

UNDERSTANDEST THOU WHAT THOU READEST?

NO. 1792

A SERMON
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AT EXETER HALL.

“And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaiah, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.”
Acts 8:30-33.

HOW this Negro chamberlain of the Queen of Ethiopia came to be a proselyte we do not know. The book which he was so fond of reading may have been the means of leading him to worship the God of Abraham, certainly it has answered that purpose thousands of times. At any rate, he followed the light he had, and though he had not yet come to the full glory of Christianity, it was more than probable that he would do so, because he was evidently prepared to follow truth wherever her flaming torch should lead the way. Oh, that there were more candor among men in these latter days, and less of the prejudice which puts scales upon the eyes of the mind!

Be true to truth as it comes to you. If God gives you only common candlelight, make good use of it, and He will trim your lamp till it shines like the sevenfold golden light of His holy place. Those who are willing to see God by the moon of nature shall soon be illuminated by the sun of revelation. Instead of complaining that you have no more light, make good use of what you have. Many groan over their inabilities, and yet they have never gone to the end of their abilities, this is sheer hypocrisy.

Having become a proselyte to the faith of Israel, the eunuch made a long and perilous journey to Jerusalem. After he had enjoyed the solemn feast he returned, and while he traveled along, he read the Word of God. The book of the prophet Esaiah was the portion chosen for his meditation. Does it not strike you as being remarkable that he should be reading at that moment the best text that Philip could have selected? He had reached a portion of Scripture from which, without the slightest digression, the evangelist preached unto him Jesus as the slain lamb, the willing sacrifice for guilty men.

The like conjunction of providence and the Holy Spirit constantly occurs in conversions. What the man has read in the book, the preacher is often moved by the Spirit of God to declare from the pulpit, for God has servants everywhere, and His secret directions are given out, so that all these servants, though they are little aware of it, are led to work together for the same predestined end.

How often have the talks of young men by the wayside been reproduced by the preacher, and such singular coincidences have struck their attention, and been the means of impressing their hearts! God grant there may be something of that kind tonight—I know there will be. Into this hall years ago there strayed a wild young man, he heard me preach, he believed in Jesus, and he has long been an honored deacon of a suburban church. Are there not other men here to whom the same salvation shall come?

This eminent nobleman is reading. That is a commendable occupation, reading is in itself somewhat of a hopeful sign. In these days we need hardly exhort young men to read. “Give attendance to reading,” said the wise apostle Paul, and that was excellent advice for Timothy. Let all Christian men be reading men. But then, Philip’s question contains these words, “what thou readest,” and that suggests a necessary inquiry.

I am afraid much that is read nowadays had far better be left unread. Multitudes of books are fruits of an accursed tree—the tree of evil knowledge, which is watered by the rivers of perdition. The fruits of this upas tree will yield no benefit to the minds that feed thereon, but much of solemn damage, by perverting the judgment, or polluting the imagination. Souls have been ruined to all eternity by reading a vile book. Count it no trifle to have heard bad language, but count it a more serious evil to have read a bad book which has wounded your soul, and left a scar upon your conscience. The writer of an evil book is a deliberate poisoner, secretly pouring death into the wells from which men drink. The printers and publishers of such works are accomplices in the crime.

Young men, you will read—who among us would wish you to do otherwise?—but take heed what you read! As one who has read more greedily than most men all sorts of books, I bear my testimony that the best of reading is the reading of the best of books. The more we read the Bible and volumes that lead up to the understanding of it, the better for us. I do not like to see in a lending library all the works of fiction needing to be bound two or three times over, while the books of sober fact and solid teaching, and the works that speak of eternal things, have never been read, since they have not even been cut. I fear that this is the general if not the universal rule.

“Understandest thou what thou readest?” is a question I should hardly put until a man has made up his mind that he will not read mere rubbish and falsehood, but will with deep attention read that which is accurate, truthful, devout, and ennobling. Read, take heed what you read, and then seek to understand what you read.

It was a very sharp-pointed question that Philip put to this gentleman. He made honest and earnest use of a rare opportunity for reaching one of the upper ten. We find it tolerably easy to put questions to a man that is poor, but how shall we approach the rich? We have sermons for the working-classes, and it would be a fair and useful thing to have sermons for the House of Peers, and evangelistic addresses for the Commons! Are there any bigger sinners anywhere than you might find in those two chambers? The rich are neither better nor worse than the poor, the various classes have bad and good in each of them, in much the same proportion. I am persuaded that there are noble lords and honorable gentlemen who would be all the better for a little teaching upon the things of the kingdom of God, for instance, it might do many of them good to hear a plain sermon from, “Ye must be born again.”

Why is it that we are so apt to be plain-spoken with working men, and not with their employers? I admire Philip for his outspokenness to the royal treasurer. This gentleman keeps a carriage. Look at his retinue and his brave display! He is a very important personage, and yet Philip, who is nobody in particular, only a poor preacher of the Word, runs up to the chariot, and solemnly asks, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” Young men, never be irritated by plain questions from a servant of Christ, or else you will not be as noble as this Ethiopian chamberlain, and young men, when you know the Lord, do not be ashamed yourselves to put important questions to other people. Bold inquiries often give less offense than the more polite and indirect address which timidity suggests.

I fear the world can seldom charge the church with being too violent in its appeals. Look at what the ungodly will do to us. Where can you live in a street of London, especially in this part of town, without having night made hideous with their loud licentious songs and shouts? They force upon us their irreligion, may we not introduce our religion in return? If we go up to a man straight away, and speak to him in the name of Christ, perhaps he will say, “You intrude.” Well, we are not the only people that intrude, for many intrude their filthy tongues upon us as we go down the streets, and force their infidelity upon us in the daily prints.

The world sets the fashion, and if we follow its customs it has no right to complain. When the wicked grow so delicate that they are afraid of hurting our feelings by their unbelieving speeches, we may take into consideration how we can go delicately also. Meanwhile, is there anything which a man of God has not a right to say if it be the truth, and if he is earnestly aiming at the salvation of his fellow men?

This was the question, “*Understandest thou what thou readest?*” Ah, my brothers, you and I have need to understand the Bible. I will suppose you read it—let me hope I am not mistaken, but when you read it, do labor, above all things, to understand it. The Book was written to be understood. It is a Book which speaks to us about our lives (for the soul is the true life), and about the bliss eternal, and the way to win it. It must be so written as to be understood, since it is a mockery for God to give us a revelation which we could not comprehend. The Bible was meant to be understood, and it benefits us in proportion as we get at the meaning of it.

The mere words of Scripture passing over the ear or before the eye, can do us little good. I heard a person say once, concerning a great doctrine which I hold to be very plainly taught in Scripture, that he had read the Bible through—I think he said six times—on his knees, but he could not find that doctrine. I replied, “Brother, that is an awkward position in which to read the Bible. I should have sat upon a chair, and studied the page in a natural and easy posture. Moreover, I should not have galloped through it at the rate at which you must have raced over the chapters. I should rather have read a little at a time, and tried to understand it.”

“Understandest thou what thou readest?” that is the question. “I read a chapter every morning,” says one. Quite right, keep that up, but “Understandest thou what thou readest?” “Well, I learn the daily text.” Yes, but “Understandest thou what thou readest?” That is the main point. The butterflies flit over the garden, and nothing comes of their flitting, but look at the bees, how they dive into the bells of the flowers, and come forth with their thighs laden with the pollen, and their stomachs filled with sweetest honey for their hives. This is the way to read the Bible, get into the flowers of Scripture, plunge into the inward meaning, and suck out that secret sweetness which the Lord has put there for your spiritual nourishment.

A thoughtful book needs and deserves thoughtful reading. If it has taken its author a long time to write it, and he has written it with much consideration, it is due to him that you give his work a careful perusal. If the thoughts of men deserve this, what shall I say of the supreme thoughts of God which He has written for us in this Book? Let us bend ourselves to the Book, let us ask for increased capacity, and let us use what capacity we already possess to reach the inmost soul of the Word of God, that we may understand it, and be fed thereby.

The Bible can be understood, I do assure you. I will not say that any man here understands all of it. I do not believe there is any man alive that does. I could not myself believe in it if I could understand it all—for I should imagine that it came from my equal, and not from that supreme Master mind, whose thoughts must be above our thoughts, even as the heavens are above the earth. All that is right, all that is fundamental, all that is essential to our soul’s eternal good, can be understood by the help of God if we desire to understand it. Digest the word, I pray you. Be prepared to answer this question, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” Desiring to press that matter upon you, I am going to speak upon three questions somewhat briefly. The first is, *what is most essential to be understood in this Book?* Secondly, *what is the test of a man understanding it?* And lastly, *what can be done to obtain such a desirable understanding?*

I. WHAT, THEN, IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN THIS BOOK?

I do verily believe that it is contained in the passage which the eunuch was reading. It is a very singular passage. A section of the Bible begins at Isaiah fifty-three, and goes onward through several chapters. I will read you a verse or two out of that part which the eunuch would soon have read had he continued to peruse the words of the prophet. Already he had noted the words—“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” There was something for him, for he had gone astray, and knew his lost estate.

Go on to chapter fifty-four, verse three, and read this, “Thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.” He might have thought, “I am one of the Gentiles, and therefore I am of the nations that shall be possessed

by the seed.” When he reached the fifty-fifth chapter, how his eyes would sparkle as he began to read, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters”! And this, “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.” Here, too, He would hear the voice of God inviting men to come to His Anointed, and he would mark that promise, “Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD your God.” He would rejoice to see that the Ethiopians were included in those who knew not the Christ, but should, nevertheless, run to Him.

I beg you to look at the fifty-sixth chapter and the third verse. I fancy the eunuch had aforesaid read the portion, it must have been a favorite passage with him, for it runs thus, “Neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus said the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house, and within my walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters.” Was not that pointedly personal, and full of consolation? I do not wonder that he liked to be found reading near such a choice promise, wherein he saw the tender compassion of the Lord for beings that are usually despised.

The passage from which Philip’s text was taken contains the most essential thing for every young man to know. Let him know and understand the sixth verse of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, it begins with “all” and ends with “all,” therefore carry it in your memories—“*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*” What is wanted is that we first understand that we have *all gone astray*. He who does not know that he has gone astray will not care for the Shepherd who comes to fetch him back again. A humbling, heart-breaking sense of our personal wanderings from the Lord is a main force by which the heavenly Father leads us to the Lord Jesus and His salvation.

I want every young man here to know and understand the truth, that *salvation is the gift of divine mercy* to those who are guilty, and is never the reward of human merit. Christ did not come to save you because you are good, for you are not good, nor because you have merit, for you have no merit. He would not have come to save you if you had possessed merit. Why should He? There would have been no need.

I hear the doctor’s brougham rattling down the street at a great pace, and I wonder where he is going. It never occurs to me that he is rushing to call upon a hale and hearty man. I am persuaded that he is hastening to see someone who is very ill, perhaps one in dying circumstances, otherwise he would not drive so fast. It is just so with Jesus Christ. When He is hurrying on the wings of the wind to rescue a child of man, I am sure that the soul He visits is sick with the malady of sin, and that the Physician is making haste because the disease is developing into corruption and death. He came not “to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

*“Who rightly would his alms dispose
Must give them to the poor;
None but the wounded patient knows
The comforts of a cure.”*

Jesus will not waste His grace on those who are already good. “He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.”

Oh, that you would also understand the second half of Isaiah’s verse, “*The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all!*” There is more philosophy in that statement than in all the teachings of Aristotle, there is more truth worth knowing in that one sentence than in all the books of the Alexandrian Library. The Lord JEHOVAH lifted up the sin of man, and deliberately laid it upon His dear Son. His Son, willingly bearing that load as our Substitute, went up to the tree, and there He bore what was due for all that weight of sin, even the penalty of darkness, desertion, and death. By bearing the chastisement He put away sin, and hurled it into His own sepulcher, wherein it is buried forever.

Now, everyone who believes in Jesus may know that his sin was laid upon Christ, and borne by Christ, and put away by Christ. A thing cannot be in two places at one time. If my sin was laid on Christ, it is no longer laid on me. God cannot exact two penalties for the same offense, if He accepted Christ Jesus as my Substitute, then He cannot punish me. God's justice cannot twice demand the penalty—

*“First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.”*

Such an exaction would be a strange confusion and destruction of both love and justice. Such injustice can never be. This is how you are to get rid of your sin. *You* cannot bear it, but Christ bore it, you are to accept Christ as your Sin-bearer, and then you may know that your sins have gone, that the depths have covered them, that there is not one of them left. I sometimes think if men did but understand this they would be sure to accept the Lord Jesus.

I heard of a minister in Edinburgh who went to visit one of his poor people. He heard that she was in deep poverty, and therefore he went to take her help. When he came to her house, he could not make anybody hear, though he knocked loud and long. Seeing her some time after, he said, “Janet, I knocked at your door with help for you, but you did not hear me.” “What time did you come, sir?” said she. “It was about twelve o'clock.” “Oh,” she said, “I did hear you, sir, but I thought it was the man calling for the rent.”

Just so, men do hear the calls of Christ, but they are willfully deaf, because they think He wants them to do something. But He does not want anything of you, He wants you to receive what He has already done. He comes laden with mercy, with His hands full of blessing, and He knocks at your door, you have only to open it and He will enter in, and salvation will enter with Him. Say, “Come in, you Traveler unknown! What have You in Your hands? I gladly accept what You do bring.” Will not some young man here, who has thought religion to be a hard exaction, change his mind, now that he understands that it is a bountiful boon? Salvation is a gift—a free gift of God. “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

The Savior lifts sin from men to Himself, and then makes an end of that sin once for all by His death upon the cross. Oh, hear you this, you guilty ones, there is full salvation presented to you in the Word of God—salvation from every sort of evil! You shall be helped to overcome every bad passion, to conquer every evil habit, to be masters of your own minds, and lords of your own spirits. The Lord Jesus Christ, if you accept Him, will come into your heart, and turn out His enemy and yours, and He will reign in you from this time forth and forever, until He has made you perfect, and fit to dwell with Himself in glory. Oh, that you understood this vital point, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”!

II. WHAT IS THE TEST OF A MAN'S UNDERSTANDING HIS BIBLE, AND OF UNDERSTANDING THIS PASSAGE IN IT?

I answer that the test of a man's understanding this important part of Scripture is that *Jesus Christ is everything to him*, for Philip, who did understand it, when he explained it, preached unto the eunuch Jesus and nothing else. I try with all my might to preach my Lord Jesus Christ, and I love to meet with people who delight in this theme. Certain critics call upon us to preach something fresh. This also will I do, for I will preach Jesus, and He is always fresh, there is nothing stale in Him, He has forever the dew of His youth.

It may be said, “But new doctrines are brought out continually.” Yes, but they grow stale in a month, they are a poor kind of Covent Garden stuff, and need to be carted away quickly, else they decay. I have lived to see a score or more sorts of modern theology, they all come and go, but Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today, and forever.

If you have Jesus Christ, you have everything—top, bottom, and middle as well. Have Christ, and nothing else but Christ. You will not be in safety if you rest without having a firm hold of Jesus, the

divine Savior. “Well,” says one, “but what do you make of Socinians and Unitarians?” I come to the same conclusion about them as did an old Baptist minister, who was greatly grieved to see a Socinian chapel erected opposite his own. One of his deacons said, “This is a dreadful thing—this opposition shop that has been opened on the other side of the road!” “I don’t call it opposition at all,” said the minister. The deacon exclaimed, “Why, they are Unitarians, they don’t preach the Godhead of Christ!” The old man said, “If you kept a baker’s shop, and another man were to open an ironmongery business opposite you, that would not be opposition, for he would be in quite another line. Those who do not preach the deity of Christ are in an altogether different business. If you want ironmongery you may go to them, but if you want the bread of heaven you must look to the Lord Jesus, the Son of the Highest.” So if you want to understand the Scripture, test yourself by this, Is Jesus Christ everything to you?

***“You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of Him.”***

You understand the Scripture if you make everything of the Lord Jesus Christ, if you believe on Him with all your heart, and then yield yourselves up to Him in His own way.

Every young man, when he believes in Jesus, should give himself to Jesus, heart and soul, forever. “That’s the kind of young man for my money, for He is O and O.” So spoke a certain person, and when he was asked what that meant, he replied, “Out and out for Jesus Christ.” Such a man is precious in these days, yes, precious as the gold of Ophir. Jesus was out and out for us, He loved us, and gave Himself for us, there should be no half-heartedness in our dealings with Him.

If we have read Scripture aright, we have not received the kind of Christianity which sanctifies us on Sunday, but enables us to be dishonest throughout the week. True saints have a religion that has entered into their very blood, changing their nature, and permeating their being, so that it is part and parcel of themselves. Practical Christianity is the only real Christianity. If your religion can be laid aside I would advise you to get rid of it, for a real Christian could no more lay aside his godliness than he could unscrew his head.

I like this eunuch for proposing that he should be baptized. He was not advised to do so, but he proposed it himself, and gave himself up to his Lord and Master to do the Lord’s bidding at once, the providence of God having provided water that he might there and then fulfill his Master’s command. Young man, whichever way the Scripture bids you dedicate yourself to God, set to work about it, and let it be done at once. Find out what is the scriptural way, and then follow it without delay, surrendering yourself wholly to the Lord, you have not read the Scriptures with understanding unless you do that.

The next thing is, if you have read the Scriptures with a clear understanding, *they have made you glad*, for this eunuch “went on his way rejoicing.” The man who gets up from reading his Bible, and says, “I am a believer in Jesus, what a solemn thing it is!” and then goes forth with a pious resolution that he will make everybody as miserable as he can all the day long, wants converting again. The faith of the Scriptures leads joy by the hand, and chases away despair. When true religion comes, its tendency is to make us rejoice in the Lord always, and though we are not as happy as we ought to be, that is not the fault of our faith, but of our unbelief. Fair flowers of Paradise spring up where Faith plants her feet, but thistles grow where doubt abides. Our indigestion, or some other malady may depress us, but faith should make our songs abound even while we are traveling through the wilderness. Joys unspeakable may be ours before we

***“Reach the heavenly fields,
Or walk the golden streets.”***

You have not read your Bible so as to understand it to the full, unless you have learned to be happy by a sweet resting in Jesus.

I think you have not understood the Bible unless *it makes you care about the salvation of others*, for this Ethiopian nobleman, when he got home, I have no doubt, spread the Gospel throughout his native

land, he was, probably, the founder of the Abyssinian Church. If any young man reads this Book aright, he becomes large-hearted, he cannot hold his soul within the narrow bound of his ribs, but his great heart looks out to see where it can scatter benefits. If you can let another man be damned without an effort, I fear that such will be your own end, if you can be quiet when you believe your brother is on the brink of eternal ruin, I fear you are on the brink of ruin yourself.

One of the holiest instincts born in a renewed man is that of longing to save others. Being saved, we wish to co-operate with the Savior in His gracious work. A missionary enthusiasm is the natural result of a clear perception of the true state of matters in reference to the world, which lies in the wicked one. The heathen die without hope, shall it always be so? Will no young man rescue the perishing? I put it to you from the deeps of my soul, will you not cry, "Here am I, send me!"?

You have read this Book so as to understand it, *if your message to others is what the message was to you*—Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ. You have nothing else to employ as the means of good, except the salvation of Jesus, and there is nothing else worth telling. I heard of a congregation the other day that was so very small that hardly any one came to listen to the preacher. Instead of blaming himself, and preaching better, the minister said he thought he was not doing much good by sermons and prayer meetings, and therefore he would found a club, and if the fellows came in, and played draughts, that might do them good. What a lot of that sort of thing is now being tried!

We are going to convert souls on a new system—are we? Are we also to have a substitute for bread?—and healthier drink than pure water? We cannot save men by faith in Jesus Christ, and so it seems we are going to try new dodges of our own? We shall reap small, scant sheaves from such wretched seed. If you can do good anyhow, do good anyhow, but to hope to ever bring sinners to holiness and heaven by any teaching but that which begins and ends in Jesus Christ is a sheer delusion. None other name is given among men whereby they can be saved. If you have to deal with highly learned and educated people, nothing is as good for them as preaching Jesus Christ, and if the people be ignorant and degraded, nothing is better for them than the preaching of Jesus.

A young man said to another the other day, "I am going down to preach at So-and-so, what sort of people are they there? What kind of doctrine will suit them?" Having heard of the question, I gave this advice—"You preach Jesus Christ, and that will suit them, I am sure, if they are learned people it will suit them, if they are ignorant it will suit them—God blessing it." When the great Biblical critic, Bengel, was dying, he sent for a young theological student, to whom he said, "I am low in spirit, say something good to cheer me." "My dear sir," said the student, "I am so insignificant a person, what can I say to a great man like yourself?" "But if you are a student of theology," said Bengel, "you ought to have a good word to say to a dying man, pray say it without fear." "Well, sir," he said, "What can I say to you, but that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin?" Bengel said, "Give me your hand, young man, that is the very word I wanted."

A simple Gospel text is the word which every man needs who is in fear of divine wrath, and he may be sitting next to you at this moment, or he is in the same house of business with you, and needs that you should tell him about Christ. Do that, and bless his soul. May you all understand the Scriptures in this way, and may God make you a great blessing to those around you.

III. Now in a few words I want to answer the question, WHAT CAN BE DONE TO OBTAIN SUCH A DESIRABLE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCRIPTURES?

"I read the Bible," says one, "and get a great deal puzzled over it." Let me advise that when you read a passage in the Scriptures which you do not understand, you should read it until you do. "I should have to read often." Well, that would not hurt you. "But suppose I never understand it?" Keep on reading it all the same. "Can passages of Scripture which we do not understand do us any good when we read them?" Yes, they gradually filter into our souls, by long considering them we get light out of them.

Here is a little boy whose father is an artisan, and uses a great many technical terms when talking about his work. The boy is apprenticed to the trade, and wants to know all about it, and therefore he listens to his father, and when the day is over he says to himself, "I heard my father say a great deal, but

I do not understand much of it.” “But you did understand a little of it?” “Oh, yes.” To that little he is faithful, and day by day he adds to his store of information, learning more by the help of that which he already knows. He hears his father talk again the next day, and still he does not understand much, but at last, by hearing the terms often, and by meditating upon them, light breaks in, and at length he can talk like his father, using the same words with understanding.

So I have found it. When I do not comprehend a chapter, I say—This is probably comprehensible, I will therefore hear my great Father speak, even if I do not understand at first what He may say to me, and I will keep on hearing Him until at last I grasp His meaning. I fear we do not understand some passages because we have not read them often enough, nor thought upon them with full concentration of mind. Once or twice they pass before the mind and produce no impression, let us observe them yet again, and then their effect will be deep and permanent. Do as the photographer does, when he allows an object to be long before the camera until he obtains a well-defined picture. Let your mind dwell on a passage till at last it has photographed itself upon your soul by the light of God.

The next bit of advice I would give is, always read with a desire to understand, always have the crackers with you to crack the nuts, that you may feed upon their kernels. Some may say, when reading the Bible, “That may be a very blessed passage, but I don’t in the least know what it means.” Be not content to leave the text in that condition. Weep much because no man can open the book, and loose its seven seals. Pray over the words, and study them again and again, till at last you come at the essence of the text. Reading with that view, it is wonderful how soon you will obtain the understanding you seek after.

Next, be sure to pray for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. If you want to understand a book, and you find difficulties in it, do as I have done on several occasions with my contemporaries—write and ask them what they mean by their language. I have in this way obtained much valuable information. Can we do that with the Bible? Assuredly we can if we know how to pray. The Author of the Bible is never more pleased than when we go directly to Him to ask Him what He means. He puts Himself at the disposal of every earnest student to open up by means known to Himself those Scriptures which He has Himself dictated. “I consulted a learned commentator,” says one. Very well, at the same time, to go to a commentator upon a book is not half so certain a mode of procedure as to go to the author of the book. Seek instruction of the blessed Spirit by humble prayer.

Remember that you can also go to the Maker of your mind, and He can open it to receive the truth. Your mind is out of order, and it is no wonder, considering its serious damage by the fall, and the atmosphere of sin which surrounds it in this present evil world. My mind, I know, is very likely to be in a disorderly state, it has for fifty years been always at work, and I think it must by this time be like an old clock that has grown rusty or dusty. I find my brains want clearing out a bit, and I believe that this is the case with you young men too. You are either very busy, or else very careless, and the dust of care or neglect spreads over your brain.

Who can set the brain right? The Creator who made the brain. The Holy Spirit has a wonderful power in clearing the intellect. You shall study for a month and make no headway, but you shall pray to God about a spiritual truth, and it shall be clear to you in a minute. There are multitudes of instances in which men have turned dark problems over and over again in their minds, and have never solved them by their own mental efforts, but one flash of Divine light has made everything bright as noonday. Wait, then, upon the Author of the Book, and then wait upon the Author of yourself, and say, “Lord, as You open the Scriptures, so open my understanding that I may perceive their meaning.”

I would earnestly entreat every man who desires to understand the Bible to consider at this moment the vital point of his natural condition, and the way of salvation from it. You are lost, dear friend. If you are an unconverted man you are still lost, and you cannot save yourself, it is impossible that you should. You may have heard the story of that philosopher who was once on the roof of a house, when suddenly behind him came a strong man with a huge whip, and told him to jump down to the ground. Certain death would have been the result. The man was a lunatic. The philosopher perceived that terrible fact in

a moment, and so he very wisely said, “Well, you see, any fool can jump down, the grand thing would be to jump up. Let us go down, and jump up.” They went down, but they never jumped up, for the gentleman thus escaped.

Are there not some here who are jumping down? some young men who are taking a desperate leap to one sin or another? Any fool can jump down, but if any of you are already down, I defy you to jump up again. No, you need a greater power than your own before you can ascend the heights of holiness. If you have tried to jump up, I know, young man, you have fallen back in despair. Easy is the descent to hell, the gravitation of our nature tends that way, but to retrace our steps, this is the work, this is the difficulty. Turn that over in your mind, and say, “If there be salvation to be had, since I cannot work out my own rescue without divine grace, I will trust in Jesus.” Oh, that you would seek His grace at once!

I tried to preach the Gospel just now, let me again put it simply. A Negro worded it thus, “*Christ die, me not die,*” and that is the Gospel, Christ dies that you may not die. Only trust Him, and you are saved.

When you are about it, dear young friend, I beseech you to trust Christ out and out. A homely parable will illustrate what I mean. A father, it is said, had to go one night along the top of a rugged and very slippery precipice. His two boys were with him, and when he started, one boy said, “Father, I will take hold of your hand.” He did so, and it seemed a very wise thing to do. The other boy said, “Father, take hold of my hand,” and as it turned out, that was a much more prudent course, for the first youngster clung to his father’s hand until he grew weary, and when they were in a very frightful place he failed to hold on, and down he went, but the other trudged along right merrily, for he was not dependent upon his hold of his father’s hand—all depended upon the father’s hold of him.

Now come, young man, and begin as you mean to go on. Put yourself right into the hand of the Lord Jesus for Him to keep you. When I was a lad I heard a preacher say that Christ gave to His sheep eternal life, and that they should never perish, for He would keep them to the end. This charmed me. I longed to find this sure salvation. I thought within myself, “I know James So-and-so, and Tom So-and-so, who went up to London, and who were about a year older than I, and they, within half-a-dozen years, were as far gone in vice as well could be. They were better boys when they were at school than I was, and yet they went to the bad. I may go and do the same thing as they did unless I get this eternal salvation. I may lose my situation, or be found pilfering, or something of that sort, for I have as bad a heart as they have.”

I looked upon salvation as a spiritual insurance, which would guarantee my character. So I tried the promise, and now, at the age of fifty, I place myself under the care of the Lord Jesus as I did at the age of fifteen, He has kept me to this day, and I believe He will never let me go, however long I may live.

Oh, young man, give yourself up to that dear pierced hand wholly and heartily! Let your motto be, “Jesus only.” Trust Christ a little, and yourself a little, and like a man who plants one foot on the rock and the other on the quicksand, you will go down. Trust in Him alone, and He will hold you fast. If Jesus does not save me, I shall be lost, for I cannot save myself. It is His business to save me, for both by name and office He is Jesus, the Savior, and I rest quite happily in Him.

When we meet in heaven we shall praise the Lord for making us understand what we read. God bless you all, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ACTS 8:26-40

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—478, 483, 486

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