

JESUS AFFIRMED TO BE ALIVE NO. 2016

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, APRIL 1, 1888,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”
Acts 25:18, 19.

FESTUS is giving to King Agrippa a brief account of the matter between Paul and the Jews. It may not be a very accurate account, for Festus did not profess to understand the business. He was a Roman governor newly come to Judea, he had no acquaintance whatever with Jewish Scriptures nor with Jewish laws, he is, therefore, merely giving to King Agrippa a rough and ready outline of the affair as it struck him. He had never thought it worth his special attention, but he was a little puzzled how he should represent the matter to Caesar, to whom Paul had appealed. Festus is represented by our translators as calling the Jewish religion a “superstition.” I hardly think he would have used so harsh a term before Agrippa, who professed to be of the Jewish faith. But yet, as he probably knew that Agrippa’s religion did not lie very deep, and was the mere appendage of a man of fashion, Festus was not very particular about the word which he used, and he lighted upon one which may mean “superstition” as the Authorized Version has it, or “religion” as the Revised Version has it. “Well, well,” he seems to say to Agrippa, “I do not know much about it. I supposed, when the Jews brought this man before me, that he would be charged with a breach of the Roman law, and I was prepared, of course, to deal with the prisoner, but when I listened to their accusation, and found that there was nothing in it but some disputes about their religion, I hardly knew what to say. Their controversy is important to them, I dare say, but it can be of no consequence either to you or to me, for it turned very much upon a person of the name of Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”

I want you to notice that, rough and ready as this description is, and neither full nor deep, yet on the surface we see that in the controversy we have the same condition of things as we usually see in such conflicts. On the one side Paul’s opponents fought with the weapons of “certain questions,” and on the other hand he defended himself with a bold affirmation. This is the old story of speculation against dogmatism. It is always the way; the adversaries of the cross of Christ assert nothing, but they question everything. They will not lay down a basis, nor define their opinions. If they would do this, we might soon demolish their fabrics of falsehood, but all that they propound is “certain questions.” On the other hand, those who are witnesses for the Lord Jesus have little care about questions, speculations, and the boasted outcome of cultured thought; but they affirm certain definite facts; they affirm these to be a revelation from God, and there they stand. Brethren, it is, at least, a hopeful token when we are on the side of the affirmation. As to that side which is abundant only in questions, what can be the practical value of its contentions? Can ten thousand questions ease a guilty conscience? Can a myriad of speculations yield comfort for the dying hour? Are we helped forward in true holiness, or even converted to the way of life by questions? Let us take hold upon truths which are surely revealed, the things which we have tasted, and handled, and verified, and, holding these intelligently and heartily, let us resolve to hold them to the end. Let us accept that which has come to us by revelation of the Holy Spirit, and let us stand firmly therein, as Paul did when he affirmed that Jesus was alive. Let us plainly declare definite truth of which we are not ashamed—truth which are often disputed, but can never be disproved.

Another thing is very noticeable in this somewhat flippant account of the whole affair by Festus, namely, that he noticed that the Jews raised certain questions about opinions, superstitious or religious, but Paul made a statement concerning a person. Paul was seen with half an eye to be the more conscientious and the more religious of the two, but still his religion resolved itself into attachment to a person—

“one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.” Brethren, the hinge of the controversy must ever turn upon our Lord, His divine nature, the authority of His teaching, and especially the meaning of His death and resurrection. Did He die as a sacrifice for sin according to Old Testament prophecy? Did He justify many by bearing their iniquities? Did He this, or did He not? The side which Paul takes is that which magnifies Jesus. He finds his chief treasure in the person of the Savior. May the Spirit of God lead us more and more to contend for Jesus, who is not only the Author and Finisher of our faith, but the sum and substance of it! Son of God, and yet Son of man; eternal, yet born into this world; our Sacrifice, and yet our Prophet, Priest and King; bearer of our sorrow and fountain of our joy; sacrifice for our transgression, and yet source of our righteousness; Jesus Christ is our all in all! God forbid that we should glory save in His cross, for we preach Christ crucified. God forbid that we should ever despair of His triumph, for we affirm that He is alive, able to save unto the uttermost those that come unto God by Him. Oh, for a deeper love to our Lord Himself, loving doctrine, precept, and ordinance for His dear sake; rejoicing most of all, that, He lives, since because He lives we shall live also. May even the blindest observer of our lives be forced to see that Jesus holds the most prominent place in them, and that the battle of our existence is for Jesus, our living Lord!

We will give more consideration this morning to the words of Festus than he gave to them himself. May the Spirit of God give us a blessing while we review this superficial utterance of an utterly worldly man! Seen in its true light, it may be instructive to us.

First, let us observe that *true gospel preaching is full of Jesus*. Paul spoke so much of Him that an irreligious heathen magistrate perceived that he spoke of “one Jesus.” Secondly, note that *gospel preaching makes much of the resurrection*; for this is implied in what Festus says of Paul’s affirmation, and, thirdly, *gospel preaching affirms that Jesus who died is alive*. The great contention was concerning “one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”

I. To begin with; TRUE GOSPEL PREACHING IS FULL OF JESUS. Jesus is the most notable figure in Christian testimony. The apostle Paul, whom we may regard as a model in preaching, exercised a ministry which was always full of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Following the historical connection of the verse before us, we note that he preached “*Jesus to multitudes unknown*.” Festus evidently knew not Jesus, for he speaks of Him as “one Jesus.” He mentions the name as belonging to some obscure individual of whom he knew nothing, and cared less. The great ones of the earth know nothing of the King of kings. Beloved, to this day this is the wonder of wonders, that the incarnate God is not known. The world which He made knows Him not. He came at first to His own nation, who had been studying the prophecies concerning Him. Even to the jots and tittles had they studied those prophecies, and yet, when He came who was the clear fulfillment of them all, they knew Him not, for had they known Him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. When He was born into the world, there was no room for Him in the inn, where there is room for everybody. No palace gave welcome to the more than royal child. He was of the house and lineage of David, but they did not perceive in Him the answer to their question, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” His birth is the starting point of the age, and yet it was almost unanimously ignored by those who wielded the recording pen of history. His was the most extraordinary life that ever passed before mortal eyes, and yet how little notice was taken of it! Beyond Palestine it seems not even to have awakened curiosity. He died, and then to the people most concerned in Him He became “one Jesus, which was dead.” The new Roman procurator, and myriads like him, well informed upon other matters, hardly knew His name, and only mentioned half of it when they spoke of “one Jesus, which was dead.” Brethren, this is why we must keep on preaching Jesus Christ, because He is still so little known. The masses of this city are as ignorant of Jesus as Festus was. You can never have a congregation in any of our places of worship and feel sure that they all know Jesus. If you gather in the outsiders from the street you may be sure that the story of Jesus will be news to them. We call this a Christian country, but it would be very difficult to prove that it is so. If we took certain lines of observation as to the moral and religious conduct of our fellow men, we should logically arrive at the conclusion that we live in a heathen rather than in a Christian city. Still the world knows Him not. As a sun He shines on all eyes, and yet men do not see Him; as an atmosphere He surrounds all life, and yet men do not perceive Him. Let this sad fact constrain us to fill our teaching with Christ. As Gideon’s fleece dripped with dew, so let us saturate our ministry with Christ. Be it ours

truthfully to say, “We preach Christ crucified.” We do this always and evermore, not by accident, but by continual design.

Paul preached *Jesus, who was despised by many*. The language of Festus is not only that of ignorance, but in a measure that of contempt. He speaks of “one Jesus, which was dead.” Jesus is evidently nothing to Festus, and Festus does not imagine that Jesus is very much to King Agrippa. Probably he was quite right; Jesus was nobody among the rank and fashion and culture of the period. Behold the unlearned of the day, if you speak to them of the great Sacrifice and the wondrous atonement made by blood, they scarcely hearken to you, for such high things are not for them. They are so hardly pressed with daily labor and slender pay that they cannot think of sin, and sacrifice, and salvation, but they ask, “What has the poor working man to do with religion?” Alas, that this folly should be so prevalent! Then you turn to the learned, and hope that here, at any rate, due attention will be given to the great marvel of reconciling love. Alas! It is not so. To these more educated ones the doctrine of the cross is foolishness. They ask for something new, something more philosophical. Substitution and sacrifice—they will have none of them. The story of the league of justice with grace, the reconciliation of holiness with mercy, is beneath their notice. They are too cultured to believe the common faith, too wise to accept that which God has revealed unto babes. Beloved brethren, it should never cause us doubt when we see many despising our Lord, for this is nothing new, and nothing unexpected. Did He tell us that if we preached in His name all men would receive us? No, He warned us that the contrary result would follow. Did not His apostles assure us that the offense of the cross had not ceased? Is not Christ crucified a stumbling block and foolishness to carnal men? If all men had received our message with a ready gratitude, we might have questioned the truth of Scripture, but inasmuch as they fight against it, we may see in this an argument for its truth, since we were told of old that “the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him.”

Gospel preaching is also full of Jesus Christ in this respect, that *we do not conceal His death*. Festus notes that the conflict was concerning “one Jesus, which was dead.” The Jews said He was dead, and Paul also confessed that He was dead; there was no disagreement between them over that matter. Hear, then, the debate. “What! Did your Leader die?” “Yes; He was crucified.” “Did you not say He was divine?” “Yes.” “Yet is He dead?” “It is even so.” “Yet you spoke of His leading you on to victory?” “So we did.” “Yet He is dead?” “Yes, He died at Calvary.” “How, then, can your boasting stand?” “We believe that by His death He has gained the victory and accomplished His great purpose.” “But how did He die?” He died the death of a felon upon a gallows. His enemies nailed Him to a cross, and put Him to a death which was reserved for slaves. We confess this; yes, we glory in it! We tell you, too, that He not only died that which was a penal death externally, but He actually and truly died such a death. “He was made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree.” Isaiah said of Him, “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,” and again, “He was numbered with the transgressors and He bare the sin of many.” His death was the equivalent to that penal death which was our just desert. Hear how He cries, “Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by? Behold, and see if there is any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord has afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger.” We glory that our Lord Jesus was put to death as bearing the sin of many. This we hold and teach; not defending it, nor apologizing for it, but affirming it with all boldness, with the desire that we may be understood. If any quibble at this teaching, we do not therefore conceal it; we expected that it would be quibbled at. We desire more and more to obtrude this truth of substitution whenever we preach, and to make it the head and front of our gospel. As the brazen serpent was lifted up upon the pole, and was by no means concealed, even so would we set forth plainly the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus, that sinners may look to Him and live. This is the hope of men—the sacrifice of Jesus proclaimed with great plainness of speech. Jesus is to be believed in as the sin-bearing Lamb of God; believed in as dying the death of the cross that we might live through Him. That only is gospel preaching which has this for its subject and spirit. A Christless gospel is a useless gospel. Our sermons should be so perfumed with Jesus that never should a congregation gather and separate without perceiving a savor of Christ. Even people who are not saved by it should yet be made to know that we preach Christ crucified. In such a case, we have done our work successfully, even if souls are not saved, for we are unto God a sweet savor of

Christ, as well in them that perish as in them that are saved, if we have exalted the Lord Jesus, and borne witness to His power to save.

Beloved, I would have you further note that *true gospel preaching will be full of Jesus as He is revealed in the Old Testament*. Our apostle, when he spoke before King Agrippa, went on to declare that he had said “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.” Evidently it was this astounding statement about Jesus having risen from the dead and being yet alive that was uppermost in the mind of Festus, so that when Paul reasserted it, he cried with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself; much learning does make you mad.” The learning he referred to was his study of the ancient books of the Jews, the writings of Moses and the prophets. Paul’s teaching paid as much deference to the ancient Scriptures as did that of the Jewish rabbis who were opposed to him; no, in very truth he paid a far more real homage to the Bible than they did. As for us, the Old Testament is prized by us as much as the New. We do not preach Jesus as a fresh arrival, the inventor of a new religion, the founder of a novel way of salvation. No; we preach the Messiah of the Old Testament, whose gospel is set forth in the types and in the teachings of Moses and the prophets, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” Do not imagine that the religion of Abraham was one thing and ours another; ours is but the continuation of that gospel which was revealed to all the faithful from the days of righteous Abel until now. All who have spoken in the name of God have borne witness to the same truth. If you would see a suffering Savior I need not refer you to the gospels but in the twenty-second Psalm behold the full-length portrait of Messiah in His agony. Hear him cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Mark how they part His garments among them, and cast lots upon His vesture, after they have pierced His hands and His feet! No Evangelist, even though he were an eyewitness, could have drawn the picture more to the life. Read also the fifty-third of Isaiah. Where can you find a better description of the Messiah’s sufferings than when you see Him cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of His people? Beloved, the New Testament is the key to the Old, but the lock is not superseded by the key—no, it is made more useful. We have not received a new religion; we worship the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, for He is the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our gospel has threads of many colors in it; both the Old and New Testaments are set forth in it to the glory of the one Christ who is the sole revelation of God. Every gospel sermon should set forth Jesus scripturally, for it is not the Christ of fancy, but the Christ of fact that saves the souls of men.

Let me add that *where the gospel is faithfully preached the reproach of Christ will not be shunned by the preacher*. Read in the fifth verse of the twenty-fourth of Acts how Paul won this reproach. His adversaries said, “We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” This was the reputation of Paul. Well did Mr. Whitefield say, “There is no going to heaven as a minister except in a fool’s cap and a fool’s coat.” There is no hope of preaching Christ faithfully without being called by disrespectful titles, regarded as a fool, and reckoned among the vulgar and ignorant. Some kind of ugly name will always be appended to the gospeller. Brethren, expect it, and accept it! Bid farewell to a quiet life, if you resolve to be true to Jesus. Nothing excites such animosity as the preaching of Jesus. The carnal mind rages at the cross of Christ. That which would be to men the greatest comfort and the greatest joy, if they were in their right minds, is their direst hate because sin has perverted their judgments. Do not, I beseech you, imagine that it is possible, fairly and squarely, to preach Jesus Christ and His gospel without raising opposition. I know a minister of whom one said, “He is a truly good man, and nobody ever says a word against him.” Upon inquiry I heard a judicious person say, “He preaches no error, but he avoids the obnoxious side of the truth. What he preaches is true enough, no doubt, but it is not easy to say what it is. Nine out of ten of his hearers could not say what his precise opinion may be, but he has a fine flow of words. Those who do know what he is preaching about usually say that, take it for all in all, there is nothing in it.” Of course nobody opposes an indistinct, colorless, please-everybody gospel; it is not worth anything. But speak clearly and distinctly the doctrine of the great Sacrifice and you will bring upon your head a shower of opposition; you will be “a pestilent fellow” and “a ringleader of the sect of

the Nazarenes.” Gospel preaching does not cry, “Peace, peace,” where there is no peace, but it is the sword which the Lord Jesus came to send upon the earth.

Once more. Jesus Christ must be preached in the gospel as the sum and substance of it all, for we note concerning Paul, in this connection, that whoever might be his hearer, his theme was the same; he preached unto them Jesus. If he speaks to Felix, he does not only preach to him of “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” as some remind us, but in the twenty-fourth verse of the twenty-fourth chapter we are told that “after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” The faith in Christ was the first thing that Paul preached, and then he “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” The foundation of Christian morality is Christ Himself, and though we do preach moral duties most earnestly, and press them home upon the conscience, yet first of all we preach the faith of Jesus Christ. When Paul spoke to Festus in the twenty-sixth chapter at the twenty-third verse, he told him that “Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead.” It was this that made Festus cry out, because he was amazed at this strange truth concerning Jesus. So was it with Agrippa. Agrippa is forced to feel that Paul is preaching Christ, for he cries, “You almost persuade me to be a Christian.” Paul did not merely persuade him to justice and righteousness, but he pressed him to yield himself to Christ. Indeed the whole of Paul’s address goes to prove the power and glory of the Jesus by whom Paul had been called to be an apostle. Now, beloved, as I resolve, God helping me, in my preaching to preach to you nothing else save Jesus Christ, so I beseech you, in your schools, in your families, in your public ministries of any and every kind, begin and end with Jesus, who was dead and is alive. Declare His blessed name, and proclaim the glory of His cross! God forbid that you should place anything in front of your testimony save Jesus crucified! Your gospel is a golden frame, let Jesus be the portrait which is hung up in it.

II. Secondly; GOSPEL PREACHING AFFIRMS THE RESURRECTION.

Please notice, that *Paul did not argue the resurrection, but affirmed it.* He did not prove it philosophically, but he affirmed that Jesus rose from the dead, because such and such persons saw Him alive after He had risen. He did not merely say that it was probable, that it was possible, that it was reasonable, but that it was so, for witnesses proved it. Two saw Him, eleven saw Him, four hundred saw Him. He dealt with the resurrection as common-sense persons deal with any other fact of history, he quoted his authorities, and affirmed that it was so. His witnesses were honest and true men, who dared to go to prison, and even to die on account of their statements. They had nothing whatever to gain, and everything to lose by their testimonies. They stated that Jesus, whom they knew to have been dead, had risen again, and had given clear proofs that He was alive. This cornerstone of our faith is sure, and upon the certainty of it we build our faith.

Paul asserted that the Savior had the pre-eminence in resurrection, and “that He should be the first that should rise from the dead.” Several persons rose from the dead before our Savior, but not in the sense which Paul intended. Those mentioned in the Old Testament were quickened for a time, but they died after all, and saw corruption. They lived anew, but they lived not evermore, as Jesus does. A miracle was worked, but it gave them only a temporary prolongation of life; they went back to the grave again in due time. Whether it was the child of the woman in the Old Testament, or the brother of Mary and Martha in the New, they were not so raised from the dead as to have attained to immortality. But our Savior finally rose from the dead, and rose from the dead by His own power. He was the first fruits of the resurrection harvest. He was the first sheaf of that wheat which will one day be gathered in bulk; He was the first fruits to be presented unto the Lord to sanctify the whole. Jesus is the pattern, the proof, the pledge, the earnest, the guarantee of the resurrection of all the rest. This Paul asserted and declared as a revelation of God.

From this he inferred the general resurrection. He says in another place, that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen, and the whole faith of the gospel falls to the ground. To you and to me this is full of comfort; the dead must rise. Our beloved ones have been taken from us, but they shall come again from the land of the enemy. We have a glorious hope concerning our own bodies. “I know that my Redeemer lives: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” We shall rise, for Jesus has risen. This is the constant assertion of Scripture. There would be

no proof of the resurrection of the dead if Jesus had not risen, but as He has risen from the dead, our resurrection is secured. Now has death lost its sting; the grave may receive us, but it cannot retain us, since Jesus has burst its bars.

Moreover, *Paul*—and he, I say, is a model among gospel preachers—*teaches us to preach in our gospel all the sweet inferences which flow from the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.* Here they are. He rose from the dead, and therefore His sacrifice has been accepted. God has brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant. The work He has done has pleased the Father, and therefore He has brought Him back from among the dead. His acceptance is ours; we are “accepted in the Beloved.”

Next, Jesus Himself is clear. He had, as our sponsor, become our hostage. Sin was laid on Him, and He was laid in the grave, but now the sinner’s surety is as clear as the sinner himself, for the Lord Jesus is released from the prison of the tomb. He was delivered for our offenses, but He rose again for our justification.

Now, also, we live unto God. Our Lord Jesus died unto sin once, but in that He lives, He lives unto God; so is it with us. This is our joy; His work is accepted, His bearing of our curse is finished, life in us is made manifest.

And now, beloved, we see in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that He is divine. He is “declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” So says Paul in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. Jesus raised Himself from the dead by His own will. “I have power to lay down My life,” said He, “and I have power to take it again.” Who could possess and exercise such a power but a divine being?

I must repeat what I have said already, that from the resurrection of our Lord we draw the comfortable inference of the resurrection unto eternal life of all who are in Christ. We said farewell, a little while ago, to him whom we loved so well, but we shall see the honored one again. We laid our sister in the grave with many tears. Oh, how we miss her! But we shall meet her again when the trumpet shall sound. We preserve a long list of departed ones, of which we scarcely dare to think, for tears drown our eyes, yet will we refrain from weeping, for as the dew of herbs causes them to spring up again, so the rising again of our Lord restores to us the beloved ones who have fallen asleep. The broken circle of our fellowship shall be renewed, for Jesus, its center, has risen again.

III. But now, alas for me! I have scant time for the point which I wanted most fully to discuss—**GOSPEL PREACHING AFFIRMS THAT JESUS IS ALIVE.** We do not preach to you a dead Christ, but one who is able to save to the uttermost, seeing He ever lives.

Jesus died, Jesus rose again, Jesus is now alive. Paul knew that Jesus lived, for He had spoken to him out of heaven. Paul had both seen and heard the Lord Jesus, and thus he had been turned from a persecutor into an apostle. *We* do not need to see Jesus, nor to hear His voice, for we are well satisfied with the witness of a man as true as Paul, in whom a change so remarkable was worked by what he saw. His entire being was transformed by what he saw and heard; assuredly he was no deceiver, and he was not the sort of person to have been deceived. Jesus Christ is then alive, for Paul saw Him.

No, not only once did he see Him, but on several other occasions. He saw the Lord when he was in the temple in a trance, and heard Him say, “Depart, for I will send you far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:17-21). Even when he lay in prison in Jerusalem the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as you have testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must you bear witness also at Rome.” Jesus had thus spoken to Paul, once, twice, and many times, and so He was to him most assuredly alive. Ah, dear friends! If the Lord Jesus has had gracious dealings with any of us, and we have had Him revealed within us, we also shall affirm that He is alive.

Beloved, receiving the witness of our apostle and remembering many other infallible proofs which we have not time to mention, we also believe that Jesus, who was dead, is alive. What follows from this? Why, first, He is alive *to bestow the Holy Spirit.* Many blessings come from our Lord’s death, but the Holy Spirit was an early gift of His resurrection life; especially was it the outcome of His ascended life. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the ascension gift of our living Lord. When we think of His resurrection life, we couple with it the outpouring of the Spirit of God. Oh, that this same Spirit would work among us more manifestly just now! And why not? He is with us because Jesus lives. No Spirit of life could

proceed from a dead Christ. Jesus, if He were not alive, could not send the Comforter to us. The life, and light, and liberty of the Spirit are with us, because Jesus lives. Beloved, do you think the times are dark and dreary? Be not afraid; while Jesus lives the Holy Spirit is always obtainable, the Holy Spirit is always ready to work in and with us. What more do we want? Error will fall, and truth will be established by the Holy Spirit. This is our battle-axe and weapon of war. O living Christ, we praise and bless Your name, for out of You shall come abundance of life and power through Your Spirit!

Jesus is alive. Dwell on that thought. He is alive, *to claim heaven for His redeemed*. He has gone up before us to occupy our inheritance for us. When He first put His feet within the golden gate He took possession of eternal glory for every soul that He represents. He is our forerunner and representative. Brethren, heaven is yours, heaven is mine, because Jesus is “the man in possession” on our behalf. That pierced hand has taken hold of eternal bliss on the behalf of those for whom He shed His blood.

Jesus is also in heaven *making preparation for our coming*. What has to be done to make heaven ready I am sure I do not know, though I have often tried to guess, but Jesus says, “I go to prepare a place for you.” Heaven, when we get there, will prove to be the exact place for us. It has taken Jesus all these years to make it ready for us. He that with a word made earth fit for created man, did not with a word make heaven fit for His regenerated, but went to heaven Himself as a living Christ to see everything set in order for them. I think I hear Him say, “This will not do for My beloved. There is something yet needed. These fruits are not quite mellow enough; these flowers are not full-blown enough for My beloved, whom I desire to entertain to the utmost of their capacity.” Jesus is living—living on purpose to keep heaven for us, and make it in all respects ready for us.

Furthermore, lay hold of this thought, that, Jesus is alive *to intercede for us*. I am most rich, beloved, when I have your prayers. If I might have a part in the prayers of all the saints on earth I would not envy a Kaiser his dominions. Yet what are all the prayers of saints compared with the prayers of the King of saints? When He prays—He of the pierced hands and feet, when He prays whom the Father loves so well, who has such deservings of Jehovah for His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross—what a prevalence must dwell in His intercession! We trust not in a mute, dead Christ, who could not speak for us, but we rest in an advocate whose eloquent pleadings before the throne of God can never be denied.

Observe also that our Lord lives *to rule all things on our behalf*. His enemies put Him to an ignominious death, but the Father has delivered all things into His hand. He whom they spat upon wears majesty in His face. The despised and rejected of men has all power in heaven and in earth. Jesus lives to control all events, and overrule them for the highest purposes of grace. Trust in Him, for His kingdom cannot fail, neither can anything go amiss while He is to the front. Paul affirmed that He was alive, and alive He is in the fullest sense, so that nothing escapes His government. Hallelujah!

“Ah!” you say, “you have now put Him far away from us by reason of His adorable majesty.” Then let me bring Him near to you. He is not only alive Godward that the Father may delight in Him, but alive towards you, *that He may have the fellowship of kinship with you*. He is touched with a feeling of your infirmities. He sympathizes with all your griefs, even as a loving husband shares the pangs and sorrows of his spouse. He is most near to you, for He is one with you. We may not think of our Lord as one whose shadow flitted over the historic page, and left a faint photographic trace, but He lives as truly in the present as in the past. He is not Jesus of the mist, but of this day’s light. He is the same in heart, the same in tenderness, the same in living feeling and union as ever He was. Did you ever reflect that something of Christ remained on earth, and was not taken to heaven? I mean those drops of blood which fell from Him in Gethsemane, and that other stream which gushed from His pierced heart on Calvary. I see that his heart’s essence is with us still. It was after death that His heart poured forth for us its treasure of water and blood, and now, long after death, His whole heart is as truly ours as it was when He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.

O child of God, I would have you further remember that Jesus is still alive *to commune with you*. You bend not over His corpse, but you sit at His feet. Carnal men would think me dreaming if I were to tell of our spiritual communion with our living Lord. Still does He speak to our hearts. Pearls may not be cast before swine, nor the love secrets of our souls declared in the streets, but we have been conscious at times of influences other than those which are natural and common. Jesus has made Himself known to

us; He has stood behind us, and His shadow has fallen over us. He has manifested Himself to us as He does not to the world. Many a time has He cast a spell over us, and bathed us in mystic influence. We have been raised from the valley of weeping to the mountains of joy by a word from Himself laid home to the heart. You know what I mean. Jesus does not forget us. He has not allowed a great gulf to open between us and Himself. He is still the loving, living, active Jesus to us and with us.

How I wish that every child of God here who is in trouble would go at once with that trouble to the living Christ! Oh, that every sinner who is crushed beneath his load of sin would bow at once before the living Christ, whose voice speaks pardon! You cannot perceive Jesus, but He is present where His gospel is preached. Eye cannot see Him, nor hand touch Him, but He is visible and tangible to faith. Bow before Him. I know you have often thought, “If, instead of seeing Mr. Spurgeon on the platform, I could see Jesus, I would confess my sin to Him, and ask His pardon.” I pray you do so even though you see Him not, *for He sees you*. Gladly would I cease to be seen of you, that your hearts might see my Lord, for He is here. Bow before Him, confess to Him and trust Him. “Oh!” cries a loving one, “if Jesus were visibly here, I would take Him home with me and entertain Him.” Do so, I pray you, though you do not see Him. Constrain Him to abide with you. Treat the Lord Jesus, not as a phantom, but as a real Christ. Paul affirmed that He was alive, believe Paul’s affirmation, and speak to the living Jesus. I will give you a text—“Whom having not seen, you love.” You cannot love a dead person as a dead person. You may love the memory of the dead, but if you love them, you regard them as living. Love is for life; it cannot dwell with death. We have not seen Jesus, but we love Him, and this proves that to our hearts He lives.

Let us view Him in the light of life at this very hour. I beseech my Lord Jesus to let me personally realize His august presence. My Lord, are You really here? Hear, then, my prayer; I beseech You, enable me to serve You with my whole being, and to count reproach for Your sake to be greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. Will you not, my beloved, each one of you, think of your Lord as with you at this moment? Behold Him, and speak to Him in the silence of your hearts. Will you not renew your dedication vow, and be the Lord’s forever?

Oh that our Lord would now appear! Oh that His silver trumpets would ring out while yet I speak to you! Oh that His feet would once more touch this earth! The second coming of our living Lord is the ultimatum of our faith. He is alive, and as surely as He lives, He will open wide the golden gate, and come again to take His people up to be with Him forever. Has He not said, “I will come again, and receive you unto Myself”? They that have been faithful to Him in this evil generation, through the dark as well as through the light, and have followed at His heel through mire and slough—these shall partake of His glory. “These are they which follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” Who is on the side of the living Christ at this hour? Let him come out and boldly say so. Hold not back lest you be found traitors. Confess your Lord, take up your cross, and be the living servants of the living Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ACTS 26

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—306, 326, 336

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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