

THE HEROIC IN CHRISTIANITY

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A SERMON
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.
 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.
 And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye?
 for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.”*
 Luke 6:32-34

BRETHREN in Christ, every word which proceeds out of our Master's lips is precious to us. We make no distinction between His promises and His precepts, but prize every syllable above rubies. A doctrine from Him we value beyond the much fine gold, and a command is equally high in our esteem. Whether His teaching is practical or doctrinal, whether it be intended to guide the feet or to encourage the heart, we are equally rejoiced at it.

*“All His words are music, though they make us weep;
 Infinitely tender, infinitely deep.”*

All the discourses of Jesus are the words of God to our soul, whether they convey to us instruction, warning, rebuke, invitation, or consolation. As *all* His garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, so are all His words most sweet to our taste.

We have not so learned Christ as to be pickers and choosers when the fruits of His lips are before us. Yet I have known professors of that sort, who would fain rend the Master's vesture that they might have only the softest part of it to be a pillow for their idle heads.

“That,” they say, “was a Gospel sermon, sweet food for our souls,” because it happened to tell of what Christ has done for us. But on the next occasion they cry out, “That was not a Gospel sermon. It was legal. It laid a burden upon our shoulders,” because it dared to tell of what Christ has commanded us to do for Him.

Those men, it seems to me, accept Christ for a servant rather than for a Master. They are glad that He shall do this or that for them—that He shall, in fact, gird Himself and wait at their table while they sit down to meat. But if they had learned better they would have chosen Christ for a Master, and would have been willing to gird themselves at His command, and wait on their Lord, counting it their honor to be servants of so divine a Prince.

Feeling certain that you are not of that order of religious cavaliers, but that you will accept anything that comes from Christ, I am glad to have a practical subject this morning. The Sermon on the Mount is as full of light to you as the Transfiguration on the Mount. You are as glad to hear what the Son of God has to say by way of precept as to hear what the Father had to say by way of recognition of His Son.

As for this sermon in the plain, it was preceded by miracles, but it is as forcible to you as the signs and wonders could have made it had you seen them all. The sick touched His garment and were restored, and those who were possessed of devils were healed—you rejoice at the miracles of Christ, but you see Him to be as mighty in word as in deed—and you adore Him for His gracious teachings which remain to us after His miracles have ceased. Here you have certain of the words of Christ, and may His Spirit bless them to your hearts.

Brethren, in the matters of which I shall have to speak this morning in the name of the Lord, taken, as I am quite certain, from His own words, there will be some things strange and unusual which may possibly sound harshly in your ears. Be not astonished, for the Gospel is one of those thoughts of God which is not our thoughts—the whole system which Christ has ushered in is foreign to men, being as far above them as the heavens are above the earth.

Our Lord's kingdom is not of this world, else would His servants do many things which now they forbear to do. The conduct of the subjects of that kingdom must not be measured by the manners of others, for they are a people as peculiar as the kingdom to which they belong.

We have heard persons say, "I do not see it to be my duty to be so precise, it is not customary." What have you and I to do with custom? If things are right, but not in fashion, let us start the fashion. And when it is the fashion to do wrong, let us be desperately unfashionable.

Our Master, evidently, from the verses before us, did not come into the world to teach us to conform to the ways of our fellow men. But He would have us go far beyond the ordinary conduct of our fellows. He asked in His sermon on the mount, "What do ye more than others?" He ordains a standard far above the common standard of mankind when He says again and again, "What thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same."

"Oh," one may say at the close of my sermon, "the preacher demands more of us than can reasonably be expected from flesh and blood." Your charge is correct. But then the preacher is not addressing himself to you as to flesh and blood, but as to those who are possessed of a far higher principle, namely, the indwelling Spirit of God.

True believers walk not after the flesh, nor do they mind the things of it, for they are clothed with the energy of the Spirit of God, and by His power their lives are lifted above the common walks of men. If so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you, you are of another nature than the men of this world, and it is to be expected that you should live after a nobler fashion.

"What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" We live under a spirit whose law is perfection, and therefore a little fault causes us much self-condemnation. We judge ourselves by a severer rule than we would apply to others, for our privileges and responsibilities are exceptionally great.

I allow in other men what I would denounce in myself. I could approve in some men actions which, to me also would be lawful but would not be expedient, upon the higher rule of glorifying God in all things. When I have heard of certain deeds of unconverted and unenlightened men, I have excused them, saying, "Poor souls, considering who they are, and where they were, their conduct is not so heavily to be blamed." And yet if I had behaved one half as badly, there would have been rebellion and presumption in the deed.

For favored children there is a different law from that which governs common subjects. That which is passed over in strangers is atrocious when it comes from a bosom friend. You are not under law, but under grace, and being under grace, you feel the force of a constraint even holier and higher than mere law could put upon you.

If you are what you profess to be, my brethren, more is expected from you than from any other men beneath the sun, and therefore I shall throw aside all hesitancy in setting before you a supreme standard, and asking of you what we never can get from sinners, nor from men of the world. Know you not that your Lord has said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven"?

If I were called to address an ordinary company of men and women upon feats of valor, I might speak with bated breath if I exhorted them to heroism in war. But if I had lived some thousands of years ago, and had been called upon to talk to Spartan warriors, all equipped for battle—men graced and scored with the scars of conflict—I should set no bounds to my exhortations.

I would bestir them as a lion arouses the young lions, and urges them to the prey. I should tell them that their name and parentage should not be disgraced by the idea of defeat, but that they must expect

victory, and seize it as their right. No orator would have spoken to Spartans as to Baeotians—it was their very life and business to fight—and deeds of prowess were therefore to be looked for from them.

Is it not so with you, you followers of the Crucified? Your martyrs and confessors call upon you to lead a life beyond that of common men. I say all this because to certain of you a sort of apology may seem necessary for the strong things that may be said before you at this time. May God's Holy Spirit come upon you and make you strong enough for all the strong things, glorifying Himself in your weakness.

I. Our first observation in plunging into our discourse is this. MUCH THAT IS NATURALLY GOOD MAY FALL FAR SHORT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

Do not make the mistake of saying that moral excellence is not good. Some have broadly declared that there is no good thing in an unconverted man, but this is scarcely true. It will generally be so understood that its meaning will be false, and this is a great pity—we must not utter falsehoods in order to honor God.

There is a great deal of good—good under certain senses and aspects of the term “good”—in many unconverted people. Many who are total strangers to the grace of God exhibit sparkling forms of the human virtues in integrity, generosity, kindness, courage, self-sacrifice, and patience.

I could wish that some who call themselves Christians were in certain respects as good as others whom I know of who have never borne the Christian name. It is always right to speak the truth, and truth obliges me to say as much as this. This ought to make professors very seriously in earnest to judge themselves, lest they should mistake natural amiability and morality for the fruit of the Spirit of God.

If the question be whether our character is the offspring of nature or of grace, it will be a sad thing if the verdict should turn out to be that it is the dead child of nature finely dressed, but not the living child of grace divine.

We may be decorated with gems which glitter and glow, and yet they may be mere paste, and none of them the work of God's Spirit. We may be adorned from head to foot with that which is lovely and of good repute, and for all that we may come short of what God requires of us, because inwardly our heart is not in accordance with our outward array. The platter is clean, it could not be cleaner—but while the filth remains within, it cannot be acceptable with God.

Observe the three things mentioned in the text against which there is no law, but of which much is to be spoken in commendation. These acts are good, but they do not come up to Christ's standard. The first is, “If ye love them which love you.” It is very proper and seemly that *kindly feeling* should awaken kindly feeling in return, that to those who are friendly to us, we should be friendly also. We say, “Love begets love,” and it is natural that it should do so.

Yet I am sorry to say that, though this is no more than a natural excellence, it is not by any means so common as to be universal. There are children who do not love parents who toiled and slaved for them in their childhood, but who grow up to exhibit a strange hardness of heart to the authors of their existence.

I know brothers who do not love the most affectionate and amiable of sisters, and it is grievous to have to add that there are many husbands, brutal husbands, who do not love their wives, who are sacrificing their lives out of love to them and their little ones. I blush to think of the many instances which I could quote, but there is no need—you know it is so.

Thousands have never reached so high as this standard, “If ye love them which love you.” But even if we reach as high as that, it is by no means a great attainment, is it? Our Lord says that sinners also love those that love them. Grace is not needed to make a man the loving husband of a tender wife. Grace is not needed to make affectionate sons and daughters—we see them all around us. I am sure it does not require grace in the hearts of the bulk of you to make you feel kindly towards those who treat you in a friendly manner. “For sinners also love those that love them.”

You have all come as far as that, and such feeling is good—the more of it the better. Yet it is not up to the mark of Christ's teaching if it stands alone. It is not that for which the Holy Spirit has begotten us

again. It is not that for which Christ has shed His precious blood. Higher virtue exists than that which loves them that love you. Here it is—we are to love them that hate us, and despitefully entreat us.

Can you love those who will not mention your name without grinding their teeth in envy, or sneering in scorn? Can you love those who have belied your character, who have done the best they can to ruin you, and who will do the same again? Can you feel towards them an earnest desire for their present and eternal welfare?

If you could do them good, would you delight to do it, and repeat the deed until you had made them too happy to be malicious, too much indebted to continue at enmity? This would be glorious indeed, especially if you could keep clear of all selfish motive in such a contest of love, and should do it all, not because you want to seem a hero or to be something great, but simply because you delight to do good, and feel it to be a pleasure to do that good where it is most needed, namely, where the spirit of enmity has the greatest power.

This is high, and I think I hear someone say, “I cannot attain unto it. I can love those who love me, but loving those that hate me is another business. I shall have to look at the matter two or three times before I attempt it.” I dare say you will, my friend, and hence it is that it needs the work of God Himself to make us Christians. It needs Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to work miracles of grace within as ere we become Godlike. Godliness is Godlikeness, and this is not easy to attain.

The next thing, in the verses before us, is *grateful return*. “If ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye?” It is a very right thing that if persons have served us, we should endeavor to repay the benefit. By common consent, “one good turn deserves another.”

I am sorry to say that though this is a very ordinary sort of virtue, it is not the most common thing in the world, for you may help others if you like, but I have heard that they do not always help you in return. I cannot speak from any painful experience here, for all have been kind to me, and I have had good measure, pressed down and running over, poured into my bosom.

But I have met with men who have bitterly bewailed the ingratitude of those whom they had aforetime benefited. They claim to have helped others generously, but when their turn has come to need assistance they have not received it—I do not feel very sure about the aforesaid claim, but that is the way in which they talk.

It is certainly a horrible thing that men should be ungrateful, but yet supposing that you, dear hearer, are grateful, and have lately taken special pains to do good to one who aforetime was good to you, what thank have you? You have done what you ought to have done, and no more. You have paid an old debt as every honest man should do, but this does not prove you to be a Christian, for Christianity includes this and rises above it, like the alp above the surrounding plain.

Followers of Jesus are called upon to do good to those who have done them harm. You know the old saying, evil for good is devil-like, evil for evil is beast-like, good for good is man-like, good for evil is God-like. Rise to that God-like point. If a man has taken the bread out of your mouth, seize the first opportunity to help him to a livelihood. If he has bespattered you, be ready to forgive him, but say not a word against him. Watch for a time, when by great kindness, you may heap coals of fire on his head.

“Hard teaching,” says one. I know it is, and harder doing, but it is blessed doing. It is sweet to render good for ill! There is a self-conquest about it which ennobles the soul more than the conquest of an empire. There is a getting near to Christ in such actions that has about it more of heaven than all beside.

That patient, persevering rendering of benefits for injuries, returning of favors for enmity, gives us fellowship with Him who, when we were enemies, laid down His life for us. Oh, taste of this sweet grace of forgiveness, and see if it be not good. If you have hitherto never known Christian joy, you shall know it then. It is a high virtue. Nevertheless, to this we must come if we are to be the followers of Christ.

Again, you note in the thirty-fourth verse that mention is made of *helping others in a neighborly way* with the expectation of their returning the friendly deed. “If ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive,

what thank have ye?” Temporary help is often rendered in the expectation that, if ever we are in the same need, we shall only need to ask, and receive the same aid.

I lend you an axe, and you will one day lend me a saw. You borrow my pail, and you will lend me your flat iron—a neighborly sort of barter, which goes on all around, and ought to go on. But there is nothing very wonderful in it, for, after all, it is a sort of laying by in store—making your neighbor your banker for a while. I help you and you help me—a very proper thing to do, and the more of such brotherly and neighborly co-operation, the better—but still there is nothing so very virtuous in it.

“What thank have ye, for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.” You as a Christian are to rise to something higher than this—namely, to be ready to help without the expectation of being helped again—ready to aid those who, you are certain, could not help *you*, who are too poor ever to come to your rescue.

Ay, and ready to help those who would not help you if they could—who may even return your kindness with words of falsehood and acts of unkindness. Can you rise to this? For this is to be a Christian, this is to be like your heavenly Father, who sends His rain upon the just and upon the unjust, who causes His sun to shine upon the field of the churl as well as upon the garden of the liberal. Who gives, and gives, and gives, and receives nothing in return.

It is the glory of God that He is too great, too full, too glorious to be dependent upon us. An ever-flowing fountain, pouring forth incalculable torrents of infinite blessing upon the sons of men. After our measure we are to be the same—we are to aspire to the higher happiness of which our Lord said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Here is the dignity, the heavenliness of happiness—not to be receiving from others—but to be freely distributing to them. May God help us to imitate our God in doing good, hoping for nothing again.

Thus, brethren, I think I have shown you that there are certain good things in the world which, nevertheless, do not reach to the standard of Christian virtue. This holds good of *all religious actions*. You go to the house of God—so do the heathens go to the house of their god. You spend certain times in prayer—so do the Mahomedans. You are very devout—so are Parsees.

You are known to be a religious man—so were a great many who have turned out to be rogues. You are a deacon or other church officer—yes, so were certain bank directors, who were none the more honest for that. But you are a preacher, yes, and so was Judas, who hanged himself, and so went to his own place.

Religious acts count for nothing unless there is a true heart at the back of them. These things ought we to have done, but if we leave heart work undone, nothing is done. Sinners also perform their religious acts, and besides these, some of them exhibit many external virtues, and yet they manifestly fail to approach the standard or Christian virtue.

The road is the same, and men may travel in it apparently in the same direction—and yet they may be journeying with totally different motives. The first may be on the King’s business, the next may be a footpad, and the third an escaped convict running from justice.

The same thing may be done by a hundred different men, and apparently done in the selfsame way, and yet only one of them may be doing it in God’s way, and doing it with the sincere motive of honoring and glorifying God—the ninety-nine, though studiously aiming to make the outward action correct, may, nevertheless, fail as to acceptance with God because their motive and spirit are altogether wrong.

Oh, it shames me when I sit down and look over my life and inquire, “Is this a life a Christian ought to live?” Does not the same question arise in your minds? Do you not feel in many points that even unconverted men have excelled you? Do you not know some persons who are no Christians who are, nevertheless, more patient than you in the endurance of pain?

Do you not know unbelievers who are generous to a high degree, and show much of self-sacrifice in helping their poor neighbors? Do you not know men whose devotion to science is greater than your devotion to Christ? Are there not within your knowledge persons who have loved their country better than you have loved your Lord? Do not these thoughts provoke you to something better?

They make me blush, and cause my heart to weep. What manner of person ought I to be, when those who do not profess to know the mysteries of everlasting love rise to such courage in battle, such endurance in pushing over seas of ice? What ought I to become when my Lord calls me to be His disciple indeed? Where are the fruits of my discipleship? What am I doing to bring Him honor? If even a text like this staggers me, and I say it is a hard lesson, where, where must I be in the sight of God, who sees all my failures?

II. Secondly, dear friends, I want you to notice that CHRISTIAN VIRTUE IS IN MANY RESPECTS EXTRAORDINARY AND MIGHT BE CALLED HEROIC.

To illustrate this, I will confine myself to the Gospel according to Luke. In the passage that we have been reading, we evidently have a form of virtue which is quite out of the ordinary range of men's thoughts. It concerns *love*. "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you."

In the point of love, kindness, consideration for men's needs, and desire to do good, the Christian life is to rise above every other, till it becomes sublime. Heathen moralists recommended kindness, but they did not suggest its being lavished upon enemies.

I have been somewhat amused by the caution of Cicero. He says, "Kindness must not be shown to a youth, nor to an old man—not to the aged, because he is likely to die before he can have an occasion to repay you the benefit—and not to the young man, for he is sure to forget it."

Those of us who are middle-aged may value the orator's generosity as we like, but we may reflect that he only recommends its exercise towards us, because we are likely to be good debtors, and pay back what we receive, perhaps, with interest. That gentle laugh which ripples over the congregation is the best refutation of such barefaced selfishness.

Our Lord bids us seek no reward from men, and He assures us that then a greater reward will come. We shall by shunning it secure it. We shall find a reward in being unrewarded. See how our Lord puts it, "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors: lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

Next, read Luke 9:54-55, and you will see that the Christian is to rise above human passion in the matter of *gentleness*. James and John, when Christ was not received by the Samaritan villagers, said, "Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But Jesus rebuked them and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. And they went to another village."

A Christian should be ready to give way. He should be quiet, peaceable, gentle. If in trying to do good, he wishes to bless certain people, and they refuse to hear him, let him not grow indignant and denounce the offenders, but let him change the scene and carry his message to those who perhaps are hungering for it. He may go round again very shortly to those who repulsed him, and find them in a better mind.

Be gentle, brother—soft words are hard to answer. They refused you at first, try them again. At any rate, be not provoked, for then they will have conquered *you*. Christians ought to be the gentlest beings under heaven—they are sent forth as lambs among wolves, and they are called to be harmless as doves. Such meekness will astonish and amaze their adversaries, and crown the religion of Jesus with honor.

In the elevation of *his joy*, the Christian is also to rise above all other men. He may rejoice as they do in the common bounties of providence, but that joy is to hold very secondary rank. Even in his own success as a Christian worker he takes but measured satisfaction.

Read Luke 10:20 and see what is the source of his truest delight, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather, rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Is not a believer a wonderful being, since even spiritual power and victory over the devil do not excite him, but he finds his joy in a fact which is quite out of himself, and fixed by the unchangeable decree of God?

The Christian is heroic, next, in his *fearlessness*. Turn to the twelfth chapter, verse 4, and there find Christ saying to His disciples, “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell.” The genuine Christian stands not in fear of public opinion, and dreads not the frown of those whom God frowns upon.

The true believer is to be willing to bear reproach, ay, and to bear much more than reproach, as saints of God have done time out of mind. So far from flinching from suffering, we are not even to give it a thought as to how we shall speak if we are brought before kings and rulers, for a part of the Christian’s heroism is to lie in his calm self-possession.

See how the Lord puts it in the eleventh verse, “When they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what you shall say: for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”

The same man who is so gentle that if men will not listen to him he goes elsewhere, is so steadfast that he cannot be silenced. Bold as a lion he stands before his accusers, and he is not troubled as to how he shall put his words together, for he relies upon the indwelling Spirit whom the world cannot receive because it sees Him not, neither knows Him.

Relying upon that Spirit, he speaks when the time comes to speak, and it is the right word, as his adversaries are compelled to confess. Or he is silent while it is time to be silent, and even in that silence there is an awe which is felt by those round about him. After this fashion is he to play the man.

See how far the true believer is lifted up above the world, as you turn to Luke 12:22, where the Lord bids us cultivate a holy *ease of heart* as to all temporal things. The rich man finds his wealth in his bursting barns, but the believer finds his treasure in the all-sufficiency of His God.

The Savior says, “Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat; neither for the body, what you shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that you have need of these things.” See, brethren, the Spirit of God is to lift us up above all fretful cares—we are to feel that the Father will provide for us in this world, and that Jesus will never leave us comfortless.

Because He is our Shepherd, and we cannot want, we are to dwell at ease, and lie down in green pastures, like a peaceful, restful flock. Covetousness is not to approach us, for a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. The desire to heap together a vast mass of wealth prevents the enjoyment of that which is already gained, and this must not come near an heir of heaven.

As to temporal things, we are to be constantly calm, content, grateful, and trustful, relying upon the bounty of our God. This freedom from anxiety constitutes a main part of the Christian character, and is so uncommon as to lift its possessor far above men of the world.

Another point in which Christian heroism is seen is in *humility*, and in delight in service. Turn to the fourteenth chapter and see our Lord’s directions to His disciples not to seek out the highest, but rather the lowest room, for, says He, “Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Habitually a Christian man is to have a modest esteem of himself. He is never to be known as one who is forward, self-seeking, self-asserting. Men who are highly esteemed by themselves are seldom justified by the verdict of their fellow men. No, a Christian man is to be one who is ready to do anything for the good of others, however lowly the service. He will wash the saints’ feet. He will be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, if he may but serve his brethren, and glorify his Master.

“Where are these Christian people?” asks a hearer. “Where are these good and humble people? I cannot find them.” Are you not one of them yourself? If you are not, make the confession, and go before God and ask Him to set you right. And when you are of a lowly, loving spirit yourself, you will find others of a like mind.

I must admit that they are not easy to come by, but when you are meek and lowly you will find them, on the principle that like draws to like, and birds of a feather flock together.

That is not the Christian spirit which turns even the kingdom of heaven into an arena for ambition, but that man has the mind of Christ who becomes the servant of all for Christ's sake. That is not the Christian spirit which, under pretense of seeking liberty in the church, craves after lordship and self-display. Those who are under this influence will have no rule in the church of God except their own rule—they are too heady and high-minded to submit themselves to those who are over them in the Lord.

The spirit of Christianity is lowly, yielding, easily to be entreated, seeking not itself. This is a chief point in the peculiarity of the peculiar people.

Furthermore, there should be about the Christian *a faith* which there is not in any other. (See Luke 17:6). He should have an eye to see that which is invisible, and an arm to lean on that which he cannot feel. He should act upon facts which others may accept as theories, but would never dream of risking a shilling upon it.

Believers, you are to be the men who can say to mountains, "Become plains," and to sycamine trees, "Be ye plucked up by the roots." You are to work miracles, not physical and material, but spiritual and mental, which are not less, but even more marvelous than wonders of healing or resurrection.

The next verse of this seventeenth chapter shows us that Christians are to be men of *service*. They are not to think that they came into the world to sit at a banquet, but they are to wait on their Master while He sits at the table.

Too many appear to consider that the services of the sanctuary are intended merely to *feed* them—they never look upon the house of God as a barracks for soldiers, or a place where workmen come together to sharpen their tools. They only regard it as a sacred buttery, a spiritual larder, or a heavenly refectory, where much is to be received, and little or nothing returned.

O brothers and sisters, we must get out of the cramping influence of the spirit which makes even religion a selfish provision for ourselves, and we must scorn that skulking away from trouble and fatigue which creeps over men of growing years and increasing wealth. We are to serve, not to recline at our ease. What are we doing that we are so anxious to rest ourselves and benefit ourselves?

The Lord Jesus Christ would not have us always be asking, "How can I be happy? How can I obtain spiritual enjoyment?" Servants are not supposed to spend their time in doing their own pleasure and seeking their own profit. A man-servant whose whole time was taken up with watching his own health would be of small value to his employer.

Even so, we have something else to do beyond watching over our own inward feelings. To snatch a brand from the burning is better than to warm your own hands. To feed a hungry soul with the bread of heaven is a far higher deed than to eat the fat and drink the sweet yourself. There is more plunging your arm up to the elbow in the mire to find a jewel for Christ than in washing one's idle hands with the scented soap of respectable propriety.

Oh, to get clean away from all ideas of self-seeking in religion. We are first of all saved by grace like drowning mariners snatched from the deep, but afterwards we are taught to man the lifeboat ourselves for the rescue of others from destruction. Christianity finds me a soldier wounded in battle, and it heals my wounds, but it does far more than that—it girds me with armor, it gives me a sword, it teaches me to fight, and it makes a hero of me if I yield myself to its full power. God grant it may do this for every one of us.

III. I will now close with the reflection that THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION SUPPLIES DUE NOURISHMENT FOR THE MOST HEROIC LIFE.

Bear with me while I show you this in a few sentences. First, *the economy of grace* requires it. You and I must have been chosen to lead a life higher than that of ordinary men, or else why all this noise and stir at all? We see heaven and earth and hell in motion. God vacates His throne and becomes a man. Immortality puts on flesh and blood and dies. The Holy Ghost comes to dwell in these bodies of clay while angels look on and wonder. Surely here is the groundwork and argument of something supremely good.

See you that angel, bright and sparkling like a flame of fire, what trouble did it cost the Creator to make him? A thought sufficed to do it. God willed it, and there stood the helmed cherubim and sworded seraphim before Him in all their glittering ranks.

What will that creature be, which has been the subject of eternal purposes, which has cost the Father the heart-pang of giving up His only Son—cost the Son a bloody sweat—cost the Spirit the exercise of His omnipotence? Such a creature you and I shall yet become. We are on the road to it. Great things ought to come of us if that is what we are, and are growing to. May this thought nourish us to the highest life.

Think again, brethren, we are helped to holy heroism by *the reward* which it brings, for our blessed Master, though He bids us spurn the thought of reward on earth, yet tells us that there is a reward in the thing itself.

Just follow my text in the thirty-fifth verse, “Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great.” What reward? Why, the reward of having done good. This is quite enough. If you go to your brother who has treated you so badly, and say, “Brother, we are going to be friends,” and you manage to heal all wounds, you will not want any other reward. You will sleep sweetly at night, and the music that awakes you in the morning will be sweet as the bells of heaven.

Suppose you have an enemy, and persistently do him all the good you can, you will not wish to be paid for it—it is such a grand thing to have acted like a Christian that you will be blessed in the deed. I believe that martyrs at the stake, when they stood and burned for Christ, felt in every pang a thousand times rewarded by possessing the grace which enabled them to endure to the end.

They felt, “We are doing the right thing. We are testifying to the truth of our beloved Lord.” And if they had possessed a thousand lives, they would cheerfully have laid all down for Jesus. Therefore, do not be so mercenary as to expect to be paid in dirty bronze and tarnished silver, but ask to find your recompense in the spirit by which you are led to do good, and in the smile of your heavenly Father.

Then, mark you this to fire your ambition—you shall be children of the Highest. Those who can rise into the heroic life shall *be as God*. The gentle, patient, peaceable, kind, loving, forgiving, affectionate—these shall be known to be the sons of God, and is this nothing? Oh, if there is a grain of nobility in your natures, you will make this the highest ambition of your lives—to be like God. What is more than that?

We are expected to be like God because we are His children. “Ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.” We expect to see something of the father in the child. If we are children of God, we ought to do what others never think of.

If you are the children of God, remember what a *Brother* you have, and what an example He has set for you. He disdained to live unto Himself, for He left the throne of glory to come down to Bethlehem’s manger, to a carpenter’s shop, and to a servant’s life.

The other night I heard read at family prayer the story of our Lord at the supper table. Jesus, knowing that He came from God and went to God, took a towel and girded Himself and began to wash His disciples’ feet.

Ah, when I thought of Him whom all heaven worships—our blessed, blessed Master—actually coming round with a basin to wash the disciples’ feet, I felt my eyes fill with tears, and I sympathized with Peter when he cried, “Dost thou wash my feet?” It seemed a stoop too great for our Lord and King thus to act a menial’s part. Is there anything which can seem too mean for you and me after beholding such condescension?

If that sight touch you not, let me remind you of a further scene—He went into Gethsemane, and there He knelt, and prayed for you and me, until He was covered with a gory sweat, and great drops of blood followed each other to the ground. Is there any pain that we would not face, is there any reproach we could not bear after this, for His dear sake? Does not that rouse you? Will you after this be proud, and claim honor of your brethren, and grow angry if it be refused?

Come with me once again, for He goes to the cross, and there He hangs. It is your Lord, remember! See, the iron passes through His hand—it is your Lord who is thus maimed! The nails tear through His feet—the feet of your Lord! He wears a diadem as monarch, but it is a coronet of thorns—it is your Lord who is thus crowned!

He wears crimson, too, but it is His own blood—and He is your own Lord! He has not a rag else, for they have stripped Him, yes, stripped and scourged your Lord! And they are hissing at Him, jesting at His prayers, and scoffing at His cries—all this at your Lord!

And what of you? The other day you were ashamed to own that you were His disciple. Are you not disgusted at such cowardice? You were silent the other day when sinners were blaspheming Him—you were niggardly when His poor people needed help. You refused to give when His church and His cause knocked at your door.

You would not forgive a fellow Christian the other day, and you parted company with one who had been your friend for years—and all for a hot word, and yet you call yourself a Christian!

Yes, and I, too, am a Christian, and have my own private cause for self-humiliation—and that is our Master bleeding there. How can we bear to look Him in the face? What sorry disciples we are! O blessed Master, let Your blood drop on us till You have blotted out these many faults of ours and made us like Yourself. Amen and amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 6:12-49

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—909, 262, 263

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.