

BELIEVERS AS BLESSED AS THE BLESSED VIRGIN

NO. 1920

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 19, 1886,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“And it came to pass, as He spoke these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the paps which You have sucked.”
But He said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”
Luke 11:27, 28.*

YOU do not wonder that this enthusiastic woman lifted up her voice in admiration of our Lord. I sometimes wonder when the gospel is preached—whose message is so sweet, so charming, so enchanting—that we do not more often observe earnest persons breaking the cold rules of propriety, and uttering exclamations of delight. Few are the hosannas of the multitude today. Is the blood of the world growing colder as the ages tell upon it? Perhaps our western constitution is too cool and self-contained to allow us to copy the demonstrative manners of the East. Assuredly this woman is not to be blamed, but to be commended, for pouring out her heart's love in honor of the Lord. The wonder is, not that she spoke as she did, but that men who hear the teaching of Jesus do not more often speak in His praise. Of our blessed Lord His enemies said, “Never man spoke like this man.” His very tone was melody, and His language was truth set to music. The doctrines which He taught were more than golden; they were light to the head and joy to the heart. He revealed the inmost heart of God, and taught as never prophet or sage had taught before. Oh, “certain woman of the company,” though we do not know your name, and cannot guess at your history, we are in harmony with your outburst of affection. We thank you for giving utterance to that feeling of delight and admiration with which we are filled. We also cry unto the Lord with you—“Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the paps which You have sucked.”

This earnest woman did not mean, in the first place, to praise Christ's mother. I do not know that she had even seen Mary, or that she would have entered into her mind, apart from her matchless Son. It is often the way in the East; if they want to insult a man, they speak vilely of his mother, and on the other hand, if they wish to honor him, they laud his mother to the skies, yet they may have neither dislike nor esteem for the mother, they only reach the son through her. It was while Jesus was preaching that this cry was raised, “It came to pass, as He spoke these things.” It was because He spoke so well, that this woman could not withhold her words of praise. After her fashion as a woman, and as an Eastern woman, she praised the Lord Jesus by extolling His mother.

But lest such an expression, commendable enough in itself, should in later years lend any kind of countenance to that Mariolatry which our Savior foresaw, Jesus said, “Yea, she is blessed doubtless, but still more blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.” Our divine Savior, with all the love of His manhood towards His mother, acted towards her in such a way as forever to forbid any degree of religious worship being rendered to her. He gave no countenance to the superstitious titles of “Our Lady,” “Mother of God,” and so forth, but, on the contrary, He taught that the nearest fleshly relationship to Himself was as nothing compared with spiritual union to Him. Remember how it is written—“Then one said to Him, Behold, your mother and your brethren stand without, desiring to speak with you. But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is My mother? And who are My brethren? And He stretched forth His hand towards His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.”

Worship is due to the Lord alone, and if rendered to the most blessed among women it is idolatrous. This superstition robs God of His glory and ensnares the souls of men. I come back to what I said be-

fore, the woman's speech, though it needed to be guarded against erroneous use, was a true speech, and a holy speech.

Moreover, to do this woman further justice; it was a brave speech for her to make, for the Savior had been confronted by the Pharisees and scribes, those teachers of the period, those persons of authority. They had spoken ill words of Him; they had even dared to say that He cast out devils through Beelzebub, the prince of devils. When He had answered them discreetly, this woman did, as it were, proclaim His victory. She lifted up her voice, so shrill, so loud, so passionate in its eagerness, that it seemed to cut through all other sounds, and reached the ears of the preacher, the ears of all the multitude, and of course the ears of the proud revengeful priests. She cared not, she felt that she must declare her feelings, and she did so right boldly. Oh, if there is a time when not only enthusiasm suggests, but when affection compels us to speak for Christ, it is when others are opposing His name and cause. If they dare to say evil things against our glorious Lord, let us lift our voices, feeble though they are, and bless His sacred name. Though we may as a rule be silent, and shun all public observation, yet when occasion requires, let us be loud and vehement in the defense of His righteous cause. "A certain woman of the company lifted up her voice," let us determine to be heard on our Lord's behalf, for surely if we should hold our speech the very stones would cry out. Do they curse Him? He is blessed, yes, and He shall be blessed! Do they dare to deny the eternal truth which He proclaimed? He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and let Him be forever blessed. We cannot be silent when He is decried. We must and will declare in the teeth of His adversaries that "He has done all things well." O woman! Your courage deserves our praise and our imitation. We will go to school to you to learn your bravery. Oh that we had a fire in our hearts burning as it did in yours, then would it consume the bonds which hold our stammering tongues. Let us believe that when the current of thought around us runs in a wrong direction, such is the power of enthusiasm, that one earnest, impassioned voice may turn it, and our Lord may yet win glory where now He is despised.

Our Lord, when He was thus interrupted by this woman's hearty testimony, did not reprove her speech, but He improved it. Thus possibly He did gently rebuke her, but it was done so delicately that I scarcely dare concede that it was a rebuke at all. Our Lord averted the wrong interpretation which might be put upon it, and then made an addition to it, but He did not at all deny that she had spoken the truth, for He said, "Yea," before He added, "rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it!" He did as good as say, "What you have said is certain, but yet there is a higher truth; she was blessed who bore Me, but more surely blessed still are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Notice the humility which hides in this language. He says not, "Blessed are they that hear *My* word, and keep it," though that would have been quite true. At the moment our Lord was being praised, and He therefore shrank out of sight. "As the fining pot for silver and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise." Many a man is taken off his balance when he is loudly extolled, but not so our humble Savior; then it was that He peculiarly shone forth as "meek and lowly in heart." The word which He had preached He speaks of as His Father's word, and thus casts a veil over that very beauty which had caused the woman's rapture.

This morning I shall invite your attention, first, for a little time, to *a blessedness which is not to be denied*; blessed was that holy woman who bore the Savior. Secondly, in the text there is mention made of *a blessedness which is to be preferred*. When we have spoken upon this theme, we shall have something to say of *that blessedness as one which is now to be enjoyed*. My prayer shall be—and I hope yours will be the same—that we may enjoy that blessedness this very morning and throughout all the rest of our lives. I see the Redeemer's outstretched hands as He pronounces this benediction upon you at this hour, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Divine beatitude, be you fulfilled in each of us!

I. First, then, here is A BLESSEDNESS NOT TO BE DENIED. The Virgin Mother was blessed among women. I have sometimes thought that in our great eagerness to keep clear of anything like superstitious reverence of Mary we have scarcely given to her her due. We cannot blame the Reformers that when they found her spoken of as the "Queen of Heaven," and worshipped with Ave Marias and so forth, they recoiled from such idolatry. Every enlightened mind ought to revolt from such superstition. "You shall have no other gods before Me" is a precept which puts God alone into the place of worship, and forbids us to worship any other person or thing. To God alone be worship. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord

our God is one Lord.” But when we have borne this protest, it does not follow that Mary herself suffers in our esteem; on the contrary, we revere the memory of this saintly woman. The angel made no mistake when he said, “Hail, you that are highly favored: blessed are you among women.” Nor was she in error when she said, “From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” We call her blessed most heartily, for so she was.

The blessing which she received had been the desire of ages. The promise given at the gate of Eden—“the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head”—had awakened the desires of all the godly women of Israel. They longed to behold this promised One, the great Messiah, the restorer of the race, and they desired children in the hope that among those children might appear the promised seed. It is probable that mother Eve herself thought that her first-born was the promised Deliverer, for, according to some readings, she said, “I have gotten a man, the Lord.” Though she was greatly mistaken, yet still it showed her faith, and her hope. All the families of Israel watched for the appearing of the Desire of all nations, the Glory of His people.

When at last the gift was bestowed upon the humble virgin of Nazareth, who was of the house of David, *it came as a great favor.* Since angels rejoiced over that birth, since shepherds hastened to do homage at the manger, and since wise men from the further East came with their gold, frankincense, and myrrh to adore the new-born King, Mary cannot be thought of as being less than the most blessed among women. All the circumstances of the annunciation, and all the homage paid to the infant Savior, show that her visitation from on high had made her greatly blessed. The angel when he addressed her said, “Hail, you that are highly favored, the Lord is with you: blessed are you among women.” We cannot suppose that since in God’s eyes, and in the eyes of His angelic messenger, this was a great favor, we are to treat it as a light thing. The Savior’s, “yea,” was emphatic when the woman spoke of His mother as highly blessed.

She herself received this honor as a great blessing. She bowed herself humbly, and said, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to Your word.” She believed the word of the Lord; her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior; she treasured up all the holy words in her heart. It was no vain thing to her to have charge of the infancy of our Lord. She felt it to be great blessedness to be placed in such a relation to the holy child Jesus. We can scarcely imagine the holy ecstasy, or the profound joy which filled her spirit. She was an eminently gracious woman, and therefore she never boasted of her relationship, nor misused it for her own purpose. But what a pleasure it must have been to have nursed Jesus in His childhood, to have cared for Him in His youth! She treasured up His little speeches, and pondered in her heart what all could mean. Happy were her fingers that made His garments and that tended to His infant and boyish wants. In His adult life she must have been among those who heard Him with delight. Was she not one of the most charmed of His hearers? What joy that her Son should speak in that way and bring such a salvation to the sons of men! Awe mingled with the mother’s delight, deepening it, but not forbidding it. When He had risen from the dead, I think her heart must have been filled with a holy exultation, that He whom she had mourned now lived again. When she knew that He was ascended, though it left a blank in her heart, yet she rose above the sorrow natural to her motherhood, and learned, though she had known Him after the flesh, now after the flesh to know Him no more. She could not but rejoice in all the glory with which the man who was born of her was now surrounded.

She was, she must have been, blessed among women, and this woman who spoke of her as such made no mistake, for think, my dear friends, *what blessings have come to all the world through the Virgin’s wondrous child.* In Him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. If all generations call Mary blessed, it is only because she brought into the world one that is a blessing to us all. Have you not tasted of the blessedness which is scattered by both the hands of Jesus? Do you not know that life and healing stream from the skirts of His garments? If you have not enjoyed the blessedness which He bestows, it is because you have denied it to yourselves—cruelly denied it to yourselves. His blessedness is free to you if your hearts desire it. Oh, what a Christ is He! His Words unlock prison doors; the glance of His eyes is the light of men; the tread of His feet turns deserts into Edens. Our faith is in His first advent; our hope is in His second advent. In Him we live, and if in Him we sleep we shall in Him awake from the dead to live forever in His glory. He has made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign with Him forever and ever. And it was, it must have been, a great blessedness to Mary’s heart to think that “that holy thing” which was born of her was the channel of such blessedness to all mankind.

I must, however, remind you that whatever the blessedness which this holy woman derived from being the mother of our Savior's humanity, *she needed it all*, for she was called to a great fight of affliction because of it. Usually all special blessings involve special trials. The thorn in the flesh attends the abundance of revelations. Weight of glory is balanced with a weight of tribulation. Lest the favored one should be exalted above measure, there is given a measure of down-casting with the lifting up. When you ask to drink of His cup, and to be baptized with His baptism, you know not what you are asking, for in that cup there is bitterness as well as sweetness, and His baptism is a baptism of suffering as well as a baptism of honor. Mary had her supreme sorrows. At the very first this woman so pure and holy had to bear the darkest suspicion. She could hardly confront her espoused one; he could hardly be expected to believe her extraordinary story. Faith alone helped her to see the bright light which lined the cloud. The Lord delivered her. Her trials in escaping from Herod by flight into Egypt were not small. Oh what sorrow often hovered over her, when she saw how her son was "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief!" Once, at least, her faith well-nigh failed her, as I read it, and she trembled for Him, for we find that His mother and His brethren (and of this I will speak another day), somewhere about this very time, stood without, desiring to speak with Him. Mark tells us that His friends sought to lay hands on Him, for they said, "He is beside Himself." He dared such perils, He so boldly opposed established authorities, He spoke such mysterious truths, and He was altogether so unearthly, that His relatives began to think that His mind had failed Him, and it would seem that His mother was almost agreed with them. Her heart must have sunk very low with all her blessedness when she could not understand her son, and could not save Him from reproach and ill will. In fact, she never had fully understood Him; did He not Himself say to her in His early days, "Know you not"—do you not understand—"that I must be about My Father's business?" She could not comprehend Him, and could not protect Him, and therefore, she must have been often sorrowful.

When Jesus came to die, of all that wept for Him, surely none could have been more full of lamentations than the sorrowful mother. *Mater dolorosa*. Do you not see her fainting at the foot of the cross? Then was fulfilled the text, "Yes, a sword shall pierce through your own soul also." John, with gentle tenderness, took her to his own home, in obedience to those words of the dying Lord, "Son, behold your mother," and "Woman, behold your son." But never a more sorrowful woman was ever housed under heaven than she who was "highly favored." She needed to have the blessedness abundantly ministered to her to sustain her heart and mind. She might have well said, "Call me not Mary, but call me Marah," so bitter was her grief.

Call her "Blessed among women," but do not sigh because this unattainable blessedness is not yours. Her tribulations abounded in full proportion to her joys. Only one, from the necessity of the case, could partake of such peculiar blessedness. This gate of honor is shut to all but that virgin of David's lineage. With full and honest emphasis we pronounce her blessed this day, but no trace of envy rests in our heart. We hear the enthusiastic voice which said, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the paps which You have sucked," but it is overpowered by the divine utterance—"Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it!" We do not take away the first, but we establish the second.

II. That brings us to our second head—to hear the word of God and keep it is A BLESSING PREFERABLE to having been the mother of our Lord.

We are sure of this, because in the weighing of the blessings the blessed Master of Beatitudes holds the balances. *Jesus Himself adjusts the scales of blessedness*. He who began His ministry with the word "Blessed," so often repeated, knows best which blessing is the best. We accept without a question, and even without an argument, this statement of our Lord, and we firmly believe, upon His authority, that though Mary is greatly blessed, yet even more emphatically are those blessed who hear the word of God and keep it. We yield our ready assent to what Jesus says, for His word is truth.

Happily this preference so truly given by the Master *puts the highest blessedness within the reach of all of us* who are here this morning. We are at this moment in a position to "hear the word of God, and keep it." If grace is given, there are only these two steps to blessedness. I feel most happy to be addressing a congregation to whom I may say that the highest blessedness conceivable is to be attained by all who "hear the word of God," for if they further receive and keep that word they are already blessed, and the lips of the Lord Jesus have declared them to be so. Remember that this made up the soul of Mary's blessedness, for she was more blessed as a believer than as the mother of Jesus. Elizabeth said to her,

“Blessed is she that believes.” So, dear friend, Mary’s blessedness lay mainly in the fact that she believed, and therefore quietly acquiesced in the Divine will. She was blessed because her faith enabled her to rejoice in God her Savior. It was not an easy thing to believe that He whom she nursed in her arms and nourished from her breast was also the Son of the Highest. He must have seemed to her more truly an infant than perhaps He may ever appear to us; nevertheless she worshipped Him as in union with the Infinite One, and magnified the name of the Lord. Oh yes, it was her faith that made her blessed, and the same faith may be in us.

When the Savior uttered this text He meant to say to the woman who had pronounced His mother blessed—“You, too, are blessed if you hear the word of God, and keep it. You, good woman, have said, Blessed is My mother; but to you I reply, No, blessed are you also, if hearing the word that has been spoken to you this day you place it in your heart, and keep it in your soul as a hidden treasure.” This blessing is open to all of us who by divine grace hear the gospel with our hearts. Dear friends, let me congratulate you on your position. Blessed are your ears, for they hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Blessed are you that you may sing today, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” Blessed are you if you lay up the witness of God in your hearts, remembering it, treasuring it, and living upon it. You are truly favored if the word of God dwells in you richly. Christ in you the hope of glory is your heart’s delight.

I now ask you to notice that this preferable blessing is *found in a very simple manner*. “Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.” The process is stripped of all ambiguity or mystery; there is nothing about it that is hard or difficult, “Hear the word, and keep it”—that is all.

By the grace of God the most uneducated, the most sinful, the most despairing, may still *hear* the word of God, and keep it. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” and by faith comes salvation. To hear God’s word is the privilege of the poor; yes, of all to whom the word is spoken, as it is written, “He that has ears to hear, let him hear.” Beloved, if you would attain to blessedness, hear God’s word *as God’s word*. Receive it, not as the word of man, for in that way it cannot bless you, but accept it as being the word of God to your own souls. Hear it, therefore, with a reverent credence, which does not quibble at it, nor question it, but which sweetly yields to it. You shall be blessed if you hear it as the word of God ought to be heard. Be silent while God speaks; let judgment, imagination, and desire, all bow before Jehovah’s voice.

Let the word fully operate upon you, while your soul sits meekly at Jesus’ feet. Be receptive. Receive the truth with no wish but to understand it and retain it. Hear it with your understanding, endeavor to know what it means, that you may be nourished by it. Do not let it come in one ear and go out the other, otherwise it may leave condemnation behind it, but hear it as a man would hear who was listening to a father whom he loved and revered. Listen as a man listens who is eagerly catching at news—news which concerns himself and his highest interests; hear, in fact, as though God spoke. Israel stood trembling about the foot of Sinai because the Lord spoke in tones of thunder, you should hear with the same reverence, though not with the same alarm. As much reverence is due to God’s word out of His inspired Book as to that same word thundered out of the thick darkness and the flames of fire. God in these last days has spoken to us by His Son Jesus, who is the express image of His person, and the brightness of His glory. Hear this incomparable word with all your powers and faculties. Let heart and mind and thought and memory and reason attend to that which the Lord says to us. So listening, you shall live. “Blessed are they that hear the word of God.”

But we must *keep* it, too. Now, to keep a thing you must first get it. Blessed are they that grasp at what they hear, saying, “That means me.” Blessed are they who take home to themselves the truths revealed, who, when they hear that Jesus died, say, “He loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Hug the truth to your souls; grapple it to your hearts with hooks of steel. When you have laid hold upon it, keep it against all comers. “Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has will he give for his life,” and let the word of God be life to you. Hold the word of God as dearer than this mortal life, and sooner part with all things upon earth than yield a syllable of this priceless word. So hold it as to remember it, to meditate upon it, to feed upon it. So hold it as to assimilate it, as when a man gets bread into himself and it builds up his frame, becoming one with himself, so that there is no getting him away from it or it from him. Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the word. Hold it also by obeying it. Yield yourself up to its sway, obey

the precept, catch its spirit, follow out the will of God. If we thus hear and keep the word of God, our Master declares that however blessed may be the virgin of whom He was born, still more are we blessed, because we are hearing the word of God, and keeping it. I again cannot help saying, happy are the lips that have to speak this morning, and to tell you of a blessing not shut up to a few, nor long ago spent upon one favored person, but open to all such as joyfully hear and willingly retain the word of God.

But why is this blessing so very remarkable? It is, my dear friends, because *it is spiritual*. Everything that is of the flesh must die. All relationships to Christ that were carnal passed away. Those who had known Him after the flesh, before long after the flesh knew Him no more. When He had risen from the dead He said to the holy woman, "Touch Me not," He was not now to be known in an outward fashion. Today no one is rated high in the kingdom of God, because, like James, he was "the Lord's brother," or like the apostles, the Lord's attendants, or like Mary, the Lord's mother. In the spiritual kingdom relationship is not of blood or of birth. All external distinctions of place, race, and descent are abolished. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The Father seeks such to worship Him, and such He finds, but nothing else is precious in His sight. To hear the word of God aright is a spiritual act. To keep that word is a spiritual operation, affecting the heart, the conscience, and the whole man, and hence it is lasting, yes, everlasting, and for this reason it stands high above everything else in the estimation of the Savior as a ground of blessedness.

Now listen to me for a moment while I set forth the excellence of this blessedness. If those who hear God's word and keep it are more blessed than even was Mary who was the mother of our Lord, then any other form of blessedness must be very secondary to the hearing of the word of God and keeping it. For instance, do you happen to be rich? Say not that the rich are blessed, "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Are you endowed with talent? Do not wrap yourselves up in conceit, do not say, "Blessed are we because we have great gifts." "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Are you a person held in high esteem, and justly beloved?—yet do not make an idol of man's regard, for "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Have you attained to considerable influence? Then thank God for it, and use it rightly, but remember that this is not blessedness, but "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Are you enjoying good health? That is one of the greatest of earthly blessings, whatever else you miss, you certainly have a great favor in being free from pain and disease, but health is not blessedness. "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." If you were on a sickbed in the most poverty stricken attic in this city, and if you had no gifts, and had even lost your sight, yet if inwardly you heard the word of God and kept it, you would be blessed amid all your poverty.

I am going a step further; if any of you possess high religious privileges do not pride yourselves on them as though these alone were blessedness; equally blessed are any who hear God's word, and keep it. Somebody might have said, blessed were the apostles, for they cast out devils and healed the sick. Did they not go back to the Master and say, "Even the devils are subject unto us through Your name"? "Yes," said He, "notwithstanding in this rejoice not; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." Perhaps you will say, "Blessed is the man who can preach to a multitude. Blessed is the man who can lead thousands to Christ." It is so, but yet, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Blessed is the Sunday school teacher, who sees her children saved. Yes, the successful worker is blessed, but even more certainly is he blessed who hears and keeps the sacred word. This blessing rises above all others, and shines with a more heavenly radiance. Again I add, what a mercy that it is within our reach!

This should warn you against priding yourselves upon your relationship to good or great men. Do not say, "My father was a minister," or, "My mother is a saint in heaven." Yes, there is an honor about such a pedigree, but true blessedness comes not in that way, or else Ishmael, and Esau, and Absalom had been blessed. Not he that is born after the flesh, but he that is according to promise, is truly blessed. There is no form of blessedness which exceeds this of hearing the word of God, and keeping it. This seems a commonplace business, but it is not common in the sight of God. This which appertains to the whole family of hearers and believers is, after all, the gem of the casket, the Kohinoor among the jewels. Since to hear the word of God and keep it is a higher blessing than to bring forth the Babe of Bethlehem, it is superior to all other imaginable blessings which can be found beneath the skies.

III. So now we close by considering this as A BLESSEDNESS TO BE AT ONCE ENJOYED. I breathe to heaven this earnest prayer that we may now enter into this blessedness. Let us see if we cannot sit still in our seats for a while, and drink in this wine on the lees well refined.

This blessedness belongs to the present. Blessed are they that are hearing the word of God, and keeping it. It is not a remote, but an immediate blessedness. While you are hearing and keeping God's word you are then blessed. The blessedness is for this world, and for you. "But I am so cast down." Yes, but you are blessed! "Alas! I bear such a burden of afflictions." Yes, but you are blessed! "Alas! I have not known a good time of late." No, but you are blessed! Your blessedness does not depend upon your fancies and feelings. If you hear the word of God, and keep it, you are at this moment blessed. But says one, "If an angel appeared to me, and said, 'Blessed are you among women,' I would be very happy." Behold, the angels' Lord and King appears to you this morning in this blessed Book, and speaks out of it with living, loving tones, saying, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." You are blessed! Does not that assurance make you happy? It ought to do so. It ought to fill you with a calm, serene delight. Jesus says I am blessed, and though, just for the moment sense does not confirm the declaration, yet faith believes it. "Blessed is she that believes: for there shall be a performance of the things that are spoken." Faith finds a present blessedness in the word of God which she hears and keeps.

That blessedness lies, in a great measure, in the very act of hearing and keeping God's word. I can speak experientially in this instance. I bear my witness that whenever God speaks to me I feel in listening to His voice a blessedness. The act of bowing the mind to receive communications from God is most pleasurable, and the actual sense of those communications is supremely so. When I sit down with my opened Bible, and let the divine truth enter my mind and permeate my thoughts and my affections, I would not change places with the angel Gabriel. To hear the voice of God as truth is spoken home to my heart by the Holy Spirit is better music to my soul than could be yielded by harps of angels or songs of shining ones. I hope that sometimes in this house of prayer, when the gospel has been preached, and God has spoken through me, you have felt an exceeding joy in hearing His word. You have felt "Oh, that these services could last forever!" and you have sighed for the place—

*"Where congregations never break up,
And Sabbaths have no end."*

Hearing the word of God is in itself an intense delight. I do not mean the bare hearing of sermons, nor the reading of good books, nor even the reading of the Bible in the letter, but when the inner ear is really affected by God's own word, oh then we know life, and light, and heaven! The primeval darkness passed away when God sent forth His word. He said, "Light be," and light was. The entrance of His word gives light. All other lights seem dim candles compared with this divine sun. If the Lord's word has ever said, "Peace be unto you," then the Lord has breathed His own calm into your heart, and you have felt that you are truly blessed.

This blessedness lies also in the retaining of God's word in the soul, in the laying it up and storing it, and especially in the obeying of it. When I feel I am doing God's will I am supremely happy. Active obedience is present enjoyment to the spiritual mind; in keeping His commandments there is great reward. Whenever you have a question about a course of conduct, you are unhappy in it, but when you feel, "This which I am about to do is according to God's mind, I have scriptural warrant for it, and I am called to it," why then you are perfectly at ease. If everybody were to quibble, you would not mind, and if you yourself suffered in consequence of doing it, you would take joyfully the spoiling of your goods. Assured obedience to the word is the surest road to a present happiness.

When a man has once broken the shell of carnality, and has burst forth into the new world where God can be heard, he has entered the kingdom of heaven. God cannot be heard in this carnal nature of ours, which is like the adder, which cannot be charmed. While we are ruled by the flesh we are in a silent land as to God, but when we break loose of the flesh, and enter into the new world of spiritual life and peace, then we are conscious that God has communications with us, for that is what is meant by His "word," and this fact blesses us. When the Lord manifests Himself to us as He does not unto the world—this is heaven! Whether we are in the body or out of it, the reception of communications from God to our hearts, and the storing up of those communications, is a blessedness which excels all that Mary could have known merely as being after the flesh the mother of Jesus. Beloved, I do not need to expatiate here, for this is a matter for experiential test rather than for verbal description. Blessed are

they, yes, infinitely blessed are they, who hear the word of God, and keep it. The hearing of it and the keeping of the word are in themselves blessedness.

This blessing is not dependent upon outward circumstances. If you hear God's word and keep it you may be very ill, and yet in spirit you will be well; you may be very feeble, and yet in spirit you will be strong; you may be dying, and yet you shall not die, for he that hears the word of God shall never see death. In listening to the Lord you have reached a region from which you look down upon the dust and smoke of time and sense. The things which are visible are transient dreams which have small power over you now that the word of the Lord has brought you out of the grave of the visible into the living world of the invisible. "We walk by faith, not by sight," and though now we see not our God, yet in our hearts we hear him, and this hearing fills us with joy unspeakable and full of glory. It is a matter of experience, and therefore though I should speak ten thousand words I could not set it forth. I exhort you to try it for yourselves.

Behold, my hearer, there lies at your feet the most precious jewel that ever sparkled before a monarch's eye. Neither earth nor heaven can produce its superior. You are a hearer, be a hearer, a real hearer. But be you not a hearer only, but a doer of the word, for that man is blessed in his deed. The blessedness of hearing and keeping the word of God, will you prize it, or will you scorn it? What do you say; will you trample this pearl under your feet? I pray you, do not so. Oh take this peerless, priceless blessedness! It lies so near you; do not miss it. If you are wise you will listen to the voice of ancient prophecy which says, "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live." Every man desires happiness, and here it is. Blessedness is the aspiration of us all; lo, it lies before you. Wise men strive for blessedness, and even fools wish for it. My hearer, will you have it? You have not to climb to heaven to win it, nor dive to hell to earn it. You need not wait for ecstasies, nor stop till you have acquired great learning, or suffered severe trials; the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. If with your heart you will believe on the Lord Jesus, and with your mouth make confession of Him, you shall be saved; or, to put it in the words of the text, "Hear the word of God, and keep it." As soon as you have done this, while you are doing it, and as long as you do it, in hearing and in keeping God's word, there shall come to you a double blessing. God has blessed you, and you shall be blessed. Did you come in here this morning under a conscious curse? Come, then, hear the word of the Lord, and the curse is turned into a blessing. Has the blessing of former days seemed to fade of late? Then, again, hear and keep the good word of God. All other doctrine will cause your blessedness to dwindle.

If you are faint and weary, plunge into the word of God as a man does into a bath when he desires to be refreshed. You shall rise out of the waves of truth revived, refreshed, happy, blessed. O my hearers, the blessedness of my own soul lies at this moment in listening to the word of the living God; how I wish you all knew this sweetness! Then shall you young women be blessed virgins, and you mothers blessed matrons, and all of us blessed men and blessed women. "You are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and your offspring with you." God says, "Surely blessing I will bless you." May you never lose a sense of that blessing! Amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 1:26-56.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—485, 775, 493.**

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