

WHAT JESUS WOULD DO

NO. 2630

A SERMON

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

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*“How often would I have gathered thy children together,
even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”*

Matthew 23:37

THE theologians have met each other around this text as on a field of battle. They have contended, and controverted, and dragged the text about as if it were a wild beast which they would tear limb from limb. And yet, if you will look through the letter of it, and come to its inner spirit, you will see that it is not a wonder that Jesus should have uttered it. It would have been much more marvelous if he had *not* spoken thus, and it would have been a terrible crux in all theology if we had read here, “I never would have gathered thy children together even if they had been willing to be gathered.” That would have been a thing hard to be understood, indeed. And it would have presented a greater difficulty than any which can be found in our text.

I have long been content to take God's Word just as I find it and when, at any time, I have been accused of contradicting myself through keeping to my text, I have always felt perfectly safe about that matter. The last thing I care about is being consistent with myself. Why should I be anxious about that? I would rather be consistent with Christ fifty times over or be consistent with the Word of God.

But as to being forever consistent with oneself, it might turn out that one was consistently wrong, consistently narrow-minded, and consistently unwilling to believe what God would teach. So we will take the text just as we find it and it seems to say to me that if Jerusalem was not saved—if her children were not gathered together in safety as a brood of chickens is gathered beneath the hen—if Christ did not gather them and protect them, it was not because there was any unwillingness on His part.

There was always a willingness in His heart to bless Jerusalem and therefore He could truly say, “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings!” From this utterance of our Lord, I learn that if any man is not saved, the cause of his non-salvation does not lie in any want of graciousness or want of willingness on the part of God. They who dare to say that it does, venture very far, and are very audacious in their assertions. This text says the very opposite—and so far as it is applicable to the sons of men in general, it declares that God wills not the death of any, but desires that they should turn unto Him and live.

The next truth that I learn from this passage is that if Jerusalem perished—as it did perish in a most awful manner—it was because it would not be saved. It was often invited, persuaded, exhorted, warned, and threatened. Prophet succeeded prophet. Tribulation followed tribulation. The rod of God came as well as the Word of God, but Jerusalem was exceedingly wicked and its people were stiff-necked, and they would not have the blessing with which prophetic hands were laden.

And even when Christ Himself came, the loveliest and the lowliest, the tenderest and the truest, bringing to them love and mercy without stint—and when He spake as never man spake, in notes of warning, yet wooing love—still they would not receive His rebukes. But they took Him, and with wicked hands did they crucify and slay Him.

It was their own rebellious will that ruined them. They would not come unto Him that they might have life. There is where the guilt lies, and when sinners go to hell, it is because they will to go there.

When they are condemned by the Judge who must do right, it is because they willed to pursue the sin which entailed condemnation. If they have not obtained mercy, their ruin shall lie at the door of their own wicked will.

This shall be the thunder which shall pursue them through all the caverns of hell—“Ye would not! ye would not! ye would not! On your own head must the guilt of your condemnation fall. You would not have eternal life—you willfully put it from you and refused it.”

Now, there, or somewhere about there—I do not quite know where—there is a great doctrinal difficulty, but I do not think you or I need go fishing for it. If there be a bone in the meat, I do not ask to have it put on my plate. And if there is a bone in this text, let any dog that likes have it. As for us, there is the meat on which our soul may feed, the truth that God lays at man’s own door the guilt of his destruction. And Christ puts it thus, “I would, but ye would not!”

I have, at this time, the pleasant task laid upon me of pointing out to you that what Christ would have done for the Jews, but which they would not accept, I am sure He would have done for us. Nay, I will go further and say that I am sure He is willing to do it for us now. And so, remembering the past a little, I want you still more to dwell upon the present, and to notice that, at this moment, Jesus is willing to gather us—to gather the children of this city together—as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.

Oh! I trust I may not have to say, “And ye would not,” but may the sweet Spirit of God be here to move the untoward and wicked wills of men till it shall be said, “Christ is willing to gather you, and you are willing to be gathered.” When those two things come together, great blessing must result.

I have read what astronomers have said about what would happen if two planets were in conjunction. I know nothing about that matter, but this I do know—when these two things come into conjunction—when Christ would, and we would—there will be blessed times for us, halcyon days of which we have never dreamed. May the Spirit of God make it to be so even now!

Now coming to the text, let us consider, first, *what Jesus would do*. Secondly, *how He would do it*. And thirdly, *when He would do it*.

I. First, WHAT JESUS WOULD DO. “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings!”

What does this mean? It is a very simple, homely, beautiful, touching simile—the hen gathering her chickens under her wings—and it means, first, that *Jesus would make you feel quite safe*. Look, there is the shadow of a hawk. The bird of prey is poised up yonder and the shadow is seen upon the ground. Or the mother hen, looking up, notices the destroyer and in a moment, she gives a cluck of alarm and so calls together her little family, and in a few seconds they are all safe beneath her sheltering feathers—her wings become their efficient shield.

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ would do just that with us. He would make us quite safe—take us out of the broad road of danger and then compass us about with the wings of His power, so that we might not only be, but also feel quite safe.

I suppose nothing feels safer than a little chick beneath the hen. That tiny creature has no gauge and measure of strength beyond its own weakness, so it reckons its mother to be incalculably strong and feels perfectly safe when it can hide its head within her breast feathers. Ah! but there are some of you who do not feel safe. You have never felt secure.

Death is truly the king of terrors to you. You do not like to hear people talk about it, and if you are ill, how quickly you send for the doctor—not because you have the symptoms of any very serious illness, but because you are afraid to die! Why, there are some of you so fearful that you hardly like to be left in a room in the dark, and you would scarcely dare to go upstairs without a candle.

You are so afraid, not from mere natural timidity, but because you know that there is something that follows death for which you are not prepared. Things are out of order between you and God, and you know it. So the fall of a leaf, or the scratching of a mouse, would disturb your mind, for you know that you are not in a state of safety.

You could not bear to be at sea in a storm. The thought of shipwreck would have about it not only the natural terror which is inseparable from such an alarming event, but also the dread that the waves of fire might succeed the waves of the ocean. You are not safe, even in your highest joys, a skeleton sits at the feast, for your pleasures are transient and you know it.

When, easygoing man as you are, you have your greatest delight in earthly things, you are still conscious that there is a worm in the very center of the sweetest fruit and you are afraid of the consequences of eating it. Oh, but Jesus would have you spared from all this anxiety! He would have covered you so completely that you would not have known a fear.

He would have you brought into the enjoyment of that “perfect love” which “casteth out fear: because fear hath torment.” He would have made you to be among the blessed ones of whom it is written, “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” And He is willing that this should be the case—that you, poor trembler, should come to Him now and feel no longer in jeopardy, but be safe forever.

That hymn with which we commenced the service—

“Jesu, lover of my soul,”—

is an exact reflex of what Christ is willing to bestow upon all who come to Him. He is willing to clasp to His bosom all who fly to Him for refuge. He is willing to take into the haven of perfect security the tempest-tossed vessel. He is willing to hide, as in the cleft of the rock, the sin-and-Satan-haunted spirit. It is so, dear friends. I know it is so, for I have proved it. Look into the eyes, into the heart, and into the wounds of Jesus, and you will know that there is no unwillingness in Him to give perfect safety to the souls that trust Him. He would make them to be in safety, “even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.”

But now I will go a step further and say that *Jesus would also make them feel perfectly happy*. Chicks under a hen are not only the picture of safety, but they are the very emblem of happiness. Did you ever disturb them a little? If so, did you not notice the sweet little noise they made—the very sound of perfect contentment.

If you have ever watched them as they stand there huddled together, you must have seen that it is their little paradise. They could not have been happier in the Garden of Eden than they are there, they are so blest. Beneath their mother’s wings, they have all that they can desire, and during the livelong night, let it be what it may—let it blow cold or warm—there they are perfectly safe and happy. Her heart is beating above them and her breast is yielding the warmth of life to keep them glad.

I feel sure that I am addressing people who are not happy. The common idea of happiness that many persons have is a very strange one. When our London friends have a day’s holiday, their notion of enjoying a rest often amuses me. They pack themselves away, as tightly as they can, inside and outside a van, or an omnibus, or a carriage—and then they go as far as they can till the weary horse can scarcely move to bring them home.

And all the while, to give rest to their ears and to their hearts, somebody blows a trumpet in a fashion that evokes very little music, and they riot all the day as if they were mad, and disport themselves as if London consisted of one huge Bethlehem Hospital—and that is what they call happiness.

My view of happiness would be to get as far as ever I could away from them, and to do the very reverse of what they are doing. These people talk about “the place to spend a happy day,” “the way to be happy” and so on, but was ever a poor word so trailed in the dust as that word “happy” is in such a connection as that?

But oh! a peaceful, contented mind that rests in God, a soul whose wishes are all fulfilled, and whose very life-breath is jubilant praise or else submissive prayer—that is what I call happiness. The man who knows that all is right with him for eternity, one who drinks from the eternal fount the joys which belong not to the brute beast, nor even to the man who is without a God—I call him the happy man.

And oh, how happy some of you would be if you came to Christ as the chicks come to the hen! Oh, how happy Christ would make you! Wretched woman over yonder, this very night you may be happy. Giant Despair has marked you for his own, you say. Then I challenge Giant Despair and call him a liar. If you believe in Christ, you shall find that He has redeemed you with His blood. Trust Him and He will set you free at once—and in Him you shall be as happy as the days are long at the longest and you shall know what true joy means—emphatic joy—“the joy of the Lord,” “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.”

I remind you of that other hymn we sang just now,—

*“Take salvation,
Take it now, and happy be;”—*

not only safe, but happy. And safe and happy forever.

I recollect how I was enticed to Christ when I heard the doctrine of the final perseverance of saints preached. I had heard a great deal about that kind of salvation which consists of being saved today and lost tomorrow, and I never cared a button for it—neither would I go across the street to listen to it now.

But I heard a salvation preached which really saves a man—and does eternally save him—and I felt that if I could get a grip of that salvation, I should be the happiest individual in the world. And I did grip it and I found it verity and fact, for Christ does save—saves effectually and eternally—all them that put their trust in Him. And even now, for the unsafe and for the unhappy, Christ is waiting and willing that they may be both safe and happy in Him.

But there is more bliss even than that, for *Christ makes them part of a blessed company*. He says in our text, “How often would I have gathered *thy children* together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings!” It is not a hen with one chick to which our Savior alludes. I suppose that the one chick might be happy, but the best happiness in the world is always enjoyed in holy company.

Christ gives the idea of a church as His notion of happiness—not one member only, but a body. Not one lone sheep, but a flock. So here he says, “How often would I have gathered *thy children* together!” Am I addressing some lone person? You have been in London a long time and you have found out that there is no place so lonely as this great London is.

I suppose that in the desert of Sahara, you might find a friend, although in Cheapside you could not. Nobody seems to know anybody here—that is to say, unless he has something to give away—and then the number of cousins that a man has is something amazing. But if you want anything, nobody knows you, and even your so-called friends forsake you.

Perhaps somebody has come to the Tabernacle for a good while and yet has been quite lonely. I am very sorry that it should ever be so, and I know that there are some earnest souls here that try to speak to strangers. But oh! dear friends, my Master would not have you lonely. He would gather you with the rest of His children, “even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.”

He would bring you to know a few burdened spirits like yourself, He would bring you to know some others that have been set free, as He will set you free. And He would lead you to have fellowship here with one, and there with another, till you would say with good Dr. Watts,—

*“In such society as this
My weary soul would rest:
The man that dwells where Jesus is,
Must be forever bless’d.”*

You would find that your joys would be multiplied by being shared with your kindred in Christ who, on the other hand, would make you partakers of their joy and would delight to do so. Oh, that you would come to Christ, for then you would have the happiness of Christian fellowship!

It seems to me that there is also another thought in the text, that is, *Jesus would make us know His love*. When the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, there is not only safety, and happiness, and congenial society, but there is also a consciousness of great love. The poor little chickens do not understand much about it—they do not know what relationship the hen bears to them, but she does.

Yet they feel that she loves them by the way she picks up every little grain for them, and by the way she calls them together so anxiously, and covers them so carefully. It is a truly blessed experience to know a great love—the love that is equal to our own—that blessed marriage love—renders life supremely happy where it is purely enjoyed.

But how much more blessed is it to have a love infinitely superior to your own, and yet to know that it is all yours, and that whatever there is in that loving One is all for you! Every chick may feel sure that, whatever the great bird can do, it will all be done for the little bird that cowers beneath its wings. In fact, the chicks are lost in the hen—see how she covers them.

That is what Jesus does to me and to you, if we are truly in Him—He covers us up and hides us from all our enemies. They cannot see us, for we are lost in our Lord, and yet we are most sweetly found, and put beyond the possibility of being lost. All that Jesus is, belongs to me, and to you, dear sister, and to you, dear brother. All Christ is mine, and all Christ is yours.

And as the hen gives herself up to her chick, and takes the chick, as it were, wholly to herself so that they become one, so does the blessed Christ give Himself wholly to His people, and He take His people wholly up into Himself, so that they are truly one. Oh, that you all had this great blessing! And if you are waiting and anxious and desirous to have it, He is willing to give it, for so He says in the text, “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings!”

That is what Jesus would do.

II. Now, very briefly, let us consider HOW HE WOULD DO IT.

He would do it, first, *by calling you to come to Him*. That is how the hen gathers her chicks around her, by calling them to her. Christ’s call is often given by the preaching of the Gospel, and I am truly glad when I can be His call-boy and pass on the message from Him. How I wish these lips had language conformable to the blessed call which He allows me to deliver in His name!

He bids me tell you, who labor and are heavy laden, to come to Him, to come unto Him now, and He will give you rest. He says, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” He bids me expressly say that him that comes to Him, He will in no wise cast out.

And I am glad that, ere He closed the Book of the Revelation, He put in this gracious message, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” That is how He would gather you by His call—is it not a sweet and gracious one? If you are His child, you will know it and come to Him, even as the chick knows the mother’s call and runs to her.

There is a pigeon not far from the hen, but it does not come at her call. There is a duck in the farmyard, but it does not come to her. Ah! but the chicks do. And this is how the Lord discerns His elect and redeemed people—that gracious call of His is understood by those who secretly belong to Him and who therefore respond to His call. He Himself said, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

How would Jesus gather you unto Him? Well, He would gather you, next, *by your coming at His call*. The hen gives a call and then the chicks run to her. What do they bring with them when they come? Do they pick up gold and silver, or bring diamonds in their mouths to pay their way to their mother’s bosom? No, not they. All they do is to run to her, just as they are.

Do you see them? The mother hen has called them and away they go. They bring her nothing and she asks nothing of them. It is for the hen to give to the chick and not for the chick to give to the hen. And so, poor sinner, all you have to do is to come and just trust Jesus. Run to Him. What shall you bring Him? Bring Him nothing but your need of everything that He can give you.

Shall you bring Him a broken heart? Yes, if you have one, but if you have not, come to Him and ask Him to give you a broken heart. Remember that verse of Hart's,—

*“Come, ye needy, come and welcome,
God’s free bounty glorify;
True belief, and true repentance,
Every grace that brings us nigh,
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.”*

So, then, this is Christ’s way of gathering sinners to Himself. First, He gives the call, and then they come to Him in obedience to it.

The next part of the gathering is the enclosure of His wing by which *He interposes between us and harm*. The hen gathers her chicks to her by brooding over them, making herself like a wall round about them, her feathers being their soft nestling-place. So Jesus gathers us to Him by brooding over us. He puts Himself between us and justice.

You know when He did it and how He suffered in doing it. He puts Himself between us and God, for He is the Mediator, the Interposer, the Daysman acting on our behalf. Oh, how sweet it is when, conscious of guilt and sin, we, nevertheless, can realize the sweetness of that promise which I have already quoted to you, “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust.” He shall Himself be your pavilion, He shall hide you from the righteous wrath of God and put your sin away by taking it upon Himself. That is the way we are gathered under the interposing Mediator.

How does He gather us? You have it all before you now—He calls us, and we come to Him, and we hide beneath Him and cry,—

*“Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.”*

That is how we are gathered to Him—may the Lord thus graciously gather us all!

III. Our last remark, concerning our being gathered to Christ, is to be WHEN HE WOULD DO IT.

The text says, “How often would I have gathered thy children together!” I will not go into an account of the many times in which Jesus, in His infinite love, would have gathered the children of Jerusalem unto Himself, but I should like to mention some times when, I think, He would have gathered some of you.

He would have gathered you, first, *when you were literally children*. I mean specially those of you who had early advantages. When you went to bed, after mother had spoken to you about—

“Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,”

and given you the “good-night” kiss, you would often lie awake and turn the subject over in your mind till the tears coursed down your little cheeks and you sobbed yourself asleep. I think Jesus would have gathered you then.

Do not some of us recall, when we were boys, when we spoke to an elder brother, or, may be, to a younger brother, and we two reasoned with one another about these things, and prayed in our boyish fashion, and yet in a few days had forgotten it all? I think Jesus would have gathered us to Him then.

In looking back over my own life, there seems to me to have been times when the Lord came very near my childish spirit and touched me, if not with divine life, yet with something very near akin to it, for there were many earnest desires after holiness, and bitter feelings of repentance, and mighty yearnings after the Christ of whom I knew so little, but for whom I longed so much.

Ah, my aged friend! am I describing your case? It is a long while since you were a boy, but you might almost wish you could be a child again to feel as you once felt. Ah, good woman! it is many a day since mother threaded her fingers through your curls and said that she hoped you would love her Savior. And you do not feel now as you felt then. Those were certainly times when Jesus would have gathered you to Himself.

Since then, I daresay many of you have had *times of serious impression and quiet thoughtfulness*. You do not know why it was, but you suddenly felt unusually thoughtful. It may be that you have been in the midst of gaiety and you have felt that it was all hollow. You could not bear it, so you got away and went upstairs, or into the garden, or you have even walked the street as if nobody else were there but yourself.

And you have thought, and thought, and thought again, and you have almost been persuaded—but you have said to the heavenly message, “Go thy way for this time, it is not yet quite convenient for me to receive you.” Will it ever be convenient, think you? Or is God to wait your convenience and play the lackey at your door, till your supreme will shall deign to listen to His merciful requests? Ah, how often!—how often would Jesus thus, by these solemn impressions, have gathered unto Himself some who are here present!

It may be that I am coming a little more closely home to some when I remind them that they have had *periods of severe illness*. At such times, you have lain in bed and listened to the tick of the watch at the bed-head and you have looked into eternity—and it has appeared very grim and dark to you. And you have then sought the prayers of good men, and you have vowed that, if you ever recovered, there should be no more wasted years, Ah! then Christ would have gathered you unto Himself and the shadow of His sheltering wing darkened your sick-chamber. But you would not yield and you escaped from Him again, and yet again.

I think I may truthfully add that, in this Tabernacle, sometimes, *when God has helped the preacher*, there have been moments when you have been brought to the very brink of salvation—and you have almost gone in. You have had to put pressure upon your conscience to keep out of the pool of mercy. You have had to resist the Holy Ghost.

Oh, but it is a dreadful thing when a man has done despite to the Spirit of God and made himself an antagonist of that blessed Spirit, whom to resist is perilous, for it is of Him that we read that there is a sin which is unto death—and there is a sin against the Holy Ghost which shall never be forgiven! I trust that none of you have yet committed that sin. But mind what you are at—mind what you are at, for you are in a most dangerous position.

Somewhere in that region where you now are, lies the sin which ensures damnation. I charge you, sirs, whatever sin you commit, resist not the Holy Ghost, for if you do, it may be that it shall be said, “My Spirit shall no longer strive with man.” And then, ah, then!—I drop the curtain and say no more, for it is too terrible to think of.

Oh, how I wish that this might be the time when Jesus would securely cover you as the hen covers her chicks! Do you really desire this blessing? I know you would not desire it if He did not desire it. If there is a spark of desire towards Christ in your heart, there is a whole flaming furnace of desire in Christ’s heart towards you. You never get the best of Him—long before you have gone half a boat’s length, you shall find Jesus Christ infinitely faster than you are. No sinner can ever say that he stopped for Christ, and waited for Jesus. I more willing than Christ? Never! A sinner more anxious for pardon than Christ is willing to pardon him? Never!

There was never seen, and there never shall be seen, beneath the cope of heaven, a soul more hungry after Christ than Christ is hungry after that soul. Long before the woman of Samaria said to Christ, “Give me to drink,” Christ had said to her, “Give me to drink.” He was the more thirsty of the two, even when He had made her thirsty. And He was thirsty after her soul long before she was thirsty after the water of life.

O poor, guilty sinner, do not doubt your welcome to Jesus! The gate of salvation is flung wide open. The door is taken completely off the hinges. “All things are ready, come.” Your Savior waits for you. The Father tarries for you. Nay, He does more—He comes to meet you. I see Him running. Is it true that I see you coming? Then what a spectacle is now before me!

I see you coming with feeble footsteps and I see Him running faster than the angels fly. I see the Father falling on the neck of the prodigal, I see Him kiss him, and delight in him, and cover him as if it were the hen that did cover her chick. I see Him delighting in deeds and tokens of infinite love. “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

“Ring the bells of heaven!” There is joy tonight, for a sinner has found his Savior and God has found His child.

God bless you, dear friends, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 13:18-34

Verse 18. *Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?*

For men learn much by resemblances and the things which are seen are frequently helpful to us in seeking to set forth the things which are not seen. Knowing that God is one in all that He has done, we are often able to learn from one part of His works to understand another. What, then, is God’s kingdom like? Is it like a mighty army marching with banners and trumpets? No. Is it like the raging sea, rolling onwards and sweeping everything before it? Not so—at all events, it is not so visibly.

19. *It is like a grain of mustard seed,*

You can hardly see it. You can, however, taste it. Try it and you shall find it pungent enough, but it is so small that you may easily pass it by. “It is like a grain of mustard seed,”

19. *Which a man took, and cast into his garden;*

It must be sown in prepared soil, but there is “a man” who knows how to cast it so that it shall fall where it will live and where it will grow.

19. *And it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.*

“The fowls of the air” that might once have eaten it, “lodged in the branches of it.” See, in this emblem, an illustration of the growth of the kingdom of God, the vitality of the truth of God, the energy with which, from a small beginning, God’s kingdom advances to a great ending.

Have you this mustard seed in your heart? It may seem a very little thing even to yourself. Others may scarcely perceive it, yet, but leave it alone and it will grow. Yet it will not grow without watering. Seeds may lie long in the ground, but they will not sprout until the rain has fallen to moisten the earth. Pray God to send showers of blessing upon your soul tonight, so that, even if you have no more than a grain of mustard seed in your heart, it may begin to grow.

Is the grain of mustard seed sending up its shoot above the ground? Then pray God that it may grow yet more till it shall not only be visible, but shall be so prominent that it must be seen—that those who once hated it will be compelled to see it—and to wonder at it as they behold the birds of the air coming and lodging in its branches.

I pray that in many hearts here, the grace of God may not long continue to be a small thing, but that it may advance to tree-like stature, till you shall yield comfort to fifties and hundreds—and many of you shall be like some of the trees in this great city and its suburbs.

Did you ever notice them at nightfall, when all the sparrows of the street come and lodge in the branches and merrily twitter ere they go to their rest? There are some Christians like those trees—they have hearts so big and they do for Christ’s service so much, that they harbor hundreds of poor little birds

of the air that else would hardly know where to go for shelter. God make us such Christians that we shall be a blessing to multitudes all around us!

20-21. *And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Some expositors think that this is a picture of the kingdom of the devil, but it does not say so. If our Lord had meant to represent the power of evil, He would have given us some intimation of that kind, but He has given us none. He means to describe exactly what He had described before, for He says, “Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?” The leaven is buried, as it were—“hid in three measures of meal.” It is lost, covered up. Leave it alone. By the force that is within itself it begins to work its way in the meal, and it leavens all around it until, at last, the whole three measures of meal are permeated by it, and made to feel and own its power. So is it with the grace of God where it is placed within a human heart—and so is it with the kingdom of God wherever its influence is exerted among the sons of men.

22-23. *And he went through the cities, and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?*

Oh, that question. Have you never asked it yourself? Have you never heard it asked? And there are some people who are very pleased when the answer is, “Yes, very few indeed will be saved—and they all go to Salem, or Zoar, or Rehoboth, or little Bethel.” There are some who are not quite certain whether all who go even there will be saved—they seem to delight to cut and pare down to the very lowest the number of those who will be saved. With such a spirit as that, I trust we do not sympathize for a moment. Certainly, our Lord does not. Listen to His reply to the question, “Lord, are there few that be saved?”

23-24. *And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

For your own part, take it for granted that there will be so few that ever will enter at all that you will have to push to get through the gate—“Strive to enter in at the narrow gate.” If you are not narrow in your own mind—and it is a pity that you should be—yet still recollect that the gate into heaven is narrow—and make up your mind that there is no getting through it except with many a push and many a squeeze.

25-26. *When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.*

See, there are some men who will not think of going to heaven till it is too late. And then, when they get to heaven’s gate and find it shut, they will begin to plead for admittance though they pleaded not for it before. When they might have had the blessing, they would not have it. And when they cannot have it, then they grow earnest in crying for it.

27-28. *But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.*

Ejected, violently driven away, as those who are abhorrent in God’s sight because you despised His mercy.

29-34. *And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee;*

how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!

What a terrible contrast! “I would...and ye would not!” May the Lord Jesus never have to say that to any of us!

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.