

CONCERNING SAINTS

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A SERMON

PREACHED ON A THURSDAY EVENING IN THE SUMMER OF 1884,

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“All Your works shall praise You, O LORD; and Your saints shall bless You.”
Psalm 145:10.*

DO not throw yourselves back in your seats, and say, “This will be a sermon for saints, and therefore we may be excused from listening to it.” Do you not see that the first clause gives you a fair word and a kindly hint? “All Your works shall praise You, O Jehovah.” Through this you may enter, as by an open door, for if you are not Jehovah’s saints you are His works, and are bound to praise His name. In these days of harvest and full summertime, every created thing appears to praise God by its very existence. Insect and fern, pebble and rippling brook, star and cloud, wind and dew—all reflect the wisdom and goodness of the Most High. Many a man’s works are no credit to him, and even in cases where men have worked well, and produced much which is to their honor, yet certain of their works are not to their credit, but deserve to be plunged in darkness. It is never so with a single work of the Eternal, all His works are perfect. He puts no bad work into them, He uses no base material, He never makes up with paint and varnish for grievous deficiencies. Set all His works in the sunlight, yes, put them all under the strongest magnifier, and they tell no tale against Him, but they all publish Him as the best of workers, the grandest of thinkers, and the most complete of designers. You may range high heaven, or descend into the depths of the sea, or dig into the darkest mines, but you will come upon nothing which can find fault with Him. You may break God’s works in pieces, and examine them in minute detail, you may pass them through the fire again and again, but tested as they may be, they bear but one witness—

“The hand that made us is divine,”

and that divine hand is excellent in knowledge and power.

All God’s works also praise Him by a sort of intent; they make praise His glory as of set purpose. We are speaking of the inanimate creation—we say inanimate, but in this matter they seem to be all alive to the glory of the Lord. The worlds that roll through space, and the dust that dances in the sunshine, the fire bolt that levels the tower, and the snow-flakes that dance in their wintry courts, the yeast of the foaming sea, the pollen of the ripening flower, and the cleavage of the crystal, all vie with one another in proclaiming the greatness of the wisdom and the goodness of the Lord. Not only are the heavens proclaiming the glory of God, and the firmament showing His handiwork, but the earth and the air, the sea and all deep places, the hillside and the cottage garden, are all emulating each other in the blessed work of praising Jehovah. How often at sunset has it seemed to us as if God held His court far away in the west, amid the bright and burning clouds, and there the seraphs bowed as visibly as before the throne above! Looking across the sea, when the sun has just been rising in the morning, we have seen the gates of heaven opened, and the skirts of the Lord’s robes have been as visible to us as once they were to Moses. At hush of midnight, when ten thousand stars adore, earth’s stillness proves her to be a profound worshipper. There are a thousand times when nature keeps her special Sabbaths and in God’s temple does everyone speak of His glory.

Awaken, then, my friend! You are a creature, if not a new creature in Christ Jesus. Adore your Benefactor if you do not know your Savior. The known may be a step to the unknown. In joining God’s works in His praise, you may be led to join with Him. You have never fully and properly attended to this first call, you cannot, therefore, complain if you find yourself too feeble for the second. Have you nothing for which to praise the Lord? Is not your body a specimen of His handiwork? Are not the organs of nutrition, and the supplies which are given to them, proofs of His goodness? Your deliverance from fever, and a hundred other deaths, is something worthy of a song. All your domestic hopes, and joys, and

longing, though they reach not to eternal things, and are but draughts from the nether springs, yet they do come from the same hand as the higher gifts, and they may lead you home, for the prodigal, who came back to his father, was sweetly tempted there by the remembrance of the bread in his father's house, of which there was enough and to spare.

Yet I confess that there is in the text much that is special for a chosen people. It speaks to those who dwell within the inner circle, who by position, character, and privilege are elevated to the highest form of service. Praise is high as heaven, and lasting as eternity, and yet there is something that is better, for it is written—"Your saints shall bless You."

Everywhere throughout the word of God you see kept up a very clear and sharp distinction between those that fear God and those that fear Him not—between the two seeds, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman—between those that are living in sin, and those that have been delivered from it, and so are made saints unto God. There are two peoples, and always will be while the present dispensation lasts, and the difference between them is great and vital. For this reason it must be difficult, if not impossible, to compose forms of prayer which shall be suitable for two conditions of men so essentially opposite. There should be in our public prayers, as there is in the word of God, this distinction clearly made and manifested. There is a line which divides today between Israel and Egypt, even as there will be a line of fire, proceeding from the judgment seat, which will effectually and finally sever between the heirs of God and the heirs of wrath. At the very beginning we shall have to remind you that the text suggests this. We are all God's works. "It is He that has made us, and not we, ourselves," but we are not all "His people, and the sheep of His pasture." We have not yet all been brought within the bonds of the covenant, we have not yet all been saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and hence we are not all His saints. Divide yourselves by a scriptural judgment. "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; prove your own selves." Rest in no neutrality; dream not of communion between Christ and Belial. "You cannot serve God and mammon." You are either with God or against Him, and the sooner you know your true position the better. I shall never preach to you as if you were all alike, for I know you are not. Some of you are in Christ, and others of you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. I shall not tonight forget that I have tares as well as wheat before me, and I shall try to make that distinction appear all through my sermon.

I shall want you carefully to notice three things. The first is that *God has a people whom He calls His saints*, of these we read in the text. Secondly, *these are placed in the first rank*, for while it is said, "All Your works shall praise You, O Lord," the saints occupy a special position, and they are spoken of by themselves, and put before all others—"and Your saints shall bless You." Thirdly, *these people render a special homage*. While they join in the praise which comes up from all God's works, they stand in an inner circle, and fulfill a peculiar ministry, and therefore we read "Your saints shall bless You."

I. Come, then, to our work. May the Holy Spirit help us! First, GOD HAS A PEOPLE WHOM HE CALLS HIS SAINTS. Who are they? Are they all dead? It is supposed so, for the usage of the Popery around us is to call men saints who have been long in their graves, but living men are not regarded in that light. I notice, even among those who call themselves Protestants, a great many relics of the old harlot of the seven hills, and among the rest this nonsense of dead saintship. Somebody wrote me the other day about his "sainted mother." What did he mean? Had the Pope canonized her? Or did she become a saint by dying? Does death, which came in through sin, bring sainthood with it? Assuredly not. If men are not saints before death, they certainly cannot be made saints after death. Do the coffin and the grave bring you this canonization? Does corruption in the tomb create an odor of sanctity? I am sure that it is not so, for it is written, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he who is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Where death leaves us judgment will find us. You cannot make a sinner into a saint by killing him. He, who does not live as a saint here, will never live as a saint hereafter. When the apostle Paul wrote letters to the churches, he called the members of them saints. They were living men and women of whom he thus spoke. They were ordinary men and women like ourselves; poor in rank, greatly deficient in education, and often without house or home. In some respects they were even inferior to us, for their former conversation had been so exceedingly lax that they ignorantly tolerated sins which in these days would not be endured for a moment. I believe that the church of God at this day, taken as a whole, is better than the church at Corinth was. For instance, there is no church that I know of, worthy to be called a church of

Christ that would tolerate in its membership one who had been guilty of incest. We would be quite sure to deal with such an open and crying crime as that. We have many faults today, and they had a great many faults then, for the apostle had to write to some churches twice over to warn them of certain very apparent evils, and yet, for all that, there were saints in those churches, and Paul was accustomed to address those who were joined together in any one place as those who were called to be saints.

Saints, then, are not people who are dead and buried, and are stuck up in niches for us to admire. There are saints, no doubt, before the throne of God, and we, too, are saints here below if we are what we should be, and if we have received that grace which brings with it deliverance from the reigning power of sin, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

These saints are to be met with in our own country. Many persons have a high esteem for ministers whom they have never seen, who labor in exceedingly remote districts. Of course these good men and their churches must be absolutely perfect, a race of saints. Distance lends enchantment to the view. For my part, I love to believe in the holiness of those who are round about me, in the sanctity of my fellow laborers, and in the fervent devotion of those who hold up my hands, from day to day, in my work of faith and labor of love. There are as many saints in England as there are in America. I am not inclined to look to the Plymouth church, or the Romish church, or the Greek Church, or any other church, for my saints, I find them in the Tabernacle—

*“There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
There God my Savior reigns.”*

It is all very fine to believe in the saintship of the brethren in the Sunderbunds, or in Cathay, wherever those regions may be, but it argues a great lack of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit if we do not believe in His sanctifying influence upon the fellowship at home. I look for my saints among the Christian men and women who are busy all around me in Sunday school teaching, street preaching, and other soul-winning work. It is the pure in heart that see God, and I believe it is the pure in heart that see the saints of God. If we were more saintly ourselves, saints would not be half as scarce as they are.

What is it to be a saint? Some people do not want to know, for with them it is a term of contempt. They say, “Oh, he is one of your saints!” They lay the emphasis on the word “saints,” as if it were something very disgraceful, or, at least, despicable and hypocritical. Whenever I have that said to me—and it has happened more than once—I take my hat off out of respect to the title. I had rather be a saint than a Knight of the Garter. Sometimes I have said, “I wish you could prove your words,” for surely nobody need be ashamed of being called a saint unless he is afraid that he cannot maintain the name. But if you really are saintly, and men apply the title to you in scorn, wear it upon your sleeve as your honor, and make no attempt whatever to conceal the soft impeachment. I suppose that nobody would, as a general thing, be ashamed to be called a peer of the realm, but certainly to be a saint is a far more honorable thing than to be a Duke. The peerage the Queen can give, but saintship only God Himself can give, and if you have that you need never be ashamed of it. I have sometimes heard of the “Latter Day Saints.” I do not know much about them, but I greatly prefer the “Every Day Saints.” Those people who are saints anywhere and everywhere are truly saints, and he that is not a saint everywhere is not a saint anywhere, for this is a thing that cannot be put off and on like our Sunday dress. Holiness must be a part of ourselves; it must be our nature to be saintly.

Who, then, are saints? Some will tell us that they are persons who are totally free from sin in thought, and word, and deed, but where will you find these marvelous beings? I have never met with such. I have seen a few hare-brained enthusiasts who said that they were perfect, but you had only to watch them for a single day to discover their defects, but a man absolutely free from all tendency to sin I have never seen on earth, nor have you. I thought we were all sinners, and I have not altered the opinion. I would not think he was much of a saint who did not confess that he was somewhat of a sinner still. I would be afraid that he did not know himself, and that his standard of saintship was not as high as it ought to be. When a man is so good that he cannot be better, I perceive that in some respects he is so bad that he could hardly be worse. For instance, in the matter of pride, he has gone some few degrees beyond Lucifer himself. When a soul is thoroughly saturated with the belief that it can be no better, it will be no better. That holy restlessness which makes a man lament his imperfections, and pine after something more Christ-like, is part of the force by which we move upward towards higher degrees of spirituality and grace. Self-satisfaction is the death of progress, and at the same time the discovery of falsehood. The

very power to become sanctified has departed from the man who boasts that he is so. A certain great painter had been accustomed to perform great feats with his brush, but one day, having finished a picture, he laid down his palette, and said to his wife, "My power to paint is gone!" "Oh," she asked, "how is that?" "Well," he answered, "up to this day I have always been dissatisfied with my productions, but this last picture I have painted perfectly satisfies me, and therefore I am certain that I shall never be able to paint anything worth looking at again." As long as a man is dissatisfied with himself, he will be capable of great things, but when he feels that he has attained, and is perfectly satisfied, depend upon it nothing will come of him during the rest of his life. He has lost the very faculty of progress.

Oh, brothers and sisters, if we know ourselves and our God, every idea of our being absolutely perfect will make us sick to the death, we know we are nothing of the sort. Still, we also know that sin does not have dominion over us, and that, we are holiness unto the Lord, and in this we do and will rejoice, and bless the Lord our God.

Taking all that into consideration, we again ask the question, who are saints?

Saints, in the first place, are those whom God has *set apart for Himself*. He chose them to be His own portion from before the foundations of the world. He gave them, as men whom He had set apart for Himself, into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are the people whom Christ speaks of when He mentions "those whom You have given Me." These are the saints. These Christ has effectually and specially redeemed from among men, according to that text, "These were redeemed from among men," and again, "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it." Whatever the general aspect of redemption—and it has a general one, wide as the race of men—yet it has also a special aspect towards those chosen ones whom God has taken to be His own from among all the inhabitants of the earth.

These people being thus God's own, by His electing love, are, in due time *called effectually by His grace*. "Come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Having been redeemed by blood, they are in due time redeemed by power. The power of the Holy Spirit brings them out of Egypt's bondage into the glorious liberty of God's dear Son. From that day these people become manifestly saints, a people that live in God, with God, for God, to God, by God—a people that do not belong to the rest of the world. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." They are a singular people, "a peculiar people." I have heard it objected sometimes, "If I were religious, I should be so peculiar." Of course you would be. Scripture says that you would be. "Oh, but I should be one by myself!" Of course you would be. "Know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for Himself." These are the saints, then, a people dedicated unto God, through His own rich grace, to live for Him, for them to live is Christ. "For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

But who are the saints, again? How shall we know them?

Well, they are known, next, by *their holy life*. They are not only dedicated to God, but they are made meet for God's use by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Forget not all I have said about our imperfections, but, for all that, God's people are a holy people. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." A man is described in Scripture, not by his infirmities, but by the general run and current of his life. We say of a river that it runs to the south, although there may be eddies along the banks which run in an opposite direction to the main stream. Still, these are an inconsiderable matter. The main stream of the Thames is running constantly towards the sea, and we speak not amiss or untruthfully when we say that it is so. And the main stream and set of the current of the life of a child of God runs towards that which is right, true, and holy, both towards God and towards man. If it is not so with you, dear friend, I make very short work of it, you do not know the Lord. You have need to be born again, and to be delivered from the power of sin. "His servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." Depend upon it, that which governs you is your king, and if evil governs you then you belong to the evil one. But where there is grace in the heart, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

"Holiness is imputed," says one. I say it cannot be imputed. The *righteousness* of Christ is imputed to us, but *holiness* is quite another term, and you never find in the word of God mention made of an imputation of holiness. That cannot be. David says, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His holy place? He that has clean hands, and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul

unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully,” these are actual qualities, not imputations. God’s saints are not drunks. God’s saints are not liars. God’s saints are not dishonest. God’s saints are not ungenerous and unloving. God’s saints are not a people that take delight in iniquity, and follow after the wages of evil, like Balaam of old. God’s people are a people that follow after holiness, and will never be satisfied till sin is exterminated from their hearts, root and branch. In fact, they will never get to heaven till they get that holiness, and when they get that they will be in heaven, for they will awake in the likeness of their Lord. These, then, are the distinguishing marks of the saints of God.

“Where shall we find these saints?” asks one. Slander says, “Nowhere,” but truthfulness affirms that there are many of them to be found. They are the ornaments of our households, the pillars of our churches, the delights of our communion, and the glory of Christ. Oh, that we might be numbered among them!

Now I want to call your mind back to where we started. Our text speaks of saints, but they are said to be God’s saints. “All Your works shall praise You, O Lord; and *Your* saints shall bless You.” The devil has his saints, and Rome has her saints, and self-righteousness has its saints, and ceremonialism has its saints, but these are not God’s saints. God has His own saints, and *they belong to Him*. They are peculiarly and especially His. They are as the signet upon His finger. Their names are engraved upon the palms of His hands. You remember how the Good Shepherd speaks of those who believe on Him—“My sheep”—do notice that word “*my*”—hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” They are so completely His that they shall be His forever and ever, and they never can be taken away from Him.

II. Well, now, secondly, I want you to notice that THESE ARE PLACED IN THE FIRST RANK, and the reason is of God’s grace and mercy, because He has done the most for them. “All Your works shall praise You, O Lord,” but “Your saints shall bless You,” because they are in a very peculiar and remarkable manner God’s works. God has created all things, but He has *twice created* His saints. He brought the world out of chaos, but He brought His people out of the land of darkness and of the shadow of death, from under the power and domination of every evil thing, yes, even from death, and hell itself. For them He worked a creation and a resurrection. You that are His people have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. Of you He says, “Behold, I make all things new.” You are “begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” The new creation of saints infinitely surpasses the creation of the world. Saints are even placed higher than the angels who are around the throne of God, “for unto which of the angels said He at any time, You are My son?” But He has said that unto you, so that in the scheme of creation you rank above all once-created beings, for you are the twice-born, the twice-made. As in the king’s army of old there was a bodyguard that always stood around the king, whom they called the immortals, so in God’s great host there is a bodyguard—His holy ones, His saints, the twice-born, the immortals, of whom Christ says, “Because I live, you shall live also.”

But, again, God’s works of grace are not only created by His own power, but in great favor they stand, in a *covenant relation* with Himself. Behold, He has made the covenant of day and night, which shall not be broken, and He has made the covenant with the earth that He will no more destroy it with a flood, and He has covenanted that while the earth endures, seed time and harvest, and summer and winter, shall not cease. After the same fashion has He made a covenant with His own redeemed, that He will not be angry with them, nor rebuke them, world without end. The rainbow in the cloud is the token of the covenant of preservation which He made with all His works, but when you come to the spiritual covenant, that eternal settlement is made of God, in Christ Jesus, with His chosen, and with them only. None but His own believing people can be said to be interested in the covenant of grace, ordered in all things and sure, for the man Christ Jesus was the Representative of those who are His own body, His own brethren, of whom He says, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which You have given Me.” The second Adam is the Head of the new race, which is born under the new covenant, not according to the works of the law, but according to the promise of the grace of God. Isaac, the happy child of Sarah, the free woman, born according to the promise, lives at home with his father, and is heir with his father forever, but Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, born according to the strength of nature, is banished and cast off, as it is written, “Cast off this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with My son, even with Isaac.”

Oh, rejoice, you people of God, that if there is a covenant with God's ordinary works, there is a higher, better, deeper, and more spiritual covenant made with you!

Further than this, God's *most tender consideration* is given to His saints. He cares for all the works of His hands. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without being noticed by our Father. God cares for every fish of the sea, and even such fish as never see the light, but dwell in black pools, in the monster caverns of the earth, are not forgotten of Him. But as for His children, what care He gives them! No farmer has as much care for his barn-door chickens as he has for his own little chicks indoors. The Lord cares for all those countless multitudes that wait upon Him, but there is the tenderer care of the Father for all those who are allied to Him by nature, and are heirs with Him by grace. Remember that text, "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him." There is a special fatherly consideration and pity that the Lord has for all His children.

Let us look back, and think how God has loved us long before we thought of Him, and how He has thought of us when we have forgotten Him. One said to me, the other day, "What will become of Gordon?" I answered, "He is safe enough, I believe, for he has given himself into the hands of God, and He will take care of him." To this the questioner replied, somewhat flippantly, "It may be so, but, you see, he is so dashing that he gives God a great deal to think of and to do." I did not like the expression, but still it is exceedingly applicable to many of us, for the office of "Preserver of men" is no careless title in the case of the Most High. Even a quiet life at home is crowded with the most spiritual, minute, and tender thoughts of God. The Lord's guardian care extends to everything, and to every particle of everything, so that nothing in the whole of life is left to chance, or regarded as a trifle. And how sweetly the Lord cares for us! He does all so quietly, calmly, perfectly. Martha, you see, cannot go about her little room without making a fuss, and complaining of Mary, but the great Father goes about His great house, and takes care of all His children, and never makes a complaint about the greatness of their needs, or the urgency of their necessities, or the repetition of their faults. He "gives liberally, and upbraids not." You who are God's saints are first in the Almighty's care. "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me," says David. It is worthwhile to be poor and needy, if for that reason we have more of the thought of God set upon us. See what a special position you occupy, oh, you sanctified ones, not only in creation and in the covenant, but in the tender care of God.

And what a position you have as to *God's visits!* "You visit the earth, and water it: You greatly enrich it with the river of God, which is full of water." But the visits of God to creation—what are they compared with His visits to us, His own redeemed! When He came to Bethlehem, He did so visit us that He took our nature, and became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. And He wears that nature still. God is still incarnate—

*"He is at the Father's side
The Man of love, the Crucified."*

To none of His other creatures has He paid such a visit as that. Even now, today, you who are humble and contrite are nearer to God than kings and princes. God in His visitations of men astounds us. "What is man, that You are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that You visit him?" Yet He will come to your cottage, come to your chamber, come to your sick bed. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word." "You have granted me life and favor, and Your visitation has preserved my spirit."

You see, the saints have the first seats all along, and they hold them to the end of the chapter, for *they shall be crowned* with glory and honor. God crowns the year with His goodness. The time is coming when the Lord will cover the earth with the wheat sheaf, and with the barley crown, and these shall be followed by the ruddy fruits of the orchard. God shall make glad the heart of man with the varied gifts of His bounty. The earth has its coronation, but what is the coronation of the saints? "You shall come to your grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn comes in in his season." Or, if it is not so with you, you shall behold your Lord coming here to receive you, for He has said it, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself."

There is a glory yet to come to the whole of creation, for its groans and travail will lead up to its new birth. What a zodiac of glory will flame from the new heavens above the new earth at the latter day! But what of that? The greatest glory is for us to be fashioned, as we soon shall be, in the image of the Son of God, and then to dwell at His right hand forever. Between God and man there seems to be an infinite

distance, yet when you see the God-man, Christ Jesus, you perceive that God has made His creature, man, near of kin unto Himself. God has taken man into the nearest possible degree of blood relation to Himself, and has illustrated this by varied degrees of relationship. He has made us to be His sons and daughters, and as a corporate body He has made us to be the spouse, the bride, the Lamb's wife. The Lord Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren. Thus are we child, spouse, brother. The nearness of our kin to Deity ought to overwhelm us with humble gratitude and intense delight. God has done infinitely more for us than for all His creatures besides. Rise as you may in creatureship, even till you reach the cherubim and the seraphim, if they be creatures of His hand, even above these stands the Son of God—the Son of man—and we are one with Him. Oh, the exceeding riches of the grace and the glory of God in His saints!

III. So I finish by noticing, dear friends, that as God has a people called saints, and as He has put them in the front rank, **THEY RENDER A SPECIAL HOMAGE** to Him. This homage is true praise, and yet it has a certain difference of principle in it, so that it is instructive to say, "All Your works shall praise You, O Lord," but, "Your saints shall *bless* You."

Praise is a very proper thing to render to God, and in common with all His works we do render it. But praise has not in it those elements of warmth which belong to blessing God. For instance, you can praise a man, and yet have no kind of regard for him. I suppose that when Wellington defeated the French at Waterloo, there could hardly be found in all the ranks of Napoleon's army men who did not praise Wellington. They said, "He must, indeed, be a marvelous warrior to have annihilated such an army as ours." They could not help praising him, but they could have no love for him, and would no doubt have been heartily glad if he had never existed. In the same way, you probably know men towards whom you personally have no warm feeling, and yet when you see their works you are bound to praise them. A man is an eminent painter, and you exclaim, "His pencil is instinct with life." Still, the man is no friend of yours, you pronounce no blessings on his name. It may be that your feeling towards him is that of deep regret that such ability should be united with so ill a character. A certain person is exceedingly skillful in his profession, but he treats you unjustly, and therefore, though you often praise him for his extraordinary performances, you cannot bless him, for you have no cause to do so. I am afraid that there might be such a feeling as that of admiration of God for His great skill, His wonderful power, His extraordinary justness, and yet no warmth of love in the heart towards Him. Cold-blooded philosophers have written of God as if He were some far-off abstraction, and they have allowed words to fall from their pens, like masses of ice, which, when we have dissolved them, have been fragrant with reverence. Such men stand like the Israelites, outside the bounds, and gaze at the fire and smoke of Sinai, awe-struck and trembling. As for us, it is our delight to come up unto God, even within the thick darkness, and to commune with Him as a man communes with his friend. Others may praise God, but it is ours, with our whole hearts, to bless His name. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name."

Praise is a form of worship in which we cannot attain to communion with God of the highest order, for that we must ascend another step, and learn to bless Him. I never read that God praises men. It may be true that in some sense He does so when He says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" But I do not find the expression used in Scripture. God blesses men. Everybody knows that, and therefore when we bless God we enter upon a singularly happy fellowship with Him. He blesses us, and we bless Him, and herein is communion. I grant you, that between the two blessings there is a very great disproportion, but it is the same word, with much of the same meaning.

Again, God's works all praise Him. The lily lifts itself upon its slender stem, and displays its golden petals and its glittering ivory leaves, and by its very existence it praises God. Yonder deep and booming sea rolls up in storm and tempest, sweeping everything before it, and every dash of its waves praises God. The birds in the morning, and some of them all through the night, can never cease from praising, uniting with the ten thousand other voices which make ceaseless concert before the throne. But observe, neither the flower, nor the sea, nor the bird, praises with intent to praise. To them it is no exercise of intellect, for they do not know God, and cannot understand His worthiness, nor do they even know that they are praising Him. They exhibit His skill, and His goodness, and so forth, and in so doing they do much, but we must learn to do more. When you and I praise God, there is the element of will, of intelli-

gence, of desire, of intent, and in the saints of God there is another element, namely, that of love to Him, of reverent gratitude towards Him, and this turns the praise into blessing.

Oh, do you not sometimes feel, as you behold the glory of God, “Let His name be praised forever and ever”? When you stand at the foot of Calvary you are not only astonished at the glorious love of God in Christ Jesus, but you are melted down, and every beat of your heart is to the tune “Blessed be His name!” Your soul goes out towards Jesus. It is not merely the sense of what He is, but the sense of what He is to you. “He loved me, and gave Himself for me.” There is a consequent love and gratitude to Him who gave these benefits, and then there is a desire that you could do something by way of expressing your deep gratitude to Him. You have almost wished that Christ were at your door, hungry, that you might feed Him. You cannot do it literally, but He tells you that you can do it in the person of His poor saints. You have thought, “Oh, that He were at my door on some cold night, when the snow was drifting, that I might open unto Him, and give Him the best place at my table, and my choicest bed. What a host I would be if He would but be my guest!” Now, that is blessing Him, an active benevolence towards Him. It is not merely praising Him, but it is feeling a good-will, a practical desire. If it were possible for you to bestow some good thing on Him, you would rejoice to bestow it. If you could do anything to make Him happier than He is, if that were possible, you wish to do it. It is the end and design of our actions which Christ looks at. It is not merely the hymn we sing, nor the alms we give, nor the service that we render, though all that is part of it, but the innermost soul of blessing God is loving Him, the love that bows over His feet, and wets and waters and washes them with tears—that unbinds one’s locks to wipe those feet—that finds the precious alabaster box to break, and pours the contents upon Him—that is not satisfied unless it can do something to show its love—this is blessing Him. Such love thinks nothing of what it does. All its thought is of Him, and how it will please Him. Oh, for a crown to put upon His head! Oh, for a song to sing at His feet! Oh, for a perfect heart, that I might reserve it for Him alone! Oh, that I had a soul as wide as heaven, that I might entertain my Lord, and Him, only! No, even that is not large enough. Oh, that I could turn space into a great mouth with which to speak His praise, and make all eternity the song, and infinity the music!

We cannot reach half way to our desire, and so we have to wind up by saying, “Bless the Lord, O my soul!” Go in, dear hearts, and sit like David before the Lord, and cry, “Why all for me?” then go out, and talk about Him to your friends, and say great things and choice things concerning Him. Make Him a glorious God in their ears. Tell them there never was such a friend, or helper, or Savior, or father, or brother, or husband as your God has been to you. Make them hear it—that you are the happiest of men because you have found the blessed God. Make all to know it—that you are the most content of men because you have chosen the good part, which is to sit at the feet of Jesus. Do bless Him in secret, and then bless Him with the few that are your daily companions, and if God has given you the tongue of eloquence, bless His name before the crowds, and never be ashamed. Tell them that there is no life like life for God; there is no joy like joy in Christ, no riches like the riches of God’s grace, no heaven like the heaven of dwelling forever with Him. Oh, speak well of Him, and when you have spoken your best of Him, then wish to begin again, and speak better, and when you have reached that, and said your best things, then say, “These are nothing compared with what He deserves. I will try again, and yet rise beyond the loftiest conceptions of the present.”

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 145.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—145, 135, 221.**

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