

DELIVERANCE FROM THE PIT

NO. 2505

A SERMON
 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1897
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“Then he is gracious unto him, and saith,
 Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.”*
Job 33:24

LET it never be forgotten that, in all that God does, He acts from good reasons. You observe that the text, speaking of the sick man, represents God as saying, “Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.” If I understand the passage as relating solely to a sick man and take the words just on the natural common level where some place them, I would still say that the Lord here gives a reason why He suspends the operations of pain and disease, and raises up the sufferer—“I have found a ransom.”

There is always a reason for every act of grace which God performs for man. He acts sovereignly and therefore He is not bound to give any reason for His actions, but He always acts wisely and therefore He has a reason for so acting. Writing to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul says that God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

It is not an arbitrary will, but a will arising out of the wisdom and holiness of His character. So God has a reason for raising men up from their sickness, but that reason is not found in them, but in Himself. The sick man does not give God a reason for restoring him, but God finds it Himself. “I have found a ransom.”

Possibly, the man does not even know the reason for his restoration—he may be so blind of heart that he does not care to think whether there is any reason for it or not—but God finds a reason for His mercy and finds it entirely in Himself. He is gracious to whom He will be gracious and He has compassion on whom He will have compassion.

So let each one of us think, “If I have been raised from sickness, if my life, which was almost gone, has been spared, I may not know why God has done it, but certainly He has done it in infinite wisdom and compassion. And it is only right for me to feel that a life which has been so remarkably prolonged ought to be entirely dedicated unto Him who has prolonged it.”

Having begun my sermon with that thought, I shall take a deep dive and go to another and a fuller meaning of our text, if not more true than this which I have first mentioned. Beloved friends, there is a higher restoration than recovery from bodily sickness. There is such a thing as sickness of the soul which is, in God's esteem, far worse than disease of body, and blessed be His name, there is such a thing as recovery from soul-sickness even to those who are so far gone that they appear to be going down into the pit. God can deal with sinners when they are on the very brink of hell. He can deal in love with them when the soil slips from under their feet and they themselves are about to dash into that pit that is bottomless. He can come in even then and rescue them to the praise of the glory of His grace.

I. Now, coming to our text, I shall ask you, first, to look with me upon A MAN IN GREAT PERIL.

That man is here tonight—let him look to himself and may God help him to see himself as a man in great peril! This is his peril—he is “going down to the pit.” That phrase describes his whole life—going down, down, down—and the end of that going down, unless the Lord shall deliver him, will be that, ere long, he will go down finally into the pit of destruction.

Notice, first, that this is a *daily and common danger*. In some respects, this man in peril is a representative of each one of us. If we are unconverted, if we are unrenewed by divine grace, every one of us is in danger of going down into the pit of woe. Think of it, there may be, my friend, but a step between you and death.

Only the other morning there was one, well known to many of us, who spoke with his friends apparently in health. He retired from the room for a moment and they wondered where he was as he did not come back. They sought him out and found that he was dead. He was gone, as in a moment. Blessed be God, we have a sure and certain hope that, though he has gone down into the grave—he could go no lower, for his soul was at once with his Savior—and out of that grave his body shall arise at the sounding of the last trumpet.

But as for unconverted men and women, they may be in hell ere the clock ticks again. It is a terrible reflection, my unsaved friend, to think how little there is between you and eternity. How thin is the wall! “Wall”—did I call it? Rather let me say, how thin the gauze! “Gauze”—did I call it? There is no word in our own or any other language that can adequately express the nearness of eternity. We are here—and we are gone—gone into the presence of God in a single instant. Gone to render to the Judge of all our last account. You are going, friend, you are going down to the pit unless sovereign mercy shall step in and prevent it.

Further, there are some who, *of set purpose, are going down to the pit*. In this chapter, Elihu said of some that God sends sickness to them that He may withdraw them from their purpose. Some seem to be desperately bent on mischief, as if they were determined to ruin themselves. How often do we see it in the case of a young man who has been well brought up, when he comes into possession of his money and gets what he calls his liberty—nothing that he has learned in his youth appears to restrain him!

No tearful admonitions are any check upon him—he appears to be resolved to destroy himself. We have known some cases of that kind and we know others now. Oh, if they were as determined to be right as they are resolved to be wrong, they might greatly help to turn the world upside down! But alas! they seem to spare no expense to ensure their own destruction—they are in a dreadful hurry to be rid of all their property, to bring their body into a state of disease—and to bring their soul into a state of damnation.

They cannot do enough to secure their own destruction, they even lay violent hands upon their own characters, as if they were insatiably at enmity with their own souls. Many of you know such people as I am describing and you know that they are going down to the pit. By what are called amusements, by what are said to be pleasures—but which are really only groveling degradations of the soul to the worst purposes of the flesh—all these men are going down to the pit.

It is a dreadful state for anyone to be in, yet I am even now addressing some who are in just such a condition—I feel sure that I am. May the description, brief as it is, be complete enough to let the sinner see himself as he really is—in imminent peril of going down into the pit!

There are some, also, who are *going down to the pit through their pride*. They are not doing anything positively vicious, but they are so good in their own estimation, or so indifferent to the claims of God, that they do not want to hear about salvation. They stand entirely in their own strength and they seem to defy the humbling Gospel of the grace of God—they will not hear it—they say by their actions, if not in so many words, “Who is God that we should serve Him? What is death that we should have any fear concerning it? What is eternity that we should ever let our spirit be depressed at the thought of it?”

If I were just now to try to describe the day of judgment and to picture the great white throne with the Judge of all sitting upon it, there are many in such a condition of heart that they would merely smile at it all and continue in their sin. A sinner may perish through pride just as easily as through any other sin. A man may, in his pride, hang himself on a gallows as high as that of Haman, and he will perish as surely as another who casts himself down into the pit by some groveling loathsome sin.

There are others who feel *some present apprehension of coming judgment*. They are not your merry men and women who count it one of the wisest things to drive dull care away, for they are eaten up with

care. They feel that they are going down to the pit—I do not say that all have felt this apprehension as I did—but this is how it came to me.

I knew that I was guilty. I knew that I had offended God. I knew that I had transgressed against light and knowledge, and I did not know when God might call me to account. But I did know this—when I awoke in the morning, the first thought I had was that I had to deal with a justly angry God who might suddenly require my soul of me.

Often, during the day, when I had a little time for quiet meditation, a great depression of spirit would come upon me because I felt that sin, *sin*, SIN had outlawed me from my God. I wondered that the earth bore up such a sinner as I was and that the heavens did not fall and crush me—and the stars in their courses did not fight against such a wretch as I felt myself to be.

Then, indeed, did I seem as if I should go down to the pit. If I fell asleep, I dreamt of that pit, and if I woke, I seemed to wake only to endure the tortures of the never-dying worm of conscience that was perpetually gnawing at my heart.

I went to the house of God and heard what I supposed was the Gospel, but it was no Gospel to me. My soul abhorred all manner of meat—I could not lay hold upon a promise, or indulge a hope, and I felt that I was going down to the pit. If anyone had asked me what would become of me, I must have answered, “I am going down to the pit.” If anyone had entreated me to hope that mercy might come to me, I should have refused to entertain such a hope, for I felt that I was going down to the pit.

Well, dear friends, it was while I was in that dreadful state of mind that infinite mercy met with me and saved me. And I could wish that I had, in my present congregation, many wounded, broken spirits. Many weary, heavy-laden souls, for it is sweet work to preach the Gospel to such people.

*“A sinner is a sacred thing,
The Holy Ghost has made him so,”*

that is, a really convinced sinner, not a sham sinner, but one who owns that the title belongs to him and saith, “Put that label upon me, for that is what I am. I deserve the wrath of God and I begin to feel as if the first spattering drops of the fiery tempest have already fallen upon me.” This is the man who sees a true description of himself in the words of our text, “going down to the pit.”

If you add to all this the fact that the man, as Elihu describes him, was suffering from a fatal sickness, so that he dreaded *the actual nearness of death*, you have indeed an unhappy case before you. See that young woman whom consumption has marked for its victim—it is not with her the thought that she shall go down to the pit in twenty years’ time, but her feet are already far on the road.

Or look at that young man who cannot delude himself with the idea that he will go down to the pit at the end of three-score years and ten, but who fears that he may not even live three-score days. He has a mortal malady within him that is dragging him down from all hope and joy—this dread fear has settled like a vampire upon his soul—that he is going down to the pit. This is the man whom I want to point out, for he is somewhere in this building. God help him to listen while I say some words which, mayhap, will bring comfort to him in this state of peril in which he is at present found!

II. Now let us notice, in the second place, A NEW PRINCIPLE IN ACTION—“Then he is gracious unto him.” What does that expression mean? That word “gracious” has more music in it than all the oratorios of Handel, though they be the chief of earthly music.

“Then he is gracious unto him.” What does that mean? Well, “gracious” means, first, *free favor*. It means that when this man is as full of sin as an egg is full of meat, when he is as black with iniquity as a foul chimney which hangs festooned with soot—even then God’s favor shall come to him and look upon him just as he is in all his defilement and ill-desert—and God shall be gracious to him.

Our text does not say, “God shall deal with him in justice. He shall charge, and accuse, and condemn, and punish him.” No, the message is, “he is gracious unto him.” The Lord comes to this poor lost wretch and says, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins:

return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.” The Lord comes to such guilty souls, and just when they think that His next words will be, “Depart, ye cursed,” He says, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Now this is not what the man deserves—it is the very opposite of his deserts. He has no natural right to such treatment as this—it is the gift of divine sovereignty, not the purchase of man’s merit. “He is gracious unto him.” The prisoner is justly condemned to death, but the King is gracious and gives him a free pardon. The prisoner is ready to be executed, but there comes to him undeserved deliverance from all punishment, for the King’s own Son has borne the penalty of all his iniquities.

Does not this truth of God make your mouths water, you who feel that you are going down to the pit? I am sure it does, if you have ever known the bitterness of sin. “Oh!” say you, “is there such a God as this?” Yes, there is. A God, “merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” “He delighteth in mercy.” His compassions fail not, therefore we are not consumed.

That is the first meaning of grace, that free and undeserved favor of God which forgives and blots out sin and iniquity.

But grace has another meaning in Holy Scripture—it means *saving interference*—a certain divine operation by which God works upon the wills and affections of men so as to change and renew them. When God is gracious to a man, He does something *to* that man as well as *for* that man. The Lord comes in the power of His grace and takes out of the sinner’s heart the stone that was there, and makes tender that heart which once was hard as the northern iron and steel. He comes and takes the iron sinew out of the neck and makes the obstinate man to be yielding and pliable. He comes and changes the affections so that the man hates what he once loved, and loves what he once hated.

In a word, where the grace of God comes, it makes a man to be born again even when he is old, so that, spiritually speaking, his flesh becomes fresher than that of a little child. He begins life anew, for he is a new creature in Christ Jesus. All his past sin is blotted out and his future is brightening up into the full blaze of eternal glory.

Yet this is the very man whom I described just now as going down to the pit. But the Lord has been gracious to him, He has said to him, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” The Lord has said to him, “Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee. Go, and sin no more.” Is not this a most comforting message?

Note that the text says, “then,” in the very extremity of his going down to the pit, “then,” when he has come almost to the last step down to that fearful gulf, and a cruel hand seems pushing him down to eternal destruction, “then,” at that moment, the Lord is gracious to him, infinite pleasure flashes into his face, for the almighty lovingkindness of God pulls him back from the pit, and sets his feet on a new track towards the glory-land and the face of God above.

III. This brings me to my third point, which is concerning how this grace operates. It operates by A WORD OF POWER.

This man was going down to the pit, but God said, “Deliver him.” To whom is this command spoken? It appears to be addressed *to the messengers of divine justice*. They have grasped the guilty man, they have bound him, they are taking him off to the place of death, and well does he deserve to die—but the great King upon the throne says to His ministers of justice, “Deliver him, let him go, deliver him from going down to the pit.”

And in an instant, his chains are snapped, his bonds drop off, and the man is free—freed by the word of the King Himself. No sheriff’s officer can arrest him now, none of all the police of the universe can lay a finger on him now, for God has said to every one of them, “Let him go. Deliver him from going down to the pit.” Here is a clean jail delivery for the prisoners of hope—they are set free by the mandate of the eternal God.

More than that, the man was not only bound by justice, but he was *fettered by his sin*. His sins held him captive and they were dragging him down to the pit. There was drunkenness, for instance, which

held him as in a vice, so that he could not stir hand or foot to set himself free. His thirst followed his drinking and his drinking followed his thirst—and then his thirst returned after his drinking till he brought himself to a delirium from which he could not possibly escape by his own power.

Perhaps it was the foul-mouthed demon of blasphemy that held him in bondage, or the black demon of vice and licentiousness, but whatever was the band by which the man was held, every hour kept putting about him a fresh and a stronger rope till he was bound, like Samson of old, to make sport for those who had him in captivity.

But just as he seemed about to be dragged down to hell, a voice came from the excellent glory, “Deliver him from going down to the pit”—and infinite mercy dragged off his evil habits, snapped his bands, and set him free. The man now no longer loved the lusts of the flesh and the passions of his body, but he was God’s free man seeking to do his Lord’s will alone. And if God shall make you free, you shall be free, indeed.

It is a grand thing to get rid of drunkenness—with all my heart I advise you to try total abstinence—but it is a better thing to get rid of all sin at once. I mean, the reigning power of every sin—by yielding yourself up to the supreme grace of God who is able to work in you at such a rate that all sin shall be made detestable to you, and you shall rise above it to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Brethren, I see this same man, in after life, *attacked by his old sins*. There is a certain, “Cut-Throat Lane” on the way to heaven. I have been down it myself, and I am afraid I may have to go down it yet again. It is a place where the hedges meet and it is very dark—and it is also very miry and muddy—and when a man is slipping about and can hardly see his own hand, there are certain villains that come pouncing upon him, not with the highwayman’s cry, “Your money or your life,” but they seek to seize his treasure, and his life, and all that he has.

At such a moment as that, it sometimes happens that the man puts his hand to his side to draw his sword, but he finds that it is gone! He determines to fight as best he can, but what can he do against such terrible odds when he is alone and unarmed? But oh, what a blessed thing it is for him just then to hear, as Bunyan says, the sound of a horse’s hoof and to know that there is a patrol going down the King’s Highway! And he can not only hear the ring of His horse’s hoofs, but he can hear the King’s own voice, crying out from the throne itself, “Deliver him! deliver him! deliver him from going down to the pit.”

That voice you shall always hear, if you are a child of God, when you get into a fix, when you are brought into peril and trouble. God has given commandment to save you and you shall be saved—saved from yourself and from all the attacks of your old sins. Saved from the devil. Saved from ill-company, for God has said it, “Deliver him from going down to the pit.” That deliverance of God is an eternal one, nor shall the infernal lion ever be able to rend one sheep or lamb that the Great Shepherd deigns to keep.

Now to come back to my own story. I remember when I felt that I was going down to the pit and I cannot forget one blessed, blessed day. The snow-flakes fell thick and heavy that morning and I was going, according to my wont, to a certain very respectable place of worship where I should hear a very respectable minister who might have left me in my misery to this day.

But it was too cold and the snow was too deep for me to go so far. So I turned into the little Primitive Methodist Chapel in Colchester and sat there feeling that I was going down to the pit, although I was sitting in the house of God to hear the Gospel. The clock of mercy struck in heaven the hour and moment of my deliverance, for the time had come. Thus had the eternal purpose of JEHOVAH decreed it.

And when the preacher opened the Book and gave out his text, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else,” and when he began to cry in simple terms, “Look! It is all you have to do. Look out of yourself, and away from yourself, and look to Christ. Not to forms, and ceremonies, or works, or feelings, but look to what Christ has done.”

I did look and in that moment went out this word, “Deliver him from going down to the pit,” and I was delivered. For, as the moment before there was none more wretched than I was, so, within that second, there was none more joyous. It took no longer time than does the lightning-flash. It was done

and never has it been undone. I looked, and lived, and leaped in joyful liberty as I beheld sin punished upon the great Substitute and put away forever from all those who will only trust Him.

That is what looking to Christ means—trusting in His one great sacrifice. O dear friends, I do pray the Lord to speak in great grace concerning some of you and to say, “Deliver him from going down to the pit.” You may think that when I speak like this, there is some of the excitement of enthusiasm about my language, but I reckon that I talk cold icicles about a thing that is hotter than the furnace.

Oh, the blessedness, the joy, the exquisite peace, the overflowing felicity of believing in Christ! If you know anything about the darkness, you are the very person to know something about the light. If you know anything of sorrow for sin, you are the very man to understand the joy of sin being put away. And it will be all done for you if you will but look to Jesus—if you will simply trust Him.

III. I finish by noticing that, in this case, God supplies us with His reason for delivering a soul and it is AN ARGUMENT OF LOVE—“Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.”

This is the only reason why any man shall be delivered from going down to the pit—because God has found a ransom. There is no way of salvation but by the ransom—all who ever are saved are saved by the ransom. And if you, dear friend, would be saved, it must be by the ransom—and there is but one.

Observe that the text says, “I have found a ransom.” This ransom is *an invention of divine wisdom*. I do not think it would ever have occurred to any mind but the mind of God Himself to save sinners by the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. The most astonishing novelty under heaven is the old, old story of the cross of Christ.

That ever God should take upon Himself the sin of His own creatures, that, in order to be able justly to forgive, God Himself should bear the punishment which He must inflict for the creatures’ sin—this is something marvelous to the last degree. The rebel sins and the King Himself suffers the penalty for the rebellion. The offender commits the trespass and the Judge bears the punishment.

Such a plan was never heard of in human courts of law—or if it has ever been spoken of there, it was because, first of all, both the ears of him who heard it had been made to tingle while God revealed it out of His own heart. “I have found a ransom.” Nobody would have thought of that way of the deliverance of a sinner from the pit of hell through a ransom if God had not thought of it.

Notice, next, that God has not only invented a way of deliverance, but he has found a ransom. So that it is *a gift of divine love*. “Deliver him from going down to the pit”—it does not say, “because there is a ransom,” or “I will accept one if he finds it, and brings it”—but the Lord Himself says, “I have found a ransom.” It is the man who sinned, but it is God who found the ransom. It is the man who is going down to the pit, but it is God who finds a ransom.

Surely, if you have sold yourself to sin and Satan, you must find the ransom to get yourself set free, must you not? “No,” says sovereign grace, “the man has sold himself into slavery, but I have found a ransom. I have broken the bonds from his neck and set him free by a price immense which I Myself have found—found it in My own bosom, where My only-begotten and well-beloved Son was lying. Found it in Myself, for I have given up Myself to bleed and die for mortal men.” Oh, this is wonderful grace indeed—that God should deliver, and should deliver through a ransom, and should deliver through a ransom that He has Himself found!

And is there not something very wonderful in *the assurance of this truth*? “Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.” God does not say “There may be a ransom for the poor soul, possibly I may find a ransom somewhere.” No, He says, “I *have* found a ransom.” Now, if a slave were in the bitterest of bondage, yet if his master said to him, “I have the ransom for you,” that man must feel certain of his liberty, because if he who held him in bondage has found a ransom, he certainly will hold him in bondage no longer.

Sinner, do not doubt your deliverance, for God has said it—“I have found a ransom.” If you had only heard this sentence uttered by a mortal man, you might have questioned the truth of it, but when God Himself proclaims concerning him who is going down to the pit, “I have found a ransom,” then is the

deliverance certain. Indeed, it is already accomplished. Wherefore, go you free, and rejoice in the liberty that God has given you.

To my mind, and with this thought I will finish, there is the ring of heavenly music in this message. “Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.” I suppose you never heard a man who had found a treasure cry out to let everyone know what he had found. Perhaps he would not mention it to anyone but his wife. When he wished to make her heart glad by sharing the fortune with her, he said to her, “I have found a treasure.”

But you may have heard a mother say, when her child had been lost in the woods, mayhap, and had been sought for by many, when at last she has discovered him, “I have found my boy.” Oh, it is wonderful, the joy of a mother’s heart when she has found her child! But to me there is the sound of bells, there is the music of a marriage peal in this verse, as God, looking on a sinner slipping down to hell, says, “Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.”

Almighty love seems to sing out with all her might, and rocks, hills, and valleys suffice not to repeat the echo of the strain, “I have found, I have found, I have found a ransom.” This is God’s “Eureka!” “I have found a ransom. I did not look for a ransom among the angels, for I knew they were too weak to furnish it. I looked not for it among the sons of men, for I knew it was not to be found there—they were too fallen and guilty. The sea said, ‘It is not in me.’ All creation cried, ‘It is not in me.’ But I looked on my Well-beloved and I heard Him say, ‘Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.’ I saw Him descend to earth, and hide Himself in an infant’s form. I saw Him toiling on in holy servitude to My perfect law. I saw Him give His hands to the nails and His side to the spear. I heard Him cry, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ I bowed the ear of My glory and I drank in His conquering cry, ‘It is finished,’ and then I, the Infinite, the Eternal, the Ever-Blessed, the Just, the Gracious, said, ‘I have found a ransom.’”

Thus, the Lord rejoices over you and over me with singing as He cries, “I have found a ransom.” How greatly did He rejoice over the finished work of His well-beloved Son! Wherefore sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth, for the Lord Himself delights in the message He delivers to us, “I have found a ransom.”

Now, dear hearts, if God has found a ransom and speaks thus joyously about it, I do pray you to accept it. “If you be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.” Receive Christ and you have the proof that God has received you. Only take Him—you have nothing else to do. Put out that empty hand of yours, black though it be, and receive in it the pearl of great price, even the Christ of God, Himself.

Receive Him, accept Him, believe Him, trust Him. That is all you have to do. Oh, will you not trust Him? Can you doubt Him? If God takes upon Himself our nature, and in that nature dies, I cannot only trust Him with my soul, but if I had all your souls within my body, and all the souls of the millions of London all gathered beneath this breast—and if I had besides that the souls of all the sinners who have ever lived all compressed within this one frame—I could believe that the dying Christ could blot out all that mass of sin.

I believe it and so confide in Him—will not you? Verily, if you will not believe, neither shall you be established. But he that believes shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end. May God add His own blessing, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JOB 33

This is a speech of young Elihu who had sat quietly listening to the taunting words of the three “candid friends” of Job—and to the somewhat exasperated replies of the patriarch. At last, the young

man breaks the silence, and with some dignity, and quite sufficient self-content, he thus addresses himself to Job—

Verse 1. *Wherefore Job, I pray thee, hear my speeches and hearken to all my words.*

“I am but a young man, but I speak because I cannot be quiet. An impulse moves me. I am as a vessel wanting vent. I desire to speak impartially, therefore, hear me, but hear all that I have to say. Do not listen merely here and there to a part of my speech, but hearken to all my words.” Sometimes, it is very necessary to beg our hearers not to run away with only one sentence or even with one sentiment.

“Hear my speeches, and listen to all my words,” for there is a proportion in truth and one truth has to be balanced with all the others. A statement may be all the better for being unguarded and more forcible because it stands alone—and yet it may need that another statement should be heard with it, lest it should be misunderstood. Wherefore the preacher also says to his hearer, “I pray you, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words.”

2. *Behold, now I have opened my mouth, my tongue hath spoken in my mouth.*

That is to say, “I speak with much solemnity, not as one who chatters without sense, or without due consideration, but I have opened my mouth deliberately, as one who has something to say—and I speak with my best powers of speech, as one who wishes to persuade those who hear him.”

3. *My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly.*

What a lesson this is to those of us who preach to others—that we speak out of the uprightness of our heart, and feel that, however others may judge us, we are sincere before God in what we say! How necessary also is it, especially in these days, that we should speak plainly, so as to be easily understood. Some men never think clearly and therefore they never speak clearly. And oftentimes, the darkness of a man’s speech is only the result of the darkness of his mind—he has no clearly-defined notion of what he has to say. Let every young man who has to teach others resolve that this utterance of Elihu shall be his also, “My lips shall utter knowledge clearly.”

4. *The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.*

That is to say, “I am as much the creature of God as these three old gentlemen are, these three wise friends who have spoken so tartly. I am as much endowed with the Spirit of God as you are, O Job, and therefore I speak to you in His name.” Should not this be a lesson to every one of us to try and do all that we can for God? Every Christian may say, “‘The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.’ Therefore let me use my very existence, the life that is breathed into me, for that Almighty Creator who has made me what I am.”

5. *If thou canst answer me, set thy words in order before me, stand up.*

He who speaks reason is ready to hear reason. It is only the unreasonable talker who will not allow others to have a word to say in reply. “If thou canst answer me,” says Elihu to Job, “set thy words in order before me, stand up.”

6. *Behold, I am according to thy wish in God’s stead: I also am formed out of the clay.*

Job had wished that someone would stand up and speak for God, someone without the terror that seemed inseparable from the Infinite, someone without the power of Omnipotence, someone who would be more nearly his equal, with whom he could debate the questions which perplexed him. So Elihu says, “I am according to thy wish in God’s stead: I also am formed out of the clay.”

7-11. *Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee. Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy, he putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths.*

Elihu did not make this excuse for Job, because he had been slandered by his friends and that his statement of innocence was not so much absolute towards God as it was defensive towards men. Still, there is no doubt that Job had gone too far in this direction. Perhaps, for this very reason, his troubles had come upon him, because he was in a measure self-righteous. In some small degree, at any rate, he

may have prided himself upon his personal excellence. Elihu does well, therefore, in all faithfulness, to point out the blot in what Job had said.

12-13. *Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.*

This man seems to have the very Spirit that rested upon the apostle Paul when he was arguing with an objector against the Lord's way of working, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" The greatness and grandeur of the Eternal should prevent our raising objections against anything that He does. Who are we, the moths of a moment, the creatures of an hour, that we should interrogate the Infinite and question our Maker? What He does must of necessity be right—though we cannot understand how it is so, we must believe it and meekly bow to the will of the Lord.

14-17. *For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.*

It is ever one great object of the divine dealings to make and keep us humble. It is strange that creatures so insignificant as we are should be perpetually infected with the foul disease of pride—this form of mental scarlet fever continually breaks out in puny man and therefore God deals with him that He may "hide pride from man."

18-19. *He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain:*

Pain of body is usually looked upon as a great evil, and doubtless it is so in some respects, but it wraps up within itself great mercy. There are some who can scarcely be taught at all except through physical pain. And if it were possible to abolish sickness and suffering, whither would men go in the wantonness of their strength? Does not this very affliction often chide man and bid him think—and cause him to return to his Maker, when, otherwise, he would be as thoughtless as the beasts that perish?

20-24. *So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness: then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.*

Happy is the messenger who comes with such a message as that. Such was the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah when the king was sick unto death, such is the minister of God's Word when he comes with glad tidings of redemption, and God through him says of the spiritually sick man, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."

25-28. *His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: he shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.*

See the easy terms of God's love and mercy? The man does but confess that he has sinned—he owns that he has perverted the right, he confesses that he has gained no profit thereby—and God, seeing him in such a state of heart as this, delivers his soul from going down to the pit, and his life shall see the light. What a gracious God we serve! How cruel to continue to offend Him when He is so ready to forgive!

29-30. *Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.*

The chastisement of sickness and the flagellation of pain whip the sinner back to Him, who alone can save him. These are the black dogs of the Great Shepherd wherewith He brings back wandering sheep till they come again under His crook and He leads them into green pastures.

31-33. *Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I will speak. If thou hast any thing to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify thee. If not, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom.*

May the Lord graciously apply to all our hearts this instructive portion of Old Testament Scripture! There is a message in it to each of us as well as to the patriarch Job, to whom it was specially addressed.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—259, 412, 286

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