

GREAT DIFFERENCE NO. 1415

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 19, 1878,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Where is the God of judgment?”
Malachi 2:17.*

*“Then shall you return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked,
between him that serves God and him that serves Him not.”
Malachi 3:18.*

YOU were not here, I am thankful to say, last Lord's-Day evening, for it was your duty and privilege to stay away to give others an opportunity of hearing. My subject then, [Sermon #1414, *No Difference*] was our heavenly Father who makes His sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good and sends rain upon the just and upon the unjust. Then I set forth the universal benevolence of God and the way in which He stays the operations of justice to give space for forbearance and long-suffering. Now this fact, this gracious fact, which ought to lead man to repentance, has, through the perversity of human nature, been used for quite another purpose. Men have said, “He blesses the evil as well as the good. The sun shines on all alike. The rain indiscriminately enriches the field of the miser and the pasture of the generous heart. Where is the God of judgment? Is there such a God? Is it not one and the same whether we fear Him or disregard Him?”

Side by side with this has run another circumstance perhaps even more readily misunderstood. God is in this life, preparing His people for a better world and part of that process is accomplished by trial and affliction, so that it frequently happens that the godly are in adversity while the wicked are in prosperity. Having no such designs toward them as toward His people, the Lord permits the wicked to enjoy themselves while they may, so that oftentimes they are as bullocks fattened in rich pastures, but they forget that they are fattened for the slaughter, while the righteous are brought very low, are often in poverty, frequently in sickness and not seldom in despondency of spirit, but all to prepare them for the glory land. From the trials of the godly, which are all sent in wisdom and in love, shortsighted man has inferred that God has no regard to human character and even treats those worst who serve Him best. In Malachi's days the blaspheming crew even said that God takes sides with the wicked and they wearied God by saying—“Everyone that does evil is good in the sight of the Lord and He delights in them.” Then again they uttered the old rude but plain-spoken question, “Where is the God of judgment?”

Truly brethren, in looking with these poor eyes upon the affairs around us, they do appear to be a great tangle and snarl, a mixed medley of strange happenings. We see the true princes of the earth walking in the dust and beggars riding upon horses. We mourn as we see servants of God and heirs of heaven lying, like Lazarus, sick at the gate of the ungodly miser, while the vicious libertine is rioting in luxury and drinking full bowls of pleasure. Until we perceive the clue, providence is a labyrinth into whose center we can never penetrate. But there is a clue which opens all its secrets. There is a God of judgment, not sitting in heaven in blind indifference, but looking down upon the sons of men and working out purposes of righteousness at all times.

At this time I propose to speak upon the fact that God does put a difference between the righteous and the wicked and makes no mistake between Egypt and Israel. The Lord knows them that are His and in His dealings, which we cannot always understand, He has not confused His people with the world, nor does the rod of the wicked rest upon the lot of the righteous. He has a right hand of acceptance for them that fear Him and He has a left hand of punishment for those that fear Him not. This distinction is not so apparent yet as it shall be, but we shall now trace the gradual widening of the division between the two classes and show that still there is a God of judgment and that by-and-by, even the blindest eye

shall be able to discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves Him not.

I. First, then, THERE ARE SIGNS OF SEPARATION between the righteous and the wicked.

The first sign is seen in the evident difference of *character*. “They that feared the Lord” are spoken of. That is to say, there are still some on the face of the earth who believe that there is a God, who believe in the revelation which He has given, who accept the atonement which He has provided, and who delight to be obedient to the will which He has declared. How came they to fear the Lord? The answer is, it is a gift of His grace and a work of His Spirit wherever it is found. It makes a distinction very deep, very vital, and consequently very lasting, for it shall continue throughout eternity. Let us bless God that in the worst times He still has a remnant according to the election of grace, and when blasphemers grow bold in sin and say, “Where is the God of judgment?” there are at least a few hidden ones who nevertheless look up and behold the Lord exalted above the rage of His foes. There will always be a band that bow the knee and worship the Most High, because their hearts stand in awe of Him. God is beginning to separate His chosen from the world, when He gives them an inward sense of His presence, and a consequent holy fear and sacred awe of Him. The dividing work begins here, in the bent and current of the heart.

This difference in real character soon shows itself in a remarkable change of *thought* and meditation. According to the passage before us, those who are said to, “fear the Lord,” are also described as those who, “thought upon His name.” Their thoughts are not always towards the transient things of this world, but they are much engaged with the eternal God and His truth. They are not always groveling after the creature, but soaring towards the Creator. The Hebrew word has the idea of “*counting*.” They reckon the Lord as the chief consideration when they count up their arguments for action. Others do not take Him into the reckoning. They act as if there were no God at all. But the righteous make much of Him and account Him to be the greatest factor in all their calculations. They fall back upon God in trouble, and joy most of all in Him when they are glad. They reckon not without the Lord of hosts. They say, “The best of all is, God is with us.” And concerning any action, if it is contrary to His mind, they reject it. If it is according to His will they think upon Him and they delight to carry it out. This makes a great difference in their course of life and also in their happiness. Dear hearers, I trust there are many among you who can truly say that your meditation of God has been very sweet, you have been glad in the Lord. This, then, is working out a distinction between you and the wicked who forget God. You fear the Lord and you take delight in meditating upon Him in secret, but this the worldling cannot understand.

This makes a distinction between you and the careless, which does not long exist without operating in a further direction. You grow weary of their frivolous conversation, and they cannot endure your serious observations. And so two parties are formed, as of old there were two lines—the sons of God and the children of Cain. You will soon see Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob living over again if you watch the thoughtless worldling and the pious Christian, and mark how much they differ. Therefore there grows out of this difference of thought and feeling a separation as to *society*. “Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another,” which shows that they often met, and that they delighted in one another’s company. Each man felt himself feeble in the midst of the ungodly, and therefore he sought out a brother that he might be strengthened by association. Each man felt himself to be like a sheep in the midst of wolves, but knowing the nature of sheep to be gregarious, each one sought his fellow, that they might make up a flock, hoping that, as a flock, they might gather round the Good Shepherd. Yes, and in the ungodliest times there are not only gracious people here and there, but these chosen souls, by some means or other, make mutual discoveries and come together and so form the visible church of the living God. In Rome in the days of the Caesars, when to be a Christian meant to be condemned to die without mercy, if believers could not meet in their homes, they would meet in the abodes of the dead, in the Catacombs, but they must meet. It is the nature of God’s children that they do not like going to heaven alone, but prefer to go up to the temple in bands and companies, and the more the merrier, as the proverb has it, for they delight to go with the multitude that keep holy day and they rejoice to fly in flocks like doves to their windows. There is a divine sweetness in Christian communion, and every true saint delights in it. The essence of our religion is love, and he that loves not the brethren, loves not God and lacks an essential point of the Christian character. By the exercise of holy brotherhood the Lord continues to call out His own people, and thus to create a manifest separation. Likeness of character and

thought produce a mutual attractiveness, and so a corporate body is formed and the solitary secret ones become manifest in the mass. The chosen stones are quarried and are built into the similitude of a palace, what if I say that, they come together, bone to His bone to fashion the spiritual body of the Lord Jesus Christ?

This distinct association leads on to a peculiar *occupation*, for “they that feared the Lord *spoke* often one to another.” They heard others speak against the Lord and they resolved to speak too. Of others the Lord complained, “your words have been stout against Me, says the Lord,” and these men felt that it would be a shame if *they* were silent. They did not cast their pearls before swine, yet they wore their pearls where those who were not swine, but saints, could see them. In society where truth would be appreciated, they were not backward to declare it, “They spoke often one to another.” It was a time of noise and tumult. It was a time of speaking very bitterly against the Lord. Therefore when they met together they spoke for the Lord and each one opened his mouth that the Lord might not lack for witnesses. I take it that the expression means that they renewed and *repeated their testimony*. “They spoke often one to another.” They said, “Ah, we can answer what the ungodly are saying. Our experience testifies that they speak not aright. It is not a vain thing to serve God. How do you find it, brother?” Then the brother would say, “I find it exceedingly comforting and cheering to my soul. They have said, ‘What profit is it that we have kept His ordinances?’ But I have found it exceedingly profitable, for in keeping His commandments there is great reward.” Then a third would say, “It has enriched our souls to walk according to the mind of God and in the blessed ordinances of His house our souls have been fed and exceedingly nourished.” A fourth would add, “The ungodly say it is in vain that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts—do you find it so, brother?” The reply would be, “No, my mournful days have often been most profitable, like the days of shower and cloud which have most to do with the harvest.” “Besides,” said another, “we do not walk mournfully before the Lord as a rule, for we rejoice before Him, yes, in His name we do exceedingly rejoice.” Thus, you see, by their testimony the one to the other, they supported each other’s minds against the popular infidelities of the time. They set their thoughtful experience against the vicious falsehoods of unbelieving men, and so they both honored God and benefited each other.

When they “spoke often one to another” I have no doubt they *expressed their affection*, one for the other. They said, “Let us not marvel if the world hates us. Did not our Master say, ‘It hated Me before it hated you’? Did He not tell us to beware of man? Did He not remind us that our worst enemies should be those of our own household?” “Yes, brethren,” they would say, one to another, “let us love one another, for love is of God.” The elders would speak like John the divine and say, “Little children, love one another.” And the younger ones would respond by acts and words of loving respect to the older saints. Their mutual expressions of love would increase love. As when we lay live coals together, they burn the better, so loving intercommunications increase the heat of affection till it glows like coals of juniper which have a most vehement flame.

No doubt, for we know by what we see, this speaking one to another *assisted each other’s faith*. One might be weak, but they were not all weak at once. One and another would be strong just then. We all have our ups and downs, but the mercy is that when one is sinking, another is rising. It will frequently happen that if the sun does not shine on my side of the hedge, it is shining on yours, and you can tell me that the sun is not snuffed out but that it will shine on me too, by-and-by. Commerce makes nations rich and Christian communion makes believers grow in grace. Speaking often one to another with the view of helping the weak hands and confirming the feeble knees, is a means of great blessing to the souls of Christians. When they met, one would tell what he knew which his brother or sister might not know, and a third would say, “I can confirm that statement and add something more,” and so the first speaker would learn as well as teach. Then a fourth brother would say, “But there is yet another truth which stands in relation to that which you have stated, do not overlook it.” Thus by communion in experience and each one expressing what the Lord had written upon his heart, the whole would be edified in righteousness.

Now, beloved, it is in proportion as the children of God speak often, one to another, in this way that the church is brought out into a visible condition. A silent church might grope through the world unobserved, but a speaking church, speaking often within itself, is of necessity soon heard beyond the doors of the house in which it dwells. Soon the sound of gospel music steals over hill and dale. “Their sound

has gone forth throughout all the earth and their words unto the end of the world.” The speaking together of assembled saints at Pentecost led to the gift of tongues and then they spoke so that every man in His own language heard the wonderful works of the Lord. An increase of private communion among the saints would lead to a fuller public communication to the outside and the world would receive a blessing.

Thus I have shown you that the Lord thus gradually begins to separate a people to Himself. The fear of the Lord in the heart and the thought of God in the mind lead to association in persons of similar mold, hence arises the church. Then the interchange of expression between the godly makes them zealous and this leads to public testimony and the people of God are revealed. You will say that this does not prove that God is dealing differently with them from other men. “Where is the God of judgment?” is the question, and how is it to be answered? My reply is, in all this the Lord *is* putting a difference. To work His fear in the heart is an act of sovereign grace, but to enable the soul to find deep enjoyment in meditating upon divine things is a reward as well as a gift of grace, and a reward more valuable than if He gave the God-fearing man wealth and fame. Christian society is also no small token of the divine favor and is another reward of the God-fearing. I do not know how you find it, but I can truly assert that my choicest delights are with the people of God. What a great deal some of us owe to Christian fellowship! People whom we should never have known and never have thought of speaking to are now our choicest friends and have been and are incalculably helpful to us. Christian love has enlarged our family circle wonderfully. We have come to be intertwined, the one with the other, and the separate threads have ceased to be such for they have become a threefold cord which cannot be broken, and this is no small gift of divine grace. Moreover, the communications which have arisen out of this society in which we have edified one another, have they not been very precious to us? Can you not say you had rather dwell for a day in the courts of the Lord than reign in the tents of wickedness for ages? Is it not so that when we are able to rejoice together and tell our experience, we find a pleasure which makes the wilderness and the solitary place to be glad? Best of all, it is in the midst of these communications where holy society yields us gracious fellowship, that God Himself is found. This is the grand distinction in God’s relation to the universe at this present time, that He is with His people, and they know it, while He is far from the wicked. The Lord listened and heard of old and He still listens and hears, and the Lord answers the prayers of His children out of His holy place, and sends tokens of acceptance to those who praise and magnify His name. “The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” Oh come, let us exult before Him, for He is not far away, nor has He hidden His face from us, but He dwells between the cherubim and shines forth among His saints in the person of His dear Son and manifests Himself to us as He does not to the world. Even now, Israel in Egypt is not Egypt, for God pities the sighs and cries of His people. Israel in the Arabian Desert is not Arabian, for, lo, the fiery cloudy pillar, like a lifted up standard, gathers around it a separated people. Lo, “The people shall dwell alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations.” Even now the faithful, in going out from the world and being separate, find the promise fulfilled. “I will dwell in them and walk in them. And I will be their God and they shall be My people.” There is the first answer to the question, “Where is the God of judgment?” The separation is already beginning; there are signs of it now.

II. Secondly, THERE ARE PREPARATIONS FOR A FINAL SEPARATION, and these are at this moment proceeding. What these preparations are we learn from the 16th verse—“The Lord listened and heard it and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name.” There is a day coming in which He will separate the two sorts of men, the one from the other, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. The great net is now dragging the sea bottom. The day is coming when the net shall be hauled in and drawn to shore. What a medley it contains of good and bad fish, of creeping things, weeds, shells and stones, this mass must be separated. Then will come the putting of the good into vessels and the casting of the bad away. When that is done it will be executed with great solemnity and care. There will be great discrimination used in the dividing of the righteous from the wicked and as at a trial, *everything proceeds upon evidence*, the separating work is being prepared for us every day, because the evidence is being collected and recorded. The evidence in favor of the righteous might be forgotten if it were not duly preserved in order that in the day when the separation shall be consummated there may be no mistake and nobody may be able to challenge the decision of the great Judge.

Remember this, dear friends, that *evidence is being written down in a book—evidence of fidelity to God* in evil times. When others were thinking against God and speaking against God, there were some who spoke on His behalf, because they feared Him and thought upon His name, and their singular conduct was reported upon and chronicled. God's gracious eye never overlooks one single act of decision for Him in the midst of blasphemy and rebuke. If the timid girl in the midst of a Christless family still patiently endures reproach and holds on to her Master's truth, though she cannot speak eloquently, behold, it is written in the book. Though her tears may often be her strongest expressions, they are in the book also, and shall not be forgotten. When the workman in the shop speaks a word against filthy language, a word for the sacredness of the Sabbath, a word for his Lord, it is all written in the book of remembrance. A commission is instituted for the collection of evidence as to those that fear the Lord and think upon His name. Are you, dear friends, furnishing evidence, do you think, evidence which will prove that you are truly godly? Do you clearly stand out from among your fellows and are you manifestly separate, so that even Satan himself at the last great day will not be able to challenge the evidence that will be given, that you did indeed fear the Lord when others reviled Him?

This evidence is being taken by the Lord Himself. There is much consolation in this, because others might be prejudiced and give an unfavorable view of what we do, but when the Lord Himself bears witness, the truth will be manifested. "The Lord listened and heard." It is a very strong expression. He not only "listened," as one trying to hear, but He did actually hear all that was said. What a witness God will be in favor of His saints! If we really fear Him and think upon His name He will set our holy fear, our godly thought and our gracious talk in evidence on our behalf. He reads our motives and these are a deep and vital part of character. Others might err, but He cannot. What He hears is accurately heard and correctly understood. Evidence is being collected, then, by a witness who is truth itself.

This evidence is before God's eyes at all times. If you notice, "The book of remembrance was written *before Him*," as if while every item was being put down, the book lay open before His gaze. From Him the record is no more concealed than the act itself, past deeds of virtue are present to His eye. Every recorded act of grace is especially noticed by the Lord. Every separate word of faithfulness and act of true God-fearing life is noted, weighed, estimated, valued and safely preserved in memory to justify the verdict of the last grand dividing day. Think of it, then, beloved—all that divine grace is working in you of humble faithfulness to God is being recorded. No annual report will proclaim it. It will never be printed in a magazine, nor advertised through the newspapers so as to bring you fame, but a book of remembrance is written before the Lord Himself. There it lies before Him whose single approval is more than fame. There, read a page—"Such a one thought upon My name. So-and-so spoke to his brother concerning Me and helped to the mutual edification of the body and to the bearing of powerful testimony for the truth against the assaults of error."

This evidence, moreover, dear friends, is of a spiritual kind and this is one reason why it is taken down by God and by no one else, for it is evidence concerning the state of the heart in reference to God. And who is to form that estimate but the Lord who searches the heart? Who is to know the thoughts of the mind, save God alone? There is an ear that hears thought. Though it is not indicated by a sound as loud as the tick of a clock, nor as audible as the chirping of a little bird, yet every thought is vocal to the mind of the Most High and it is written down in the remembrance book. Certain great actions which every man applauds may never go into that book, because they were done from motives of ostentation. But the thought which nobody could have known, and which must otherwise have remained in oblivion, is recorded by the Lord and shall be published at the last judgment. Perhaps it ran thus, "What can I do for Jesus? How can I help His poor people? How can I cheer such-and-such a languishing spirit? How can I defeat error? How can I win a wandering soul for my Master?" Such thoughts as these are reckoned worthy of record and they are supplying evidence which in His gracious love the Lord is collecting, that the sentence of His great tribunal may be justified to all.

That evidence concerns apparently little things, for it mentions that "they spoke one to another." Of course people will gossip when they get together. What is there in talk? Oh, but what sort of gossip was it? That is the question. For a holy theme turns gossip into heavenly fellowship. It is written, they "thought upon His name." Surely it is not much to think? Ah brethren, thinking and speaking are two very powerful forces in the world and out of them the greatest actions are hatched. Thoughts and words are the seeds of far-reaching deeds and God takes care of these embryos and germs. Men do not even

know of them and if they did know, would not esteem them, but they are put down in the book of remembrance which lies always open before the Most High.

Now, all this is going on every day and every night as certainly as time's sands drop through the hour-glass. Letter after letter, stroke by stroke, the story is being written in the book of remembrance and though men see it not, the evidence is being gathered up to be used in that dread solemnity, in which, amidst the pomp of angels, the great Infallible shall separate the blessed of His Father from those who are accursed. Thus every day the God of judgment is working towards the time when even the most careless shall discern between the righteous and the wicked.

III. This brings us to the third point that IN THAT SEPARATION GREAT PRINCIPLES WILL BE MANIFESTED. I shall only have time to mention them rapidly.

First, the principle of *election* will be displayed. God will have a people who are more His than other men can be. "They shall be Mine, says the Lord of Hosts, in that day." "All souls are Mine," says God, and His witness is true, but He rejects some souls because of sin and says, "You are not My people." As for His chosen, they are His portion, His peculiar treasure, His regalia, His crown jewels and they shall be His forever. Then will special love and peculiar choice be manifest, for in the day of the separation it shall be seen that the Lord knows them that are His and while He counts others to be as mere stones of the field, He has set His heart upon the saints who are the gems of His crown.

But then will come as the next principle, the fact of *essential value*, namely, that the Lord's people are not only His, but they are His *jewels*. There is something in them which grace has put there, which makes them to be more precious than other men. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor." God's grace makes His children to be purer, holier, heavenlier than the rest of mankind, and they are rightly divided from the impure and worthless mass. They will at the last, by evidence, be proved to have been jewels among men and nobody shall be able to question their worth. They shall be confessed by all men to have been precious stones amid pebbles, gold amid dross.

Then will come up the next principle of *open acknowledgment*. They were the Lord's and they shall be acknowledged as such. "They shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, in that day." He Himself will declare the fact, for it is written, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren," and in that day the Lord Jesus will say, "Here am I, and the children that You have given Me." Oh, what a joy it will be to be thus openly confessed by Jesus Himself! Now we are unknown if we are God's people, for the world knows us not because it knew not our Master Himself, for we are dead and our life is hid with Christ in God. But when He who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory. "Then shall your righteousness shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Then shall be carried out the principle that there is nothing hid which shall not be known and those who were secretly servants of the Lord shall have evidence of that fact read aloud before assembled worlds, and God, the judge of all, shall not be ashamed to declare, "They are Mine, they are My peculiar treasure."

But even in their case the principle of *mercy* will be conspicuous. I want you to notice very specially. "When I make up My jewels they shall be Mine, and I will spare them." Sparing applies to those who, under another mode of judgment, would not escape. Had it been a question of merit as under law, they would have been doomed as well as others, but the Lord says, "I will spare them." O God, even though You have made Your chosen to be Your treasure, yet You do spare them, for the evidence does not prove them meritorious, but shows that they were saved in Christ Jesus and therefore taught to fear You. When the apostle had received great kindness from a friend whom he had valued he offered a prayer for him, which you may be sure would be a very earnest and comprehensive one, but it was this—"The Lord have mercy upon him in that day." That is all we can expect and blessed be God, it is all we need. The matter of justice is settled by our Great Substitute and to us mercy comes freely. The brightest saint that ever reflected the image of Christ on earth will have to be saved by mercy from first to last. "I will spare them," He says, for He might have dealt otherwise with them had He taken them on grounds of law and judged them apart from the mercy which flows through the atoning Sacrifice. True, they were jewels and they were the Lord's own treasure, but if He had laid up their sins as evidence, instead of their marks of grace, if that book of remembrance which is written before Him had contained an account of their shortcomings and their transgressions as the basis of judgment, it would have gone otherwise with them. But now He calls to remembrance their godly fear, their sacred thoughts and their holy conversation and He spares them.

They will be dealt with on the principle of *relationship* also. "I will spare them as a man spares his own that serves him." You spare your son when you know he is doing his best to serve you. He has made a blunder and if he had been a mere hired servant you might have been angry, but you say, "Ah, I know my boy was doing all he could and he will do better soon, and therefore I cannot be severe. I see that he is imperfect, but I see equally well that he loves me, and acts like a loving son." The word here used signifies pity or compassion, "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him." He will even at the last look upon us with a love which has pity mingled with it, for we shall need it in that day. He will "remember that we are dust" and will accept us, though cognizant of all the faults there were, and of all the infirmities that there had been. He still will accept us because we are His own sons in Christ Jesus and by grace desire to serve Him. We do not serve Him to become sons, but because we are sons. It is a sweet name for a child of God, a son-servant, one who is a servant to his father and therefore, because he is his son, serves not for wage, nor of compulsion, but out of love. Such service is mentioned as evidence of sonship and not as a claim, and we shall be saved through grace, our holy service of sonship being the proof of that grace.

Beloved, on these principles will God make the final division. He will say, "You are Mine, I chose you. You are My saints and there is a gracious excellence in you. I acknowledge you as Mine and I am not ashamed to do so, for you bear My nature. I chose you in mercy and in consequence of My having chosen you, I have made you to be My son-servants and so I accept your holy conversation as the token of your sincere love to Me and I receive you into My glory to be Mine forever and ever.

IV. And now, lastly, comes the sure truth that THE SEPARATION, ITSELF, WILL BE CLEAR TO ALL. Then shall you mourn you sorcerers and adulterers, you that oppress the hireling and turn aside the stranger from his right, you false swearers and enemies of God. You now can go on your way and say, "God cares nothing about righteous or wicked, He deals with all alike, or even smites His children worst of all." But you shall look another way by and by. Compelled to turn your heads in another direction from that of this poor fleeting world, you shall see something that will astound you. For though you wish it not, even you and much more the godly shall then, "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves Him not."

The division will be sharp and decisive. Wherever you read in the Bible you find only two classes. You never read of three, but you find the righteous and the wicked, him that fears God and him that fears Him not. A certain order of persons puzzle us in making division here below, because we do not know to which party they belong. But when the book of remembrance is finished and shall be opened, there will be no sort of difficulty in knowing them. The two classes shall roll apart like the two portions of the Red Sea when Moses lifted up his rod and there shall be a space between. On which side, my dear hearer, you that are hesitating between two opinions—on which side, will you be? There will be no border land, no space for non-committal and neutrality. You will then be among the fearers of God or among those that fear not His name. Who may abide the day of His coming? That coming may be very speedy, for none of us knows the day or the hour when the Son of man shall appear. The separation will be sharp and decisive. There will be no undecided ones left.

And it will obliterate a host of pretensions, for the day comes that shall burn as an oven and all the proud shall be as stubble. The Pharisee who thought he took his place among those that were the jewels of creation will find that the coming of the Lord will burn up his phylacteries and his broad hems, and utterly consume all his boasts as to fasting thrice in the week and taking mint and anise and cumin, for these things were never written in the book, nor worth recording there. What was put there was, fearing the Lord, and thinking upon His name, and speaking one to another. But ceremonials and niceties of observance are not thought worth a stroke of the recording pen. There is nothing in the book to act as evidence for the proud, but everything to condemn him. And therefore the day shall burn him up and utterly consume him and his hopes.

That division will be *universal*, for all they that do wickedly shall be as stubble, not one of them escaping. Though they hid their wickedness and bore a good name, though they concealed their sin even from those who watched them, they entered the church and gained honors in it as Judas did in the college of the apostles, yet that day shall discover all that do wickedly. Talk how they may and speak as they please, their outward conduct will be the index of their inner alienation from God, and in the hour of their judgment the fire shall consume them from off the earth.

Then shall both classes perceive that the distinction *involves two very different fates*. Once the righteous were in the fire, and according to the third chapter and the third verse, the Lord sat as a refiner and purified them in a furnace like silver. But now the tables are turned and the proud, and they that do wickedly, are in a more terrible fire. The day shall burn as an oven! The righteous were profited by their fire, for they were good metal, and to part with the dross was no loss. But the wicked are such base metal that they shall utterly fail in the testing fire. The tables will be turned again, for the righteous were under the feet of the wicked, they ridiculed and mocked them and called them “cants and hypocrites.” But then the ungodly shall be laid low, and the righteous shall tread them as ashes under their feet. The cause of evil will be a worn-out thing, it will be burnt up and there will be nothing left of it upon the earth but memories of its former power, and of the fire by which it perished. That day comes and let the mighty ones among the sons of men who rebel against God know it. They shall no more be able to resist the terror of His presence than the stubble is able to stand against the blazing fire. When they pine forever in the place where their worm dies not and their fire is not quenched, they will know the God of judgment and see how utterly He consumed them out of the land.

Look at the lot of the righteous. When Christ the Sun of Righteousness, shall arise upon the earth and gild it with His own light, there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, and the righteous shall go forth and leap for joy, like cattle which before had been penned in the stall. No works of the ungodly shall be left. As far as this world is concerned, they shall be utterly and altogether gone. There shall then be no tavern songs or ale-house vulgarity. There shall be no village degenerate around who shall gather the youth of the hamlet to be led away by his lewd and blasphemous words. There shall then be no shameless reviler who shall provide a hall where blasphemers may congregate to try which can utter the blackest profanities against the Lord of hosts. There shall be no shrine of virgin, or of saint, or idol, or image, or crucifix. Superstition shall be swept away. There shall be no congregations where pretended preachers of the gospel shall deal out new philosophies and suggest newly invented skepticisms, or which at least they hoped men would accept as new, though they were the old errors of the past picked off the dunghill upon which they had been thrown by disgusted ages. Sin shall all be gone and not a trace of it shall be left. But here shall dwell righteousness and peace. The meek shall inherit the earth and the saints shall stand each one in his lot, for the Lord Himself shall reign gloriously among His ancients. From every hill and every vale shall come up the one song of glory unto the Most High and every heart that beats shall magnify His name, who at last has answered the question, “Where is the God of judgment?” Then, cast into the nethermost hell, in the place appointed for the devil and his angels, the ungodly shall never ask again, “Where is the God of judgment?” And saints triumphant in their Lord, with whom they shall reign forever in eternity, shall also perceive that He, “discerns between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves Him not.” Beloved hearer, where? O where will *you* be? Where shall I be in that day?

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MALACHI 2:17, 3:18.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—885, 714, 728.

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