THE SOUL-WINNER

NO. 1292

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY 20, 1876
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise."
Proverbs 11:30

I HAD very great joy last night—many of you know why, but some do not. We held our annual meeting of the church, and it was a very pleasant sight to see so many brethren and sisters knit together in the heartiest love, welded together as one mass by common sympathies, and holding firmly to "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism."

Think of a church with four thousand nine hundred members members! Such a community has seldom been gathered in any age, and in the present century it is without parallel. "O Lord, thou hast multiplied the people and increased the joy. They joy before thee as the joy of harvest."

It brings tears into one's eyes to look upon so many who declare themselves to be members of the body of Christ. The hope that so many are plucked as brands from the burning and delivered from the wrath to come is in itself exceedingly consoling, and I felt the joy of it while communing with the brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus.

On thinking it over afterwards, however, it seemed to me that there was a higher joy in looking at a body of believers than that which arises from merely regarding them as saved. Not but what there is a great joy in salvation, a joy worthy to stir the angelic harps. Think of the Savior's agony in the ransom of every one of His redeemed, think of the work of the Holy Spirit in every renewed heart, think of the love of the Father as resting upon every one of the regenerate, I could not, if I took up my parable for a month, set forth all the mass of joy that is to be seen in a multitude of believers if we only look at what God has done *for* them, promised *to* them, and will fulfill *in* them.

But there is yet a wider field of thought and my mind has been traversing it all this day—the thought of the capacities of service contained in a numerous band of believers, the possibilities of blessing others which lie within the bosoms of regenerate persons. We must not think so much of what we already are as to forget what the Lord may accomplish by us for others. Here are the coals of fire, but who shall describe the conflagration which they may cause?

We ought to regard the Christian church, not as a luxurious hostelry where Christian gentlemen may each one dwell at his ease in his own inn, but as a barracks in which soldiers are gathered together to be drilled and trained for war. We should regard the Christian church, not as an association for mutual admiration and comfort, but as an army with banners, marching to the fray to achieve victories for Christ, to storm the strongholds of the foe, and to add province after province to the Redeemer's kingdom.

We may view converted persons when gathered into church membership as so much wheat in the granary. God be thanked that it is there, and that so far the harvest has rewarded the sower. But far more soul-inspiring is the view when we regard those believers as each one likely to be made a living center for the extension of the kingdom of Jesus, for then we see them sowing the fertile valleys of our land, and promising ere long to bring forth some thirty, some forty, some fifty, and some a hundredfold.

The capacities of life are enormous, one becomes a thousand in a marvelously brief space. Within a short time a few grains of wheat would suffice to seed the whole world, and a few true saints might suffice for the conversion of all nations. Only take that which comes from one ear, store it well, sow it

all, again store it next year, and then sow it all again, and the multiplication almost exceeds the power of computation.

O that every Christian were thus year by year the Lord's seed corn! If all the wheat in the world had perished except a single grain, it would not take many years to replenish all the earth and sow her fields and plains. But in a far shorter time, in the power of the Holy Spirit, one Paul or one Peter would have evangelized all lands.

View yourselves as grains of wheat predestinated to seed the world. That man lives grandly who is as earnest as if the very existence of Christianity depended upon himself, and is determined that to all men within his reach shall be made known the unsearchable riches of Christ.

If we whom Christ is pleased to use as His seed corn were only all scattered and sown as we ought to be, and were all to sprout and bring forth the green blade and the corn in the ear, what a harvest there would be! Again would it be fulfilled, "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains"—a very bad position for it—"the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth."

May God grant us to feel tonight some degree of the Holy Spirit's quickening power while we talk together, not so much about what God has done *for* us as about what God may do *by* us, and how far we may put ourselves into a right position to be used by Him.

There are two things in the text, and these are found laid out with much distinctness in its two sentences. The first is—*the life of the believer is, or ought to be, full of soul-blessing*—"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life." In the second place—*the pursuit of the believer ought always to be soul winning*. The second is much the same as the first, only the first head sets forth our unconscious influence, and the second our efforts which we put forth with the avowed object of winning souls for Christ.

I. Let us begin at the beginning, because the second cannot be carried out without the first, without fullness of life within there cannot be an overflow of life to others. It is of no use for any of you to try to be soul winners if you are not bearing fruit in your own lives. How can you serve the Lord with your lips if you do not serve Him with your lives? How can you preach with your tongues His Gospel, when with hands, feet, and hearts you are preaching the devil's gospel, and setting up antichrist by your practical unholiness? We must first have life and bear personal fruit to the divine glory, and then out of our example will spring the conversion of others.

Let us go to the fountain head and see how the man's own life is essential to his being useful to others. THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER IS FULL OF SOUL-BLESSING, this fact we shall consider by means of a few observations growing out of the text, and first let us remark that *the believer's outward life comes as a matter of fruit from him*.

This is important to notice. The fruit of the righteous—that is to say his life—is not a thing fastened upon him, but it grows out of him. It is not a garment which he puts off and on, but it is inseparable from himself. The sincere man's religion is the man himself, and not a cloak for his concealment.

True godliness is the natural outgrowth of a renewed nature, not the forced growth of pious hothouse excitement. Is it not natural for a vine to bear clusters of grapes? natural for a palm tree to bear dates? Certainly, as natural as it is for the apples of Sodom to be found on the trees of Sodom, and for noxious plants to produce poisonous berries.

When God gives a new nature to His people, the life which comes out of that new nature springs spontaneously from it. The man who has a religion which is not part and parcel of himself will by and by discover that it is worse than useless to him. The man who wears his piety like a mask at a carnival, so that when he gets home he changes from a saint to a savage, from an angel to a devil, from John to Judas, from a benefactor to a bully—such a man, I say, knows very well what formalism and hypocrisy can do for him, but he has no vestige of true religion.

Fig trees do not bear figs on certain days and thorns at other times, but they are true to their nature at all seasons. Those who think that godliness is a matter of vestment, and has an intimate relation with

blue and scarlet, and fine linen, are consistent if they keep their religion to the proper time for the wearing of their sacred pomposities, but he who has discovered what Christianity is knows that it is much more a life than an act, a form, or a profession.

Much as I love the creed of Christendom, I am ready to say that true Christianity is far more a life than a creed. It is a creed and it has its ceremonies, but it is mainly a life. It is a divine spark of heaven's own flame which falls into the human bosom and burns within, consuming much that lies hidden in the soul and then at last, as a heavenly life, flames forth, so as to be seen and felt by those around.

Under the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit a regenerate person becomes like that bush in Horeb, which was all aglow with Deity. The God within him makes him shine so that the place around him is holy ground, and those who look at him feel the power of his hallowed life.

Dear brethren, we must take care that our religion is more and more a matter of outgrowth from our souls. Many professors are hedged about with, "You must not do this, or that," and are driven onward with, "You must do this, and you must do that."

But there is a doctrine, too often perverted, which is, nevertheless a blessed truth, and ought to dwell in your hearts. "Ye are not under the law but under grace" hence you do not obey the will of God because you hope to earn heaven thereby, or dream of escaping from divine wrath by your own doings, but because there is a life in you which seeks after that which is holy, pure, right, and true, and cannot endure that which is evil. You are careful to maintain good works, not from either legal hopes or legal fears, but because there is a holy thing within you, born of God, which seeks, according to its nature, to do that which is pleasing to God.

Look to it more and more that your religion is real, true, natural, vital—not artificial, constrained, superficial, a thing of times, days, places, a fungus produced by excitement, a fermentation generated by meetings and stirred by oratory. We all need a religion which can live either in a wilderness or in a crowd. A religion which will show itself in every walk of life and in every company.

Give me the godliness which is seen at home, especially around the fireside, for it is never more beautiful than there, that is seen in the battle and tussle of ordinary business among scoffers and gainsayers as well as among Christian men. Show me the faith which can defy the lynx eyes of the world, and walk fearlessly where all scowl with the fierce eyes of hate, where there are no observers to sympathize and no friends to judge leniently.

May you be filled with the life of the Spirit, and your whole conduct and conversation be the natural and blessed outgrowth of that Spirit's indwelling!

Note next that *the fruit which comes from a Christian is fruit worthy of his character*—"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life." Each tree bears its own fruit and is known by it. The righteous man bears righteous fruit, and do not let us be at all deceived, brethren, or fall into any error about this, "he that doeth righteousness is righteous," and "he that doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

We are prepared, I hope, to die for the doctrine of justification by faith, and to assert before all adversaries that salvation is not of works. But we also confess that we are justified by a faith which produces works, and if any man has a faith which does not produce good works, it is the faith of devils. Saving faith appropriates the finished work of the Lord Jesus, and so saves by itself alone, for we are justified by faith without work. But the faith which is without works cannot bring salvation to any man.

We are saved by faith without works, but not by *a* faith that is without works, for the real faith that saves the soul works by love and purifies the character.

If you can cheat across the counter, your hope of heaven is a cheat too. Though you can pray as prettily as anybody, and practice acts of outward piety as well as any other hypocrite, you are deceived if you expect to be right at last. If as a servant you are lazy, lying, and loitering, or if as an employer you are hard, tyrannical, and un-christianlike towards your men, your fruit shows that you are a tree of Satan's own orchard, and bear apples which will suit his tooth.

If you can practice tricks of the trade and if you can lie—and how many do lie every day about their neighbors or about their goods—you may talk about being justified by faith all you like, but all liars will have their portion in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, and among the biggest liars you will be, for you are guilty of the lie of saying, "I am a Christian," whereas you are not. A false profession is one of the worst of lies, since it brings the utmost dishonor upon Christ and His people.

The fruit of the righteous is righteousness, the fig tree will not bring forth thorns, neither shall we gather grapes from thistles. The tree is known by its fruit, but we cannot judge men's hearts, and must not try to do so, we can judge their lives, and I pray God we may all be ready to judge our own lives and see if we are bringing forth righteous fruit, for if not, we are not righteous men

Let it, however, never be forgotten that the fruit of the righteous, though it comes from him naturally, for his newborn nature yields the sweet fruit of obedience, yet it is always the result of grace and the gift of God. No truth ought to be remembered more than this, "In me is thy fruit found." We can bring forth no fruit except as we abide in Christ.

The righteous shall flourish *as a branch*, and only as a branch. How does a branch flourish? By its connection with the stem and the consequent inflowing of the sap. And so, though the righteous man's righteous actions are his own, yet they are always produced by the grace which is imparted to him, and he never dares to take any credit for them, but he sings, "Not unto us, but unto thy name give praise." If he fails, he blames himself. If he succeeds, he glorifies God. Imitate his example.

Lay every fault, every weakness, every infirmity at your own door, and if you fall in any respect short of perfection—and I am sure you do—take all that to yourself and do not excuse yourself. But if there be any virtue, any praise, any true desire, any real prayer, anything that is good, ascribe it all to the Spirit of God. Remember, the righteous man would not be righteous unless God had made him righteous, and the fruit of righteousness would never come from him unless the divine sap within him had produced that acceptable fruit. To God alone be all honor and glory.

The main lesson of the passage is that this outburst of life from the Christian, this consequence of life within him, *this fruit of his soul, becomes a blessing to others*. Like a tree, it yields shade and sustenance to all around. It is a tree of life, an expression which I cannot fully work out tonight as I would wish, for there is a world of instruction compressed into the illustration.

That which to the believer himself is fruit becomes to others a tree, it is a singular metaphor, but by no means a lame one. From the child of God there falls the fruit of holy living, even as an acorn drops from the oak. This holy living becomes influential and produces the best results in others, even as the acorn becomes itself an oak, and lends its shade to the birds of the air.

The Christian's holiness becomes a tree of life. I suppose it means a living tree, a tree calculated to give life and sustenance to others. A fruit becomes a tree! A tree of life! Wonderful result this! Christ in the Christian produces a character which becomes a tree of life. The outward character is the fruit of the inner life. This outer life itself grows from a fruit into a tree, and as a tree it bears fruit in others to the praise and glory of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, I know some of God's saints who live very near to Him, and they are evidently a tree of life, for their very shadow is comforting, cooling, and refreshing to many weary souls.

I have known the young, the tried, the downcast, go to them, sit beneath their shade and pour out the tale of their troubles, and they have felt it a rich blessing to receive their sympathy, to be told of the faithfulness of the Lord, and to be guided in the way of wisdom. There are a few good men in this world whom to know is to be rich. Such men are libraries of Gospel truth, but they are better than books, for the truth in them is written on living pages. Their character is a true and living tree. It is not a mere post of the dead wood of doctrine, bearing an inscription, and rotting while it does so, but it is a vital, organized, fruit-producing thing, a plant of the Lord's right hand planting.

Not only do some saints give comfort to others, but they also yield them spiritual nourishment. Well-trained Christians become nursing fathers and nursing mothers, strengthening the weak, and binding up

the wounds of the broken-hearted. So, too, the strong, bold, generous deeds of large-hearted Christians are of great service to their fellow Christians, and tend to raise them to a higher level. You feel refreshed by observing how they act. Their patience in suffering, their courage in danger, their holy faith in God, their happy faces under trial—all these nerve you for your own conflicts.

In a thousand ways the sanctified believer's example acts in a healing and comforting way to his brethren, and assists in raising them above anxiety and unbelief. Even as the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the people, so the words and deeds of saints are medicine for a thousand maladies.

And then, what fruit instructed believers bear, sweet to the taste of the godly. We can never trust in men as we trust in the Lord, but the Lord can cause the members to bless us in their measure, even as their Head is ever ready to do.

Jesus alone is *the* tree of life, but He makes some of His servants to be instrumentally to us little trees of life, by whom He gives us fruit of the same sort that He bears Himself, for He puts it there, and it is Himself in His saints causing them to bring forth golden apples with which our souls are gladdened. May we every one of us be made like our Lord, and may His fruit be found upon our boughs.

We have put into the tomb during the last year many of the saints who have fallen asleep, and among them there were some of whom I will not at this moment speak particularly, whose lives as I look back upon them are still a tree of life to me. I pray God that I may be like them.

Many of you knew them. and if you will only recall their holy, devoted lives, the influence they have left behind will still be a tree of life to you. They being dead yet speak, hear ye their eloquent exhortations! Even in their ashes live their wonted fires. Kindle your souls at their warmth. Their noble examples are the endowments of the church, her children are ennobled and enriched as they remember their walk of faith and labor of love.

Beloved, may we every one of us be true benedictions to the churches in whose gardens we are planted. "Oh," says one, "I am afraid I am not much like a tree, for I feel so weak and insignificant." If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed you have the commencement of the tree beneath whose branches the birds of the air will yet find a lodging. The very birds that would have eaten the tiny seed come and find lodgment in the tree which grows out of it. And people who despise and mock you now that you are a young beginner, will one of these days, if God blesses you, be glad to borrow comfort from your example and experience.

But one other thought on this point. Remember *the completeness and development of the holy life will be seen above*. There is a city of which it is written, "In the midst of the street thereof, and on every side of the river was there the tree of life." The tree of life is a heavenly plant and so the fruit of the Christian is a thing of heaven. Though not transplanted to the glory land it is getting fit for its final abode.

What is holiness but heaven on earth? What is living unto God but the essence of heaven? What are uprightness, integrity, Christ-likeness? Have not these even more to do with heaven than harps and palms and streets of purest gold? Holiness, purity, loveliness of character, these make a heaven within a man's own bosom, and even if there were no place called heaven that heart would have a heavenly happiness which is set free from sin and made like the Lord Jesus.

See, then, dear brethren, what an important thing it is for us to be indeed righteous before God, for then the outcome of that righteousness shall be fruit which will be a tree of life to others, and a tree of life in heaven above, world without end. O blessed Spirit make it so, and Thou shalt have all the praise.

II. This brings us to our second head. THE PURSUIT OF THE BELIEVER SHOULD BE SOUL WINNING.

For "he that winneth souls is wise." The two things are put together—the life first, the effort next, what God hath joined together let no man put asunder.

It is implied in our text that there are souls which need winning. Ah me, all souls of men are lost by nature. You might walk through the streets of London and say of the masses of men you meet upon

those crowded pavements with sighs and tears—"Lost, lost, lost!" Wherever Christ is not trusted, and the Spirit has not created a new heart, and the soul has not come to the great Father, there is a lost soul.

But here is the mercy—these lost souls can be won. They are not hopelessly lost. Not yet has God determined that they shall forever abide as they are. It is not yet said, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." But they are in the land of hope where mercy may reach them, for they are spoken of as capable of being won.

They may yet be delivered, but the phrase hints that it will need all our efforts. "He that *winneth* souls." What do we mean by that word win. We use it in *lovemaking*. We speak of the bridegroom who wins his bride, and sometimes there is a large expanse of love, many a pleading word, and many a wooing act, ere yet the valued heart is all the suitor's own.

I use this explanation because in some respects it is the very best, for souls will have to be won for Christ in this fashion, that they may be espoused unto Him. We must make love to the sinner for Christ. That is how hearts are to be won for Him. Jesus is the Bridegroom, and we must speak for Him, and tell of His beauty as Abraham's servant, when he went to seek a wife for Isaac, acted as a wooer in his stead.

Have you never read the story? Then turn to it when you get home, and see how he talked about his master, what possessions he had and how Isaac was to be heir of it all, and so on, and then he finished his address by urging Rebecca to go with him.

The question was put home to her, "Will thou go with this man?" So the minister's business is to commend his Master and his Master's riches, and then to say to souls, "Will you be wedded to Christ?" He who can succeed in this very delicate business is a wise man.

We also use the term in a *military* fashion. We speak of winning a city, a castle, or a battle. We do not win victories by going to sleep. Believe me, castles are not captured by men who are only half awake. To win a battle needs the best skills, the greatest endurance and the utmost courage. To storm fortresses which are regarded as almost impregnable men need to burn the midnight oil, and study well the arts of attack. And when the time comes for the assault, not a soldier must be a laggard, but all force of artillery and manhood must be brought to bear on the point assailed.

To carry man's heart by main force of grace, to capture it, to break down the bars of brass and dash the gates of iron in pieces requires the exercise of a skill which only Christ can give. To bring up the big battering rams, and shake every stone in the sinner's conscience, to make his heart rock and reel within him for fear of the wrath to come, in a word, to assail a soul with all the artillery of the Gospel needs a wise man and one aroused to his work.

To hold up the white flag of mercy, and if that be despised, to use the battering ram of threatening until a breach is made, and then with the sword of the Spirit in his hand to capture the city, to tear down the black flag of sin and run up the banner of the cross, needs all the force the choicest preacher can command and a great deal more.

Those whose souls are as cold as the Arctic regions, and whose energy is reduced to the vanishing point, are not likely to take the city of Mansoul for Prince Emanuel. If you think you are going to win souls, you must throw your soul into your work just as a warrior must throw his soul into a battle, or victory will not be yours.

We use the words "to win" in reference to *making a fortune*, and we all know that the man who becomes a millionaire has to rise up early, and sit up late and eat the bread of carefulness, and it takes a deal of toiling and saving, and I know not what besides, to amass immense wealth. We have to go in for winning souls with the same ardor and concentration of our faculties as old Astor of New York went in to build up that fortune of so many millions which he has now left behind him.

It is, indeed, *a race*, and you know that in a race nobody wins unless he strains every muscle and sinew. They that run in a race run all, but only one receiveth the prize, and that one is generally he who had more strength than the rest. Certainly, whether he had more strength or not, he put out all he had and we shall not win souls unless we imitate him in this.

Solomon declares in the text that, "He that winneth souls is wise," and such a declaration is all the more valuable as coming from so wise a man. Let me show you why a true soul-winner is wise.

First, *he must be taught of God before he will attempt it*. The man who does not know that whereas he was once blind now he sees, had better think of his own blindness before he attempts to lead his friends in the right way. If not saved yourself, you cannot be the means of saving others. He that winneth souls must be wise unto salvation first for himself. That being taken for granted, *he is a wise man to select such a pursuit*.

Young man, are you choosing an object worthy to be the great aim of your life? I do hope you will judge wisely, and select a noble ambition. If God has given you great gifts, I hope they will not be wasted on any low, sordid, or selfish design.

Suppose I am now addressing one who has great talents and has an opportunity of being what he likes, of going into Parliament and helping to pass wise measures, or of going into business and making himself a man of importance. I hope he will weigh the claims of Jesus and immortal souls as well as other claims. Shall I addict myself to study? Shall I surrender myself to business? Shall I travel? Shall I spend my time in pleasure? Shall I become the principal fox hunter of the county? Shall I lay out my time in promoting political and social reforms?

Think them all over, but if you are a Christian man, my dear friend, nothing will equal in enjoyment, in usefulness, in honor, and in lasting recompense the giving yourself up to the winning of souls. Oh, it is grand hunting, I can tell you, and beats all the fox hunting in the world in excitement and exhilaration. Have I not sometimes gone with a cry over hedge and ditch after some poor sinner, and kept well up with him in every twist and turn he took, till I have overtaken him by God's grace, and been in at the death, and rejoiced exceedingly when I have seen him captured by my Master.

Our Lord Jesus calls His ministers fishermen, and no other fishermen have such labor, such sorrow, and such delight as we have. What a happy thing it is that you may win souls for Jesus, and may do this though you abide in your secular callings. Some of you would never win souls in pulpits, it would be a great pity if you tried, but you can win souls in the workshop, in the laundry, in the nursery and in the drawing room. Our hunting grounds are everywhere, by the wayside, by the fireside, in the corner, and in the crowd.

Among the common people Jesus is our theme, and among the great ones we have no other. You will be wise, my brother, if for you the one absorbing desire is that you may turn the ungodly from the error of their ways. For you there will be a crown glittering with many stars, which you shall cast at Jesus' feet in the day of His appearing.

Further, it is not only wise to make this your aim, *but you will have to be very wise if you succeed in it*, because the souls to be won are so different in their constitutions, feelings, and conditions, and you will have to adapt yourselves to them all.

The trappers of North America have to find out the habits of the animals they wish to catch, and so you will have to learn how to deal with each class of cases. Some are very depressed, you will have to comfort them. Perhaps you will comfort them too much and make them unbelieving. And therefore, possibly instead of comforting them, you will need sometimes to administer a sharp word to cure the sulkiness into which they have fallen.

Another person may be frivolous, and if you put on a serious face you will frighten your bird away. You will have to be cheerful and drop a word of admonition as if by accident. Some people, again, will not let you speak to them, but will talk to you. You must know the art of putting a word in edgeways. You will have to be very wise and become all things to all men, and your success will prove your wisdom.

Theories of dealing with souls may look very wise, but they often prove to be useless when actually tried. He who by God's grace accomplishes the work is a wise man, though perhaps he knows no theory whatever. This work will need all your wit and far more, and you will have to cry to the great winner of souls above to give you of His Holy Spirit.

But mark you, he that wins souls is wise because *he is engaged in a business which makes men wiser as they proceed with it*. You will bungle at first, and very likely drive sinners off from Christ by your attempts to draw them to Him. I have tried to move some souls with all my might with a certain passage of Scripture, but they have taken it in an opposite light to what it was intended, and have started off in the wrong direction.

It is very difficult to know how to act with bewildered inquirers. If you want some people to go forward you must pull them backwards. If you want them to go to the right you must insist upon their going to the left, and then they go to the right directly. You must be ready for these follies of poor human nature.

I knew a poor aged Christian woman who had been a child of God fifty years, but she was in a state of melancholy and distress from which nobody could arouse her. I called several times and endeavored to cheer her up, but generally when I left she was worse than before.

So the next time I called to see her I did not say anything to her about Christ or religion. She soon introduced those topics herself, and then I remarked that I was not going to talk to her about such holy things, for she did not know anything about them, for she was not a believer in Christ, and had been, no doubt, a hypocrite for many years. She could not stand that and asserted, in self-defense, that the Lord above knew her better than I did, and He was her witness that she did love the Lord Jesus Christ. She scarcely forgave herself afterwards for that admission, but she could never talk to me quite so despairingly anymore.

True lovers of men's souls learn the art of dealing with them, and the Holy Spirit makes them expert soul surgeons for Jesus. It is not because a man has more abilities, nor altogether because he has more grace, but the Lord makes him to love the souls of men intensely, and this imparts a secret skill, since for the most part the way to get sinners to Christ is to love them to Christ.

Beloved brethren, I will say once more *he who really wins souls for Jesus, however he wins them, is a wise man*. Some of you are slow to admit this. You say—Well, So-and-so, I dare say, has been very useful, but he is very rough. What does his roughness matter if he wins souls? Ah, says another, but I am not built up under him. Why do you go to hear him, to get built up? If the Lord has sent him to pull down, let him pull down, and do you go elsewhere for edification. But do not grumble at a man who does one work because he cannot do another.

We are also too apt to pit one minister against another, and say you should hear *my* minister. Perhaps we should, but it would be better for you to hear the man who edifies you, and let others go where they also are instructed. "He that winneth souls is wise." I do not ask you how he did it. He sang the gospel, and you did not like it, but if he won souls he was wise. Soul-winners all have their own ways, and if they do but win souls they are wise.

I will tell you what is not wise, and will not be thought so at the last, namely to go about the churches doing nothing yourself and railing at all the Lord's useful servants. Here is a dear brother on his dying bed, he has the sweet thought that the Lord enabled him to bring many souls to Jesus, and the expectation when he comes to the gates that many spirits will come to meet him. They will throng the ascent to the New Jerusalem, and welcome the man who brought them to Jesus. They are immortal monuments to his labors. He is wise.

Here is another who has spent all his time in interpreting the prophecies, so that everything he read of in the newspapers he could see in Daniel or the Revelation. He is wise, so some say, but I had rather spend my time in winning souls. I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ than unpick all the mysteries of the divine Word, for salvation is the thing we are to live for. I would to God that I understood all mysteries, yet chief of all would I proclaim the mystery of soul-saving by faith in the blood of the Lamb.

It is comparatively a small matter for a minister to have been a staunch upholder of orthodoxy all his days, and to have spent himself in keeping up the hedges of his church. Soul-winning is the main concern. It is a very good thing to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, but I do

not think I should like to say in my last account, "Lord, I have lived to fight the Romanists and the State Church, and to put down the various erroneous sects, but I never led a sinner to the ,ross." No, we will fight the good fight of faith, but the winning of souls is the greater matter, and he who attends to it is wise.

Another brother has preached the truth, but he did so polish up his sermons that the Gospel was hidden. Never a sermon was fit to preach, he thought, until he had written it out a dozen times to see whether every sentence would be according to the canons of Cicero and Quintilian, and then he went and delivered the Gospel as a grand oration. Is that wise? Well, it takes a wise man to be a thorough orator. But it is better not to be an orator if fine speech prevents your being understood. Let eloquence be flung to the dogs rather than souls be lost.

What we want is to win souls, and they are not to be won by flowery speeches. We must have the winning of souls at heart, and be red hot with zeal for their salvation, and then however much we blunder, according to the critics, we shall be numbered among those whom the Lord calls wise.

Now, Christian men and women, I want you to take this matter up practically, and to determine that you will try, this very night to win a soul. Try the one next to you in the seat if you cannot think of anybody else. Try on the way home. Try with your own children.

Have I not told you of what happened one Sunday six months ago. In my sermon I said, "Now, you mothers, have you ever prayed with each of your children, one by one, and urged them to lay hold on Christ? Perhaps dear Jane is now in bed, and you have never yet pleaded with her about eternal things. Go home tonight, wake her up and say, 'Jane, I am sorry I have never told you about the Savior personally, and prayed with you, but I mean to do it now.' Wake her up and put your arms round her neck, and pour out your heart to God with her."

Well, there was a good sister here who had a daughter named Jane. What do you think? She came on Monday to bring her daughter Jane to see me in the vestry, for when she woke her up and began, "I have not spoken to you about Jesus," or something to that effect, "Oh, dear mother," said Jane, "I have loved the Savior these six months, and wondered why you had not spoken to me about Him." And then there was such kissing and rejoicing. Perhaps you may find that to be the case with a dear child at home, and if you do not, so much the more reason why you should begin at once to speak.

Did you never win a soul for Jesus? You shall have a crown in heaven, but no jewels it. You will go to heaven childless. And you know how it was in the old times, how the women dreaded lest they should be childless. Let it be so with Christian people. Let them dread being spiritually childless.

We *must* hear the cries of those whom God has given to be born unto Himself by our means. We *must* hear them, or else cry out in anguish, "Give me converts or I die."

Young men, and old men, and sisters of all ages, if you love the Lord get a passion for souls. Do you not see them? They are going down to hell by thousands. As often as the hand upon the dial completes its circuit, hell devours multitudes, some of them ignorant of Christ, and others willfully rejecting Him. The world lies in darkness, this great city still pines for the light, your own friends and kinsfolk are unsaved, and they may be dead ere this week is over.

Oh, if you have any humanity, let alone Christianity, if you have found the remedy tell the diseased about it. If you have found life, proclaim it to the dead. If you have found liberty, publish it to the captives. If you have found Christ, tell of Him to others. My brethren in the college, let this be your choice work while studying, and let it be the one object of your lives when you go forth from us. Do not be content when you get a congregation, but labor to win souls, and as you do this God will bless you.

As for us, we hope during the rest of our lives to follow Him who is *The* Soul-Winner and to put ourselves in His hands who maketh us soul-winners, so that our life may not be a long folly, but may be proved by results to have been directed by wisdom.

O you souls not won to Jesus, remember that faith in Christ saves you. Trust in Him. May you be led to trust in Him for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 10

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—906, 957

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