

THE PASTOR'S RETURN.
THREE SPECIALLY SELECTED SERMONS TO HIS
CHURCH, CONGREGATION, READERS AND FRIENDS,
CONSISTING OF
A RETROSPECT [No. 1882], A PROSPECT, AND AN EXHORTATION [No. 1884.]

PROSPECT—“HE WILL KEEP”

NO. 1883

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as we are.

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name: those that You gave Me

I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition;

that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

John 17:11, 12.

WHAT a wonderful intercommunion and fellowship exists between the Father and the Son in the matter of redemption! It is the Father who gave the Son; it is the Son who gave Himself. It is the Father who gave us to the Son; it is the Son who has bought us with a price, and has kept us by His hand. Here, in the text, the Father who gave receives back from the Son, the Son praying to Him in these terms, “Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me.” We cannot doubt the personality of the Father and of the Son, nor their essential unity. There are not three Gods, but one God. The Father and the Son, though two in one sense, are one in another. I delight to see the traces of the Trinity in every act of grace. From the first transactions of covenant love, even to the ingathering of the whole election of grace, and the introduction of the chosen into glory, we hear the sound of that voice which of old said, “Let *us* make man.” The three divine Persons work together in absolute union for the production of one grand result. “Glory be unto the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end! Amen.”

Observe that our text is all about *keeping*. Three or four times over we have some tense or other of the word “*keep*.” “Holy Father, keep those whom You have given Me.” “While I was with them in the world, I kept them.” Greatly we do need keeping. You have been redeemed, but you must still be kept. You have been regenerated, but you must be kept. You are pure in heart and hands, but you must be

kept. You are quickened with the divine life, you have aspirations after the holiest things, your love to Christ is intense, but you must be kept. You have had a deep experience, and you know the temptations of the enemy, but still you must be kept. The sunlight of heaven rests upon your honored brow, you are near the gates of glory, but you must be kept. The same hand that bought you must keep you, and the same Father, who has begotten you again unto a lively hope, must keep you to His eternal kingdom and glory. All glory be unto Him who is able to keep us from falling! Let all those unite in the song who are kept by the power of God. Here lies our topic, and we will not wander far from it.

First, we will notice *a choice pastorate* which was enjoyed by some of God's people. Secondly, we shall observe that this choice pastorate was, after all, but *a temporary privilege*. And thirdly, we shall see that those who enjoyed it were brought by and by, to the exact place where we must always be, and therefore were made the objects of *a blessed prayer*, "Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me."

I. First, here is A CHOICE PASTORATE. Our little children sing—

*"I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children like lambs to his fold,
I should like to have been with them then!"*

and so forth. Might not you and I well wish that we had been numbered with the twelve, or that we had been among the Marys? It was certainly a choice privilege to be one of the apostles, who were the intimates of Christ, the bodyguard of Jesus. These men saw Him in His privacy, understood His dark sayings, and read His heart. That privilege cannot be ours. Let us think of them without envy, and learn something from them.

You notice what the Savior did for the twelve who were round about Him—"While I was with them in the world, I kept them." *This care was continuous*. It looks as if He did this above everything else. He kept them. He was a guard to His people. He made this the chief employment of His life. While He went about doing good, and reclaiming the wandering, He never diverted His care from His people. Loving them as His own, He loved them to the end. In this chapter you have "the ruling passion strong in death." He has kept them in life, and now He says, "I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You," and the one thought of His heart is, "What is to become of *them*? While I was with them, I kept them. What will they do now that I am taken from them? They will have nobody to resolve their doubts, nobody to abate their discords, no one to answer their adversaries, no one to cheer them into holy confidence. What will the poor babes do when their Nurse has gone? What will the half-instructed scholars do when their Teacher shall be taken up from among them?" He closes His life on earth by commending them to the keeping of His heavenly Father.

Surely, brethren, this teaches us that *this care is ever needed*. Sheep never outgrow the necessity for their being kept by the shepherd. If the eleven always required keeping, I am sure that you and I do. We are not better than Thomas, or Peter, or John. We have among us many a Thomas, who will not believe without a superfluity of evidence, many a Peter, rash and impetuous, and many a John, who would call

fire from heaven upon the adversaries of the cause. We are full of flaws and failures, are we not? We shall crumble to the dust if the Lord does not keep us. Is there one man among us that can live unless the eternal life shall continue to flow into him? I am sure there is not.

We are all so greatly dependent upon the continual keeping of our Lord, that I look with joy to *a care ever personal*. I read with pleasure that the Lord Himself, all the while that He was here, kept those whom the Father gave Him, those eleven priceless gems were ever in His custody. I bless His name that they enjoyed a ministry so tenderly personal, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name." He lays stress upon His personal care—"I kept them." The Good Shepherd kept the sheep, not by proxy, but by His own hands. There is no nourishment for the child like that which comes from its own mother's breast, and a child of God only thrives as he lives upon Christ Himself. Those of us who are under-shepherds exercise a very poverty-stricken ministry compared with that of our Lord, but we should at least give the best we have. We should be willing, night and day with tears, to the utmost of our strength, and even beyond it, to help the feeble and cheer the faint, if by any means we may preserve the flock of God committed to our imperfect charge. Do you not wish that you had Christ for your pastor? You may well wish it. But it cannot be, for He has ascended. Truly, it was a choice privilege to the eleven that Christ could say of them, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name."

What must have been the effect of the personality of Christ upon those eleven? There are some men whose influence upon others has, for lack of a better word, been called "magical." History tells us of warriors who have been courageous and skillful in the marshalling of battalions, and these have inspired their soldiers with boundless loyalty, grappling them to themselves with hooks of steel. Certain heroes have been absolutely supreme over their fellow men; a willing homage has been rendered to them. The influence of the Christ upon those who actually lived with Him must have been superlative. Think of it. There were but eleven of them, but He so molded them that the little handful of seed brought forth a harvest, the fruit of which did shake like Lebanon. They were nothing but peasants when they came under His hand, but when they left it they were the fathers of a new age. They were the Patriarchs of twelve tribes of a new Israel. The apostles, after they had been with Jesus, were men of a superior mold. Though they had little human learning, they were the best educated men on the earth. Each man of them was more than a prince, in having touched the skirts of Deity, in bearing upon his face the brightness of the eternal Godhead, in speaking with a word which, like the Word of God Himself, was utterly irresistible. They were men anointed above their fellows, men to the fullness of manhood, men beyond the utmost height to which the schools could have trained them. What a privilege to have had Jesus Himself for one's own private Tutor!

Our Lord's care was most successful. Of the eleven not one was lost. I should not have marveled at all, apart from what we know of our Lord's gracious power, if the whole eleven had gone back. They were very fickle at first, and extremely ignorant. And at the same time, they were strongly tempted. Influences which made some go back, and walk no more with Jesus, would naturally have had the same power over them if Jesus had not kept them, yet of those whom the Father gave Him not one of them was lost. His marvelous pastorate was so successful that He could say, "Of those whom You have given

Me I have lost none." Thomas, John, Peter, James; they are all kept. The training of the Master has qualified each one for his lofty office. Oh, that you and I may be helped by divine grace to keep with us all the souls God has given to us, that we may at last say of all our hearers, "Here am I and the children that You have given me!" Our Lord's was a wonderful pastorate, was it not?

But, nevertheless, it was *attended with an awful sorrow*, for He says, "None of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Our Savior never meant us to understand that Judas was one of those whom the Father gave Him. He never made a mistake about that. Very early he said, "I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." He had spoken distinctly about the character and doom of Judas. Some have asked, "How could Jesus have all knowledge, and yet permit a man like Judas to be one of the twelve?" Brethren, He did it advisedly, with wisdom aforethought, for He knew that often, in the ages to come, people would say, "Can this Christianity be true which has such false-hearted traitors in its midst, which has such sellers of the Master even among its leaders?" He allowed that objection to come up at the very first, and suffered a covetous traitor to be one of the twelve. The Savior sometimes seemed to speak of Judas as if he was one of His, but then He was speaking popularly, and according to the method of common conversation. He permits the Evangelist to call him "one of the twelve," as if He would let us feel that men may go very far on the way to heaven, and have everything except the essential matter, and yet may perish. When Judas cast out devils, and in Christ's name did many wonderful works, it would have been impossible for any but the omniscient God to have seen any difference between him and any other of the twelve. In some respects Judas excelled others of the apostles; probably he had not half the faults of Peter, nor half the doubts of Thomas. There were fine qualities within him, but they were all leavened by that supreme covetousness which mastered him, and made him the son of perdition. He seemed very near to being all that he should be, yet the Master described him in this prayer, not as one that would be lost, but as one that was already lost. "None of them *is* lost but the son of perdition." He calls him "the son of perdition," and you may be sure that He did not give him that name without great sorrow. The Watcher over the sons of men could not lose even Judas, without deep regrets. He sighs, "He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me." Among the bitter herbs of His Passover, none was more like to wormwood and gall than that word, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, one of you shall betray Me." As there is inexpressible sweetness in the doctrine of the final perseverance of the Saints, so there is an unutterable horror in other doctrines which guard it, such as that which our Lord lays down in the words, "if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is therefore good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." Final perseverance is a rose of heaven's own garden, but it is set with thorns, and those thorns are such cases as those of Judas and of others that drew back unto perdition.

See then in this choice pastorate of our Master the great need there is of keeping. Let us pray for Him to keep us to the end.

II. Secondly, and very briefly, let us speak of A TEMPORARY PRIVILEGE. The eleven were not to have Christ with them always. He was to ascend unto His throne, and then they were to fall back on another mode of living, common to all saints.

Now, why was Christ with them at all? It was because they were very weak. They needed fostering and nurturing. Look, brethren, you had great joys in your early days, you then enjoyed raptures and transports. You have not had them lately; it may be, for you have traveled to heaven at a steadier pace. My mother bounced me upon her knee when I was a babe, but she never thought of nursing me when I became a man. Certain spiritual joys are the privilege and the necessity of our religious babyhood, but we outgrow them. The Lord took the eleven when they were in their infancy, and He was with them in the world, and kept them. Why then did He go away? Why, for this reason, that they might grow to spiritual manhood! If He had always remained with them, working miracles, and teaching them by His personal presence, they would always have been mere children, but it was expedient for them that He should go, for then the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they rose into the full vigor of manhood. While Jesus was with them, they were little children, but in His absence they became men in Christ, quitting themselves valorously through faith in His name. Many joys of sense are allowed to trembling saints, which are taken from them when they become strong in the Lord.

You also, dear friends, have enjoyed a profitable pastorate, and you are now about to lose it. You have not been under Christ's personal teaching, that could not be, but you have been under the teaching of some man whom God has very greatly blessed in the ministry of His Word. Alas, you are now going far from the much-loved means of grace! I pray God that you may now grow stronger. Now that the plant is put out into the cold, may it have strength and vigor enough to bear the frost! I see my gardener hardening off young plants, and it may be the Lord is about to do the same with you. A boat in the builder's yard has been gradually fashioned to perfection, and beautified with abundant care. But it must be launched, it must be washed by the rough sea, it must know the wear and tear of storms. Israel must not always fatten in Goshen, the tribes must be led into the wilderness, and must be conducted over stony places, for thus the Lord brings His chosen to their promised rest.

Please note that, choice as the privilege was of having Jesus Himself to be their pastor, apart from the grace of God, this special gift had no power in it. The Lord Jesus Christ might preach, but He could not touch the heart of the son of perdition. He looked on Peter, and Peter went out and wept bitterly, but the Lord might have looked till Dooms Day at Judas, and there would have been no tears of penitence in Judas's eyes. Alas! Judas heard every sermon that Christ preached, saw all the mighty deeds that He did, even saw the bloody sweat upon His face in the Garden of Gethsemane, and kissed that face with traitorous lips! No ministry of itself can turn a heart of stone into flesh. "You must be born from above." Though the Son of God Himself is the preacher, yet when the congregation goes out, eleven in whom there is the grace of God are blessed, but the son of perdition remains just what he was—hardened even to the end. Let this be a warning to such as be not profited under the word when faithfully preached. Beware lest you perish under the gospel, and so perish with a vengeance. If, however, a choice ministry is about to be removed from any of you, let this thought minister a measure of comfort to you, that, after all, the essential thing is not to be taken from you, for even in the absence of the best outward ministry the Spirit of God can bless you, but without that Spirit of God even the ministry of Christ Himself, in the days of His flesh, could not have been effectual to you.

III. So now I come, in the last place, to show you where the Master left His disciples, where we all are, where we may well be content to be. We are all the objects of A BLESSED PRAYER. "Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as we are." Beneath this divine petition we all find shelter.

Notice how He begins—"Father." Oh, yes, it is the Father who keeps us! Children of God, who can be a better keeper for you, than your Father? To whom can you cry with such certainty of being heard as to your Father in heaven? Whose heart will so soon be moved, whose ears will be so quick to hear, and whose feet will be so swift to save as your Father's? The Lord Jesus was tender to us when He selected that title of the great God, and did not say, "Jehovah," or "Elohim, keep Your people," but "Father, keep them."

And then He puts it "*Holy* Father," but why that? Why, just because the keeping means, keep us holy, and who can make us holy but the Holy God, and who can keep us holy but He who is Himself holy? Who will have such an intense interest in our growing holiness as One whose name is the Holy Father? Beloved, I love well this title; it commends itself to my faith, and breeds assurance in my soul. If the blessed hand of Jesus has put me into the bosom of the Holy Father that I may be kept, why, the keeping is sure and certain! The Holy One will never suffer us to be polluted or defiled.

Carefully note that the prayer is still—"Keep them: keep them." What keeping do you and I require? I was thinking of the various forms of keeping that we as a church might seek for. We need keeping from discord. "Holy Father, keep them that they may be one." It is a very wonderful thing when a dozen people agree for a dozen weeks. We are such an odd lot of people—I did not mean you in particular, but I mean all members of Christian churches—that it is really no wonder when we disagree. The wonder is that we have been so long and so heartily united. I praise and bless God for our years of spiritual harmony. Knowing that despite our imperfections, our tendencies to self-exaltation, and the easiness of misunderstanding one another, and the readiness with which we provoke, and are provoked without cause, it is very a wonder to me that we should have had no strifes or divisions. "Holy Father, keep us." Let us pray that prayer very often. We do not know how soon we may be all sixes and sevens. Let us pray God that we may not fall foul of one another through the entrance of some serpents of discord into our happy paradise.

But, brethren, to be kept in unity is not enough, we need keeping from error. The world swarms with false doctrines, like Egypt with frogs in the day of her plague. You cannot put your head outside the door without having a flight of heresies buzzing around you. As some cities on the Continent have been full of cholera, so has this city been full of "modern thought," and I will not attempt to decide which the worse of the two is. But it is a great mercy to be kept from the silly love of novelties, and to be helped to adhere to the old faith, to cling to the old cross. Happy is he who is determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. "Holy Father, keep us." We have seen some go to the east, and some to the west, some to the moon, and some to the stars, some to perfection, and some to licentiousness. Keep us, Holy Father, keep us staunch in Your truth even to the end.

But it would not be enough for us to be kept united and firm in the truth, we need also to be kept from sin. Saints must be kept, or they will soon be sinners. How have I seen the brightest men tarnished with the foulest lusts! How have I mourned as I have known those who preached holiness with wondrous power to practice unholiness in their private lives! You and I are so ready to be upset by a sudden squall of temptation, especially such as carries much sail and little ballast, that we have need to pray each one for himself, and then for all his brethren, "Holy Father, keep us: keep us from all evil."

Nor would that be enough, for there is such a thing as being kept perfectly moral, outwardly proper and decorous, and yet our hearts may gradually subside into spiritual death. Have you never seen it? It was not putridity, it was not even ghastliness. The corpse was washed—washed with rosewater, and there were touches of paint on the cheeks and lips that almost veiled the work of death. Fitly draped, and with a smile upon its countenance, it looked a welcome to you, yet it was a corpse. Could you have thought it? O church of God, beware of accepting the semblance of life. In the battles between the Spaniards and the Moors, when the Cid, Rodrigo Diaz, had fallen in the fight, the Spaniards set his body upright upon his milk-white steed, and went forth to battle with his corpse at their head. How often had his presence made victory secure to his comrades! Until the Moors discovered that the mighty arm was palsied by death, they fled before the sword of the great Cid, but when once they knew that the uplifted falchion was held in a dead hand, they recovered spirit. And so you can make a dead church sit upright in the saddle, wearing all its harness of war, and you can make it bear aloft the great sword of the Lord, and for a time its death may be unsuspected, but once let the world find out the dreadful secret, and its hour of defeat has come. A dead church, like a dead lion, is sport for children. A church devoid of spiritual life is the laughing stock of devils. God keep us that we never fall into the condition of spiritual decay! Pray from the bottom of your hearts, my brethren, in unison with the sweet prayer of our living, loving Lord, "Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as we are."

Observe, further, that our Lord Jesus Christ asks that we may be kept *through God's own name*. It requires the very name of God to keep a Christian.

By the word "name" is sometimes meant the whole character of God, the whole royal power and prerogative of God. Frequently *power* is meant by the word "name." There is no keeping one of us, much less the whole ship's company, except the sacred name of God shall exert all its power to keep off our foe. The Savior concludes with this plea, "Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me." I do not know whether it will strike you, but it strikes me as very touching. He seems to say, "Father, You did give these to Me, they are very precious to Me, they are My jewels. Now I am going away, and therefore I must leave them. O My Father, keep for Me the sweet tokens of Your own love to Me! These are Your forget-me-nots, and I have valued them, therefore I ask you, while I go up to yonder bloody tree and die, and when afterwards I come to You, and enjoy My eternal rest, take care of these whom You have given Me." It is like a husband who has obtained his bride, but now finds that he must go away from her. He gives her back to her father who originally gave her to him, and says, "Take care of her for my sake. As you love me, take care of *her*." We are talking about you, you believ-

ers in Christ, listen, therefore, with diligence. "The Father Himself loves you." The Father gave you to Jesus because He loved Jesus. He wanted Jesus to have that which would give Him most delight, and so He gave *you* to Him, and now that Jesus cannot be with you by His bodily presence, He gives you over to the great Father, from whose loving hands He first received you, and He says, "Holy Father, keep them." Do you think the Father will answer the Son's request? I am sure that He will. I feel safe in that Almighty hand in which Jesus has placed me—

*"I know that safe with God remains,
Protected by His power,
All that to Jesus appertains,
Till the decisive hour."*

Remember that double-handed safety of which Jesus speaks in John 10:28, 29, "They shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand."

Do you belong to Christ, dear hearer? You are not alone in being owned by that royal Proprietor, many of us are the sheep of His flock, and the children of His love. We are going to gather around our Lord's table. Will you go away, or will you come with us and say, "We belong to Him, and we would share His banquet of love?" If you must go away this once, hasten to put yourself right, that you may obey your Lord in the future. End this forgetfulness of your dying Lord, I pray you. Give yourself to Jesus, and that shall be the best evidence that the Father gave you to Jesus, for never did a heart give itself to Jesus except as the result of the eternal purpose of God, and the work of the Spirit within. Beloved hearer, yield yourself to the Well-beloved, whose love shall henceforth be your joy, your safeguard, your perfection, your bliss! Yield yourself now without an hour's delay!

Let the Lord's people now come, and keep the feast with joy and gladness, singing praises unto the name of the Great Keeper of Israel, who does neither slumber nor sleep.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 17.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—675, 668, 670.**

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