us add—for this increases the marvel—so sinful, and therefore so uncomely, so ungrateful, and therefore so provoking, so willfully obstinate in returning to old sins again, and so deserve to be abhorred and rejected! I can imagine the Lord’s love to the apostles. We can sometimes think of His love to the early saints without any great wonder, and of His love to the patriarchs, and to the confessors, and the martyrs, and to some eminently holy men whose biographies have charmed us—but that our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself God, even our Father, should have loved *us* is a world of wonders! And if I put it into the singular number, and say, “Who loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*,” it shall ever stand first of all miracles to my soul’s apprehension, that I should be the object of divine affection. Dear brothers and sisters, I leave this meditation with you, I cannot speak of it, I beseech you to baptize your souls into it, and to let this one thought overwhelm you this day—“God, even our Father, has loved us.”

Let me carry your minds onward a little further. Remember that the eternal love of God is the great fountain and source from which proceed all the spiritual blessings which we enjoy. If you stand at the

source of a great river like the Thames, you see nothing there but a tiny rivulet—the fact being that we do but by courtesy speak of that little brook as the source of the river. It is only a very partial source. A great river derives its volume of water from a thousand streams, and is sustained by the whole of the watershed along which it flows. The imaginary fountainhead of a river is therefore but a small affair. But suppose the Thames had never borrowed from a single stream in its entire course, but welled up at once a full-grown river from one fountainhead? What a sight it would be! Now the mercy of God to us in Christ Jesus owes nothing to any other stream; it leaps in all its fullness from the infinite depths of the love of God to us, and if in contemplation you can travel to that great deep, profound and unfathomable, and see welling up all the floods of covenant grace, which afterwards flow on forever to all the chosen seed, you have before you that which angels to wonder. If it would be marvelous to see one river leap up from the earth full-grown, what would it be to gaze upon a vast spring from which all the rivers of the earth should at once come bubbling up, a thousand of them born at once? What a vision it would be! Who can conceive it! And yet the love of God is that fountain from which all the rivers of mercy which have ever gladdened our race—all the rivers of grace in time and of glory hereafter—take their rise. My soul, stand at that sacred fountainhead and adore and magnify forever and ever, “God, even our Father, who has loved us.”

Now please notice the words of the text, for they are full of instruction. When speaking of this love, the apostle joins our Lord Jesus Christ Himself with, “God, even our Father.” He honored the deity of Jesus by speaking of Him side by side, and on terms of equality with God the Father. But there is more here than this, for the words remind us that our Lord Jesus Christ and God, even our Father, act in holy concert in the matters which concern our welfare. Jesus Christ is the gift of the Father’s love to us, but Jesus Himself loved His own, and laid down His life for His flock. It is true that the Son loves us, but the Father Himself loves us, too. The love of God does not come to us from one person of the blessed Trinity alone, but from all. We ought to make no distinctions by way of preference in the love of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. One love dwells in the breast of the one undivided Three. We must adore and bless our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, even our Father, with equal gratitude.

Still notice that Jesus Christ is here put first, and if the reason is requested, we find it in His mediatorial office. He is first to us in our experience. We began our dealings with heaven, not by going to the Father, but to His Son, Jesus Christ. Our Lord has truly said, “No man comes unto the Father but by Me.” All attempts to get to commune with the Father, except through the Son, must be futile. Election by the Father is not first to us, though it stands forth in order of time; redemption by the Son is our starting point. Not at the throne of sovereignty, but at the cross of dying love, our spiritual life must date its birth. Look to Jesus first, even our Lord Jesus Christ, and then follow after the Father. I am sure every converted soul here knows that this is the truth, and I would exhort everyone who is seeking salvation, to take care to observe God’s order. And remember that the love of the Father will never be perceived by us, nor felt in our hearts, till first of all we go to Jesus Christ, who is the one mediator between God and man.

Note the words of the text again: the love of God to us gives to us the Lord Jesus to be our own Savior, friend, husband, and Lord. By grace we obtain possession of Jesus Christ; Christ is ours. Observe the Lord, “*Our* Lord Jesus Christ.” The apostle might have written, “*The* Lord Jesus Christ,” but when he was testifying of the great love of God, the article would not have sufficed—he must use a word of possession. Faith looks to Jesus and finds salvation in that look. Then she grows into assurance, and having used her eyes to look with, she next employs her hands to grasp with. She takes hold of Jesus and says: “He is all *my* Salvation, He is all *my* desire, and He is *my* Christ.” And from then on assurance speaks not of *the* Lord Jesus Christ, but of *our* Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to drink into the love of God this morning from the silver pipe of this thought—Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal God, who is also a man like yourself, is yours, altogether yours. If you are believers in Him, He is from head to foot entirely yours! In all His offices, in all His attributes, in all that He is, in all that He has done, in all that He is doing, in all that He shall do, He is your Savior. Though you cannot take Him up in your arms as

Simeon did, yet your faith can embrace Him with the same ecstasy, and feel that you have seen God's salvation. Behold what manner of love is revealed in this, that God should give His only Son to us. God commends His love to us by this unspeakable gift. Here love has reached its climax. Blessed be the love of God this morning and forevermore.

Observe that this love displays itself in another shape, for the text goes on to say, "And God, even our Father." He might have said, "God, even the Father." I have no doubt the text does refer to the Father as one person of the blessed Trinity, but it runs thus—"even *our* Father." A father! There is music in that word, but not to a fatherless child—to him it is full of sorrowful memories. Those who have never lost a father can scarcely know how precious a relation a father is. Indeed, a father who is a father is very dear! Do we not remember how we climbed his knees? Do we not remember the kisses we imprinted on his cheeks? Do we not recall with gratitude the chidings of his wisdom, and the gentle encouragements of his affection? We owe, ah, who shall tell how much we owe to our fathers according to the flesh—and when they are taken from us, we lament their loss, and feel that a great gap is made in our family circle. Listen, then, to these words, "Our Father, who is in heaven." Consider the grace contained in the Lord's deigning to take us into the relationship of children, and giving us with the relationship, the nature and the spirit of children, so that we say, "Abba, Father." Did you ever lie in bed with your limbs vexed with pains, and cry, "Father, pity Your child?" Did you ever look into the face of death, and as you thought you were about to depart, cry, "My Father, help me! Uphold me with Your gracious hand, and bear me through the stream of death"? It is at such times that we realize the glory of the Fatherhood of God, and in our feebleness learn to cling to the divine strength, and catch at the divine love. It is most precious to think that God is our own Father! There, now, I cannot talk about it. Upon some themes it would be hard to be silent, but here it is hard to speak. I can but exclaim, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God!" And, having said that, what more remains?

Before I turn from this gracious and fruitful topic of the love of God, I beg you to notice that it is no new thing, no affair of yesterday. "Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, *has* loved us." He does not tell us when this love began, and he could not have done so had he tried. He has loved us; loved us when first we came to Him repenting; loved us when we were spending our living with harlots; loved us when we were at the swine trough; loved us when from head to foot we were one mass of defilement. O God, did You love me when I played the rebel? Did You love me when I could blaspheme Your name? What manner of love is this? Yes, and He loved us before we had a being. He loved us and redeemed us long before we existed. He loved us before this world had sprung out of nothingness. He loved us before the daystar first proclaimed the morning. He loved us before any of the angels had begun to cover their faces with their wings in reverent adoration. From everlasting, the Lord loved His people. Now, again I say, drink into this truth—feed on it. Expect us not to speak at length about it, but contemplate the fact—"Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, has loved us."

II. Now we shall turn to the second point which is THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THIS LOVE. They divide under two heads—"Everlasting consolation" and "good hope through grace."

First, God's love has given us everlasting consolation. The Lord found us wretched; when the arrows of conviction were sticking in our hearts, we were bleeding to death, and what we needed, first of all, was to have these wounds staunch. Therefore the Lord came to us with consolations. Do you remember the time when the blood of Jesus Christ flowed warm over your wounds, and made them cease to bleed? Have you forgotten the hour when you heard the voice of the Lord saying in the word, "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned," and you were enabled to see Jesus Christ as your substitute suffering in your place, and you knew that your sins were forgiven for His name's sake? You have not forgotten that, have you? Well, that was one of the everlasting consolations which He gave you in the time of your distress. Since that day you have had your sorrows, perhaps you have seldom been long without them, but consolation has always followed on the heels of tribulation, and your main consolation has continued to be where it was at the first—you still find the sweetest joy on earth to be

looking to Jesus. When sin rebels, you put it down by the same grace which overthrew it at the first. Conscience starts and accuses you, and you answer its accusations with that sweet word, “Jesus died for our transgressions, and rose again for our justification.” The greatest delight of all is that this consolation is an everlasting one; other sources of comfort dry up; friends have called to visit you in times of distress, and have suggested pleasant thoughts that have whiled away a mournful hour, but your griefs have returned again, and the passing comfort has been of no further service to you. When a man sees that Jesus Christ took all his sins, and was punished for them, so that the man can never be punished again—when he understands that wondrous mystery of substitution—then he gets a consolation which serves him at all times and in all weathers. Whatever may occur to him, he flies to this refuge—and even though he may have fallen into great sin, he knows that the atonement was not made for sham sin, but for real sin, and he resorts again to that same fountain filled with blood where he was once washed, resting fully assured that it will be equal to the washing of him as long as he shall be capable of sin; “Everlasting consolation!” There are some here present who have tried this consolation for 40 or 50 years; dear brothers and sisters, I am sure you do not find it is any the weaker, but on the contrary, you understand more of its strength. You are happier today in falling back upon the love of God than you were, and at this moment you feel that in the absence of all other comforts, it would suffice you to know that everlasting consolation which is given you in Christ Jesus.

Let us run over, for a moment, some of our consolations. The first one is, as I have already said, that God has forgiven us all our transgressions because Jesus died in our place. The next consolation is that God loves us, and can never change in His love—

*“Whom once He loves, He never leaves,
But loves them to the end.”*

Then we have the grand consolation that the promises of God do not depend upon our faithfulness for their fulfillment, but are all established and made yes and amen in Christ Jesus. We have this consolation—that our salvation does not depend upon ourselves. As we fell and were lost by the first Adam’s unrighteousness, so we have risen and are saved through the second Adam’s righteousness, beyond all risk and fear of perishing. We stand upon a firm foundation, not on the shifting sand of creature obedience and faithfulness, but upon the eternal rock of a work which Christ has completed, and over which He sang that joyous paean—“It is finished”—before He entered into His rest.

We have, also, this consolation, that all things work together for good for us who love God, and are the called according to His purpose. And again, this other consolation, that as long as Christ exists, we are safe, for He has said, “Because I live, you shall live also.” We also have this consolation, that even though we shall sleep in the dust for a while, yet He has said it, “I will that they, also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.” In fact, to tell you all the consolations which God has given us would need many an hour! And fully to enjoy them will occupy your entire lives, for everlasting consolation is not to be spread out before you and done within the short space of a sermon. Thus much upon one of the first manifestations of divine love.

The next is, He has given us “good hope.” Consolation for the present; hope for the future. “Good hope,” the hope when days and years are past, we all shall meet in heaven; the hope that whatever the future may be, it is full of bliss for us; the hope of immortality for our souls, and of resurrection for our bodies, for when Christ shall come, we also, who sleep in Jesus, shall come with Him; the hope of reigning with Jesus Christ on earth in the days of His triumph, and reigning with Him forever and ever in endless happiness. This is our hope, a good hope, for it is based and founded on a good foundation. A fanatic’s hope will pass away with the vapors which produced it, but the hope of the true believer is good, because it is founded in truth and in grace. “A good hope in grace,” is the Greek. If I believed in my own merit, and based my hopes on them, I should be only self-deceived and blinded, for what merit have I? But if my hope is fixed alone in grace, and that is the sphere in which my consolation and hope are found, then, since God is assuredly gracious, since He has made a covenant of grace with all believers, since He has ratified the covenant by the gift of His own Son, and since He has sworn by His

holiness, our hope founded on His grace is a good hope, and since God will be as good as His word, our hope in grace is good! Here stands the fact—it is written, “He who believes in the Lord Jesus has everlasting life.” God has covenanted with man that he shall be saved eternally, and since God cannot lie, the believing man must and shall be saved. Why is it, do you think, that some believer’s hopes flicker? It is because they get away from a hope in grace, and look towards themselves and their own merits. “Oh,” they say, “I have not prayed as I did; I do not feel as I did; therefore, my hope declines.” Friend, was your hope founded on your prayers? Was your hope grounded in part upon your feelings? If so, it may well quiver and tremble. One of these days it will go down altogether, for the foundation is not able to bear its weight. But if my hope is fixed on this—that God has promised, and cannot change His promise, then I have a good foundation to build on. He will not alter the thing that has gone forth out of His mouth. He has said, “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved,” and He cannot change His own word. Therefore every believer has the promise of eternal life. “But,” says one, “it surprises me to hear you talk so,” Does it? It much more surprises me that I may so speak. It is marvelous to the last degree that God, even our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ should have given us such a hope as this. I never feel at all astonished at some people’s hope when I find that it is this—the hope that if they behave themselves they will get to heaven—the hope that if they are faithful, God will be faithful. Why, any simpleton might have imagined such a hope as that. But a divine revelation was needed to set before us the great hope of the gospel, and it needs grace-given faith to believe that God will not change or lie, and therefore, must save all those who have believed in His Son Jesus Christ. He cannot allow one of the sheep of Christ to perish, or His promise will be of no effect. “If I believed that,” says one, “it would cause me to lead a careless life.” Perhaps it would, but it does not lead true believers to do so. On the contrary, we feel that if God loves us so, and deals so generously with us, and takes us right away from the whips of Sinai and the covenant of the law, and places us entirely under grace, we love Him as we never loved before. And because of His love, sin is hateful to us, and we shun it as a deadly thing! The law which you think would drive men to holiness has never done it, while the grace which you imagine would lead us to licentiousness, binds us with solemn bonds of consecration to serve our God 10 times more than before! Suppose someone were to tell my children that the continuance of my love to them will depend entirely upon their good behavior. My children would repel the suggestion with indignation. They would answer, “We know better! You speak falsely! Our father will always love us.” Even so, the Lord’s children know that their Father’s love is immutable. For our transgressions, our heavenly Father will visit us with the rod, but never with the sword. He will be angry with us, and chide us, but He will love us just as much when He is angry as He did before. And as long as ever we are His sons—and that we always must be, for sonship is not a relationship which will ever change—so long will He love us. Do you think that children become disobedient because their relationship is unchangeable? I never heard of such a thing. They have many reasons for being disobedient within their own little wayward hearts, but no child disobeys his father because he always must be his father’s child, or because his father loves him. I have heard of one child who said to another, “Come with me, John, and rob such an orchard; your father is so kind he will not beat you if you are found out.” The little lad drew himself up, and said, “Do you think because my father is kind to me, that I will go and vex him?” This is the holy reasoning of love—it draws no license from grace, but rather feels the strong constraints of gratitude leading it to holiness. It may be that in unregenerate hearts the love of God, if it could come there, would be turned into an excuse for sin, but it is not so to us, my brethren. Since the grace of God has made us new creatures in Christ Jesus, the love of God constrains us not to sin, but to walk in holiness all our days. Blessed be His name, then, for we are not ashamed to rejoice that God, even our Father, has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope in grace.

III. The last thing is THE PRAYER flowing out of all this. The apostle prays, and we pray this morning, that God would comfort your hearts. This is not spoken of everybody, but of such as believe in the Lord Jesus. It is of the utmost importance that your hearts should be comforted. Cheerfulness, habitual calm, peace of mind, content of spirit—these ought to be the very atmosphere you breathe, and

Paul thinks it so important that he prays that God Himself, and Christ Himself, may comfort your hearts. I know you have many troubles—how very few are altogether without them! Some of you are very poor; others suffer heavy losses in business and exercises of soul, with much trial in the world, and in the church. I pray the good Lord comfort your hearts, speaking not to your ears only, but to your innermost nature. “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Why, surely, if you believe that God loves you, it ought to make your heart glad. And if He gives you everlasting consolation, you cannot be otherwise than happy. I remember well when I was under a sense of sin looking at a dog, and wishing I were such as he, that I might die without fear of judgment hereafter, for it seemed so awful a thing to live on forever as a sinner. But now, on the other hand, I have sometimes looked at the happiest animals, and I have said to myself, “Ah, but yonder poor creature does not know the love of God, and how thankful I am to God that He has given me the capacity to know Him. Why, if I could hear of an angel in heaven who did not know the love of God, I should pity him. There are kings and mighty emperors who know not the Lord’s love and what poor, pitiable creatures they are. But as for you who rejoice in divine love, I would have you go into the darkest alley, if you are forced to live there, and undergo the most wearisome toil if that is your lot—yes, and go home to a persecuting husband, or a churlish father, and yet hear melodious music ringing in your hearts, for—“God, even our Father, which has loved us, has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” This is enough to make the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose.

The next part of the prayer is that the “Lord would establish us in every good word and work.” I see that the most approved editions of the original have it, “in every good work and word,” putting the best first. And the thought is this, that God would make His people so happy that they would never have an inclination to leave off any good work or word. Depression of spirit often leads to slackness of hand. No doubt many, through sad hearts, have ceased to labor for Christ. A lack of gladness has restrained their activity. Now, the apostle would not have any one of us cease from serving God in good works, or in good words through a lack of consolation. Does God love you? Do you know it? How, then, can you cease from any good work? Did enemies abuse you for speaking the truth? Did you say it because you felt you loved God? Say it again! Say it again! Did you work in your class without success? Did you do it because God loved you, and you wanted to show that you loved Him? Go on, Brother! Go on, Sister! Success or no success! God loves you, and He has given you everlasting consolation, therefore be established in your good work. Have you been accustomed to sing His praises, and has the devil said, “Leave off! Leave off!”? Have you been accustomed to rebuke sin, and to tell others about the Savior in your own poor way, and are you getting low in spirit? Do you doubt your own interest in Christ? Have you lost the comfort you once enjoyed? O, dear brother, sister, come back to the old original source of happiness—“Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which has loved us, and given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” After refreshing yourself with this blessed truth, you will return with renewed energy to good words and works, and continue in them steadfast, unmovable—till life’s allotted service shall come to a close.

Now and then we become greatly disheartened about the condition of the church. I know I do. I see everywhere Popery spreading, or else rationalism—these rival evils are devouring our country. There is far too little prayerfulness, and too little gospel preaching; and at times one is apt to cry out, like Elijah, that no one is left who is faithful to Jehovah—all knees are bowed to Baal! We must not give way to these feelings, dear friends, for, “God, even the Father, has loved us.” When the disciples were too much elated with their success, and came back to Jesus and said, “Lord, even the devils are subject to us,” Jesus said, “Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” And today, when we are depressed with great anxieties, and come back to our Master, and say, “Lord, the devil is getting the upper hand over us,” He repeats to us the same admonition, “Nevertheless do not be depressed about this, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven, and your Father has given you everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.”

Establish your hearts, then, beloved brethren. Be “steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Things are not what they seem. Dark nights are but the prelude to bright days. The rain shall be followed by the clear shining. When truth retreats, she only retires to leap to a greater victory. Though each wave, as it comes up upon the shore, may die, and you may think that there is no progress, yet the tide is coming in—even Jehovah’s tide of everlasting truth which shall cover all the earth. Be not discouraged! Go to your God. Get away, every man, every woman, from your circumstances, and from yourselves, and get to your Savior and your Shepherd. And there, like sheep in the pasture, lie down to feed, and then, like sheep obedient to the shepherd, rise up and follow Him where ever He goes. God bless you in this.

Perhaps while I have been preaching, some unconverted person here has been saying—“There is nothing for me.” Do you remember, dear friend, what the Syro-Phoenician woman said? She was called a dog by the Savior, and that is what you think you are, but she said, “The dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table.” Now, if I called myself a dog, would there be anything in this subject that I might dare to lay hold upon, because, like a crumb, it fell from the table? Yes. It seems to me there is. Evidently God deals with His own people in a way of grace, for it is said, He has “*given*” us—it is altogether of His free love, and it is added, “*through Grace,*” or absolute favor. The consolations of the Lord are the gifts of mercy and love. Well, then, if He is gracious to one, why should He not be gracious to another? And if those who sit at His table were once unclean, filthy, and depraved, and yet the sovereign grace of God called them, and brought them into the banquet of love, why should it not light on me also? If it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy—why should He not show mercy to me, whoever I may be? Why not to me?

But is there a door through which I can come to the gracious Lord? Yes, there is, and it is the other crumb in the text, for it begins with, “our Lord Jesus Christ.” My soul that is where you must begin this morning! There is the Lord Jesus Christ. I see Him hanging on the cross, bleeding for the sins of others, with hands stretched wide, that He may receive sinners to His heart. And that heart has a channel made down to it by the spear, that prayers and tears may find an easy way into His sympathies. Come, my soul, come now, and tell your case to Jesus. Fellow sinner, come and confess your sins to Jesus, and then throw yourself at His feet with this upon your heart and lips—“If I must perish, I will perish clinging to the cross, declaring to all men that my hope is stayed on Him whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for the sins of man.” Sinner, you will never perish there. Go there at once and be safe. God help you for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 THESSALONIANS 2, 3.

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