

FAITH: LIFE
NO. 2809

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 14, 1902
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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“The just shall live by his faith.”—Habakkuk 2:4
“The just shall live by faith.”—Romans 1:17
“The just shall live by faith.”—Galatians 3:11
“Now the just shall live by faith.”—Hebrews 10:38

THE fact that these words are so frequently found in the Word of God is a sufficient justification for often preaching from them. There seems to be, among certain preachers and hearers, some sort of question about preaching more than once from the same text, yet it would appear that this is by no means a wrong practice, but a most proper one. Indeed, our Lord Jesus Christ may be thought to have preached the same sermon more than once, for the sermon on the mount contains many passages similar to those uttered by Him on other occasions. The apostle Paul imitated his Master's example when he wrote to the Philippians, “To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.” We need not hesitate to follow such leaders as these

As the truth contained in our texts is so often brought before us in the Scriptures—and is revealed at least four times in almost the same words—we ought to regard it as of the greatest imaginable importance, as indeed it is. A mistake upon this subject would be a mistake concerning life—for we are told again and again, “The just shall live by faith”—and a mistake concerning life is a vital mistake, and will be a fatal mistake to those who make it unless it be corrected and rectified by a power higher than their own.

Therefore, we ought to give most earnest heed to that which lies near to the very heart of true religion, and which is indeed, its very life. To the believer, faith is of the utmost importance. He should endeavor not to lose any of his graces, he should seek, by the power of the blessed Spirit, neither to lose patience, nor hope, nor love, nor any other grace or virtue, still, the root of true religion is faith, so he must first of all see to that. If we fail in faith, we shall fail everywhere.

I might almost say of faith, with regard to religion, that it is like the heart, out of which are the issues of life. If faith is weak, we are weak all over—for service, for suffering, for everything, but when faith is strong, it imparts strength to all the members of the spiritual body, and the whole spiritual manhood is full of vigor. So, my brother or sister, see you first and foremost to your faith. May God the Holy Spirit graciously strengthen it, and may our consideration of these four texts tend to the same end!

First, *in the great change from condemnation to justification*, these words are true, “The just shall live by faith,” and secondly, using a very wide term to take in *all the rest of our daily life*—in reference to what we have been accustomed to call sanctification—these words are also true, “The just shall live by faith.” It is the same life all the way through, and the same method of living that life, namely, “by faith.”

I. First then, IN THE GREAT CHANGE FROM CONDEMNATION TO JUSTIFICATION, these words are true, “The just shall live by faith.”

We all need to be delivered from the condemnation which is our due because of sin. When a man's conscience is awakened to see the fearful penalty which he has incurred by his transgressions, he cries out for someone to rescue him from the death which looms before him as the result of his condemnation. He begins to seek a way of escape, and he tries all sorts of ways, and runs in them with great

perseverance, and earnestness, and self-denial, but he makes a mistake as to every way of escape until he comes to this way, “The just shall live by faith.”

This is the famous text which was the means of the emancipation of the soul of Martin Luther. I have stood at the bottom of the Santa Scala, or holy staircase, at Rome, which is superstitiously believed to be the very one down which the Savior came from Pilate’s hall, I have never gone up those stairs, because no one may go up them except upon his knees, and I would not do that, but I have walked up and down the steps by the side of them.

There are certain holes cut in the wooden floor which encases the marble staircase, and that wooden floor has been worn away many times by the pilgrims’ knees. There are places cut—where the priests say that the blood of Jesus fell—in order to enable the poor votaries of superstition to kiss the spot where the blood drops fell. I have seen scores of men and women going up that staircase on their bended knees, for they are told that there are great indulgences to be obtained by crawling up those stairs.

Luther was doing this, for he had gone to Rome determined to get rid of his sins, if possible, and while he was in the middle of that slavish toil, seeking to gain everlasting life by his penances, this text came into his mind—he had read it in the Bible in the monastery—“The just shall live by faith,” and to the astonishment of those who looked on, he rose from his knees, never to go up the Santa Scala any more in that fashion, for he had discovered that which he was looking for, the true way of living, and you know that it was not long before he needed to tell others of the life and peace that he had discovered.

An old monk, who knew something about these truths, but who did not want to have any noise made concerning them, said to him, “Go back to thy cell, and live near to God, and do not make a stir.” But God did not mean him to go back to his cell, and he began to speak, and very soon the world knew that a mighty change had been wrought, but it all came, instrumentally, through Luther learning this great truth, “The just shall live by faith.”

If I am addressing any who are *trying to procure eternal life by their own works*—if you have mended your ways a good deal, it was time you did so—if you have obtained a great many virtues to which you were strangers before, I am very glad to hear it, for it was your duty to do so—but if you are hoping, by any such means, to put away your sin, oh that some voice, more potent than mine, would speak not only to your ear, but to your heart and say, “The just shall live by faith!”

It is well that you have forsaken the ale bench, it is right that you have abstained from profane language, it is good that you are honest, it is most commendable that you are seeking to be a comfort to your friends at home, and to observe all the laws of domestic and social life, but if you are seeking, in this way, to obtain eternal life, you will miss the object of your search.

It is not so that you can be made just in the sight of God, or that you can secure true spiritual life, for “the just shall live by faith,” that is, by faith in Jesus Christ. You know “the old, old story,” but I will tell it you once again.

To obtain life, you must believe in that dear Son of God who came to earth, took our nature, and took our sin, and was made a curse for us that we might be no more a curse, and died, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” Your faith must be fixed on what He did, not on what you can do, and on what He suffered, not on what you can suffer by way of repentance, despondency, and distress of soul. You must look right away from anything there is within or about you, or anything you can possibly perform or achieve, to the ransom price paid by Christ upon the cross of Calvary, for you must live—you can live only—by faith in Jesus Christ, for “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight.”

Some, however, place a great deal of reliance *in various forms of religious observances*, as Luther himself did until his eyes were opened by the Holy Spirit. If that is your case, my dear friend, let me say that it is well that you should attend the house of God, and I am glad that you do, but if you get the idea that you are to be saved because you go so many times a week to the assembly of the saints, you are making a fatal mistake. It is well to search the Scriptures, but if you imagine that the searching of them

will save you—if you think that in them there is eternal life—you will find that there is something else to be done before you can get that great blessing, namely, coming to Christ that you may have eternal life, for you will search the Scriptures in vain if you regard that exercise as one which merits salvation.

It is well that you have begun to pray, but all the praying in the world, if it be relied on as a ground of salvation, is like a sandy foundation for a man to build on. You may weep over your sinful state, your tears may flow until, like Niobe, you are transformed into a perpetual fountain, but salvation comes not so. “The just shall live by faith.” All the devotional exercises in which you can possibly engage, in public or in private, with all the so called “sacraments” thrown in, and all the priestly efficacy of which men dream—even if there were such a thing in reality—all this could not save you. “The just shall live by faith.” This is the only way of living that God has ordained for sinners dead in trespasses and sins.

There is a notion more common, perhaps, than either of these two, of salvation by works or ceremonies, and that is the idea of *a certain amount of terror of conscience*, which is often confounded with true conviction of sin. According to the ideas of some people, this state must be passed through before you can be saved. You must dream about dreadful things at night, and wake in the morning full of horror and confusion, and go about your business in the utmost conceivable despair. So some say, and it is true that there are many who do come to God in that way.

I do not doubt that there are thousands who reach the Celestial City by way of the Slough of Despond, nay, how can I doubt it, when I went that way myself? Yet that is not the best way, it is our wandering and blundering that leads us to go that way, for the just shall not live by despondency, but by faith. The just shall not find eternal life through terror and despair, but they shall find it through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The prophets of Baal were under a gross delusion when “they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them,” but they are equally deluded who think that, by lacerating their conscience, and by endeavoring to make themselves miserable, they shall thereby obtain the favor of God. That is not true, you may even be put into the mortar of conviction, and brayed there with the pestle of the law until you are ground to atoms, and there is no hope left in you, but that is not the way of salvation.

“Believe and live” is the Gospel precept. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “The just shall live by faith.” Do not, therefore, try and set up another mode of salvation, “for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” and salvation comes by building upon that foundation, resting and relying only upon Him.

There are, no doubt, others who are looking in various directions for salvation, but we may say to them all that it is of no use which way they look—this way or that, up, down, to the right, or to the left—until they look by faith to Jesus Christ, but oh, what life comes streaming into the soul as soon as the eye is fixed upon Jesus!

In the case of some of us, the thrill that went through our heart, directly we looked to Jesus, was like a little heaven. It seemed to us as if we were suddenly brought into a new world. To me, believing in Jesus brought such a change in me at once, that I can only compare it to the experience of a blind man, who, having never seen a ray of light, should be suddenly taken out in the night, set under the sky studded with stars, and then should have an instantaneous operation performed upon his eyes so that in a moment he could see clearly.

Oh, how ravished he would be, how astonished, how delighted! How every little star would seem to twinkle for him! How every beam of light would seem to make him glad! He would clap his hands, he would leap for joy in the new sense of sight, and the newly discovered pleasure which it had brought into his life. This is the kind of bliss that comes through believing in Jesus. It is like the discovery of buried treasure, there comes such a flood of delight upon the soul as must be experienced to be understood, for it cannot be described. It does not come to all so suddenly, for some eyes are opened gradually, first they see men, as trees, walking, and by and by, they see more fully, but however it is

manifested, the change that faith works in the soul is truly marvelous. Beloved, he that believeth in Jesus is “justified from all things, from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

He relies upon a perfect atonement that puts away the whole sin of the man’s earthly existence, and he rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Man, you will die, the sentence already passed upon you will be executed before long unless you believe in Jesus, for “he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

But man, if you believe in Jesus, you can never be executed for your sin. For you, there is no hell; for you, there is no undying worm, no Tophet, no Gehenna, there cannot be any of these things, for you have no sin now. “Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee.” “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Faith brings life, and liberty, and love, and everlasting joy into the heart, but nothing else will do this.

This then, is the first sense of the expression, “The just shall live by faith,” and many of us have realized it, and bless God that we have. I wish that all in this place did not only know about faith, but really had faith. Oh, that some might have it now, and that ere this congregation shall break up, each of them might be able to say, “I believe in Jesus. I repose myself upon Him. Sink or swim, I fall into His arms. Come what may, Christ shall be to me, from this time forward, all my salvation and all my desire!” O blessed Spirit, work this faith in every heart here present now, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

II. Now comes the second part of the subject, namely, that THE WHOLE AFTERLIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN, AFTER HE IS MADE TO LIVE, IS STILL BY FAITH.

Note first, that *the believer, after his conversion, lives in no other way but by faith.* No Christian remains a Christian except by still believing. Where we began, there we continue, we looked unto Jesus at the first, and we are still looking unto Jesus. We came to Him at the first, and we are still coming unto Him “as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.” We know of no future ground of hope that can be any stronger or better than this, nay, we know of no other than believing in Jesus Christ. I beg you, beloved Christian people, try to avoid all attempts to live in any other way.

There are some professing Christians who live upon their devotions. Now, no Christian can live without prayer—without praise—without feeding upon the Word of God. Nobody ought to attempt to do that, but if any man should begin to say, “Now I can do without faith in Jesus, because I read so many chapters of a morning, and I spend so much time in prayer, and I also attend so many public services;”—ah! my brother, you have wandered out of the right track now, for you are not living by faith.

But if you pray in faith, and praise in faith, and read the Word of God in faith, then all these things shall become helpful to your spiritual life, but if faith be left out, all these things shall be but as mere husks which contain no wheat in them whatsoever.

I do fear that there are some professors of religion who feel perfectly satisfied if they have gone through the regular routine of the day. I admire habits of devotion, they should be maintained, but if the mere habit is mistaken for living power, and if it takes the place of coming continually to Jesus by living personal faith, you will soon find yourselves in a very strange case. “The just shall live by faith,” and not by these things apart from faith. Faith puts power into them, but they have no living force apart from faith.

There are some other Christians who try to live by their works. They are believers in Jesus, but they have got into such a state of heart that they are happy, and restful, and comfortable, only when they can have a certain amount of activity in the service of God. But if, through illness, or any other cause, they are hindered from active service, they are full of doubts, and begin to think that they are not saved, which proves that they were at least somewhat resting upon their activities.

Now by all means, let us be active in the service of our Savior, let us be zealous in good works, for to this end were we called, and this is for the glory of God. But beloved, if I were to begin to draw

comfort as to my soul's salvation from the fact of my diligence in preaching the Gospel, I should be making a great mistake, or if you began to draw comfort from your earnestness in the Sabbath school class, or if you should rest upon your devotion to various benevolent societies, or upon anything that you do, you would be upon the wrong track altogether. You would be feeding where God would not have you feed.

Do all you can do, but live by faith. Serve God with all your might, but never make your service into a prop or pillow of confidence, for even when we have done all that we ought to do, we are still unprofitable servants, and we must bring our best works, and ask forgiveness for their imperfections, even as there was a sacrifice appointed for the sins of Israel's holy things. What sin there is even in our holy things, so that they might sooner damn us than save us! Let us put no confidence in them, nor try to live by them as some do.

There are other Christians who live by feeling. Indeed, I have heard some advocate that we ought to live by feeling. Now, a true Christian man cannot be without feeling. God forbid that he should! Feelings of sorrow, feelings of joy, feelings of spiritual depression, and feelings of holy elation—these are all necessary in their time and place, but to live by feeling, and to gauge our security by our state of feeling, would be truly dreadful work, because our feelings are more fickle than the weather.

It is fine just now; but in another half hour, it may rain. In such a variable climate as ours, we can never reckon for long upon any sort of weather, and as to our hearts, and our feelings, so dependent upon our bodily health, or upon the kindness or the unkindness of our friends—so dependent upon a thousand little things almost too minute to be observed—if we begin estimating our safety by our ups and downs, we shall feel lost and then feel saved a hundred times a day. That plan will not do.

“The just shall live by faith.” I like to believe in Jesus when I have the worst feelings, just as firmly as when I have the best of them, and to trust in God just the same when my full assurance in Him brims with delight as I did when my soul was emptied by sorrow. Do you think I put that sentence the wrong way upwards? I did not, for it is easier, I believe, to trust Christ in the depths of sorrow than it is when you are high up in your stirrups, and feel yourself to be somebody, for then, almost insensibly, you get away from the sole foundation of your standing by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are some too, who live very much, even in religious matters, upon their outward circumstances. There are some who, if they become poor, almost give up all profession of religion. They say that they have not proper clothes in which to come to God's house, and that they do not like to be seen by people who knew them when they were in better circumstances, so that religion depends upon how many shillings a week they can earn, and that is a very poor concern. But if we have learned to live by faith, we shall follow the Lord in rags if He gives us nothing better to wear, and if we have not a shoe for our foot, we shall go after Him all the same.

Let us be in whatever condition we may, we shall never be worse off than He was, so come poverty, or come wealth, come the lowest possible ebb of outward fortunes, yet still, if we live by faith, we shall keep close to the heels of the Crucified. God grant us grace to live above our outward circumstances! Remember that inspired message, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Thus, you see that the Christian lives in no other manner than by faith.

And beloved friend, *he lives in all forms of his life by faith*. I can only speak for a minute or two upon this thought. In one form of his life, the Christian is a child at home with his Father. Well, as a child, he lives by faith, for “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” Our sonship and adoption remain to us matters of faith, and we continually look up to God our Father by faith.

As His children, we receive teaching, supplies, food, clothing, and everything, and we receive all by faith. To the child of God, faith is the hand that takes everything from God. I am His child, and I know that He will supply my every need, but faith prompts me to tell Him my need—yea, makes me feel that He knows what I need before I ask Him, and so I take from Him what He freely gives by believing in Him.

The Christian is, next, described in the Word of God as a pilgrim. He is journeying to “a city that hath foundations,” but all the way there, he goes by faith. He never takes a step heavenward except by faith. An unbelieving step is not a step towards heaven. All the progress that is made by any child of God is due to faith.

The Christian is also described as a warrior, and there is no fighting except by faith, and no weapon of defense like the great shield of faith. No victory is won by doubting, no devil is ever overthrown by desponding. Mistrust of God never yet put to flight the armies of the aliens, unbelief never stopped the mouths of lions, or quenched the violence of fire, or divided the sea, or conquered the land. Point to the wonders wrought by unbelief if you can. All it can show is ruin and desolation, for unbelief is powerless except for mischief. The just, when he fights, must fight by faith, and faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

The Christian is also continually described in the Word of God as a servant. Now, all service done for God must be done by faith. One of the first objectives of our service must be to please God, but “without faith it is impossible to please him.” O brothers and sisters, if we always go to our work, as Christians, saying, “I am going to do it by faith,” how differently we should act from what we do now!

We sit down, and think of our many infirmities, and we say, “We shall never accomplish that task.” But sirs, have you forgotten the everlasting arms and the omnipotent might of JEHOVAH? We observe how difficult the duty is, and how strong the opposition, and so we go to work very mistrustfully, but if instead thereof, we were to say, “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain,” we should be sure to conquer.

Service rendered in unbelief is like a vessel marred on the potter’s wheel, but as long as faith can turn it round upon the wheel, and fashion it, it will come to something that the Master can use. You must believe, for so will you be able to serve. “Trust in the LORD, and do good,” but be sure to do the first thing. The trusting must come before the doing, and be mingled with all the doing, or else it will be a very poor piece of doing indeed.

Well, then, in any capacity in which a Christian is found, he must always be believing. If you have to go home and go to bed, and lie there for a month and suffer, go upstairs believing that the Lord will make your bed in all your sickness. If you have to go back to a business where everything seems to be going wrong with you, go in faith, and know that He has said, “Bread shall be given thee, thy waters shall be sure.”

Or if you are going next Sunday to teach a class in the Sunday school, or going round with your tracts in a district where you have to call upon some ugly minded people, go in faith. Has not the Lord said, “Certainly I will be with thee. I will bless thee, and help thee”? Then, go in faith. It will change the whole color and tenor of your life if you remember that “the just shall live by faith,” whatever form his life takes.

Very rapidly, let me also say to you that *this is the way the just are to live in every case and every condition*. The prophet Habakkuk is the one who first uttered these words, “The just shall live by his faith.” I wonder whether he fully understood them himself. It is always pleasant to see whether a doctor takes his own physic, and whether a preacher practices his own precepts.

I think this is how Habakkuk understood these words, here is his practical exposition of them in the last verses of his prophecy, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will joy in the LORD; I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon my high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.”

Why, it is a hymn, is it not?—the hymn of a man who saw the bread going, and the meat going, and the oil going, and everything going, and yet he rejoiced in the Lord. This is what he meant by living by faith—faith, you see, about fruit—faith about flocks—faith about cattle—faith about fig trees—faith about everything—yea, a faith that does without anything—a faith that can take nothing, and be content

with it because it finds everything in God—faith under the worst conceivable conditions. This is how the just are to live.

And as they are to live thus at their worst, so should they live at their best—still by faith. I was told of a friend, who walked with that blessed man of God, Mr. George Muller of Bristol, and who made the remark to him that he thought he had £5,000 balance one year. “Yes,” said Mr. Muller, “God had been very gracious, and we had a large balance.” “And I think,” said the friend, “for some years you have always had a large balance.” “Yes,” he replied, “we have.”

“Well,” asked the other, “do you now, my brother, trust in God just as simply as you did when you had to call the children together to pray because there was no bread to give them for dinner, and God graciously sent you the dinner just at the right time? Is your faith just as simple? Do you walk by faith as you did then?” And that good man said, “Yes, my dear brother, I live by faith now as I did then, only a great deal more so, for I find I have more need of faith now to prevent me beginning to trust in what I have in store.”

It is just so, if you are getting on in life, you need more faith to keep you from making a god of what you have, and trusting in it. Instead of less faith in time of prosperity, you will need even more. There are some people, you know, who lean upon God because they have no one else to lean upon. They are like that famous rider of whom Cowper sang, who was—

*“Stooping down as needs he must
Who cannot sit upright.”*

That is how it is with the faith of these people, and very good faith it is too, but that faith is even nobler that has some apparent means of sitting upright, that seems to have something to confide in, yet will not do it because it disdains to have even things visible, of the best and most powerful kind, to rest upon, but will rest on nothing but God. Why, you props and buttresses, if I trust you today, I may want you tomorrow, and where shall I be then?

No, as Abraham said to the king of Sodom, “I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich,” so often have we to cast aside what is offered to us and say, “I cannot and will not have it, lest my heart should, at any time, rely upon those gifts rather than upon my God.”

You know how the devil spoke to God concerning Job, “Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.”

That is what the devil said, but it was not true, yet in some cases, there is a danger of it getting to be true. We are getting on so well, and the hedge is all around us. Ah! but we must not get to love the hedge, or it will be taken from us. If you love the fields, and the gold, and the silver, and begin to confide in them, you will lose them. “The just shall live by faith”—faith as much in the summer weather as in the winter cold, see to that matter, O thou who art the children of God!

“The just shall live by faith” in every condition. When he comes to die, he shall live by faith. I recollect what a Negro said about his master who was a Christian. The minister said to the Negro, “Sam, is your master dying?” “Yes, sir,” he said, “he be dying.” “And how is he dying, Sam?” “Sir,” said the Negro, “he be dying full of life.” That is how a Christian should die, “full of life.” The life of God is within him even to the last. Till he gets into glory, “the just shall live by faith.”

Yes, and before he gets there, he shall taste some of the joys of heaven, for living by faith means living in the heavenlies, it means getting to anticipate the glory that is yet to be revealed. Living by faith makes us live the life of God, and he that lives the life of God must, in some degree, live the life of heaven. Oh, to have it so developed, strengthened, and full grown that, from this time forth, we may live by faith even to the end!

The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Verses 1-3. *And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.*

Observe, that it was a king who made this wedding feast, therefore, to refuse to come to it when the command implied great honor to those who were bidden, was as distinct an insult as could very well be perpetrated against both the king and his son. "They would not come." Had the one who invited them been only an ordinary person, it might not have been their duty to come, and they might even have been justified in their refusal. But this was a king, who sent his servants to summon the guests to the marriage of his son, and I bid you to take notice that the Gospel marriage feast, to which you are invited, is the feast, not only of a king, but of the King of kings, your Creator, and your God, and in refusing to come, in obedience to His command, you commit an overt act of rebellion against His divine Majesty.

The king "sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come." They were bidden, yet they would not come, from whence I gather that those who think the invitations of the Gospel are to be restricted to certain characters, because they say it is useless to invite others, "do err, not knowing the Scriptures." What have we to do with the apparent uselessness of what we are commanded to do? It is our duty to give the invitation according as our King directs us, but it is not our business to decide whether that invitation will be accepted or rejected. In this case, we know what happened, "They would not come."

4. *Again, he sent forth other servants,—*

Perhaps, in the kindness of his heart, he thought that the first servants, whom he sent, were somewhat offensive in their manner, and that, therefore, the guests would not come, just as it may be that some of you will never receive the Gospel from one minister, for you have a prejudice against his way of putting it, so the Lord may, in the greatness of His mercy, send you His Word by the mouth of another. I am quite sure that any of us, who are the King's servants, would be very glad for somebody else to take our place if he could succeed better with you than we can. This king, in his wisdom and kindness, "sent forth other servants,"—

4-6. *Saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.*

The great majority of those who heard the invitation, "made light of it," and still is this the habit of the bulk of mankind, and even of many whom I am now addressing. Any day will do for you to think about Christ, so you seem to fancy. He may have your leavings, when it shall come to the last, you think that you can send for a minister to come and pray with you, and that then all will be well.

You make light of it—you make light of present mercy, of immediate reconciliation to God, you make light of the love and grace of God, and of the precious blood of Jesus. Take heed what you are doing, for the great King in heaven regards this as high treason against Himself, He looks upon it as a presumptuous attempt to lower His infinite majesty in the eyes of men. When a king has killed his oxen and fatlings for his son's wedding feast, and there is nobody to eat the provision, then is it a dishonor to him, and if it were possible for the Gospel provisions to be universally rejected, God would be dishonored.

There are some, however, who go further than merely making light of the invitation, "the remnant" who would, if they could, maltreat and slay the messengers of mercy, and as they cannot, nowadays, kill

their bodies, they try to slay their reputations. Any slander which they have heard, or any lie which they have invented, will do to tell in order to make the minister of Christ of less repute than he deserves to be.

7-10. *But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.*

This is the glorious rule of the Gospel still. Those who were first bidden to the great wedding feast were the Jews, they would not come, and therefore, Jerusalem was destroyed. Now the Gospel is preached to all nations, and all sorts of people in all nations, yet the same sinful rejection of the invitation is constantly being repeated.

You, who hear the Gospel from Sunday to Sunday, are bidden by it to come to the great supper, and as some of you will not come, God, in His infinite mercy, is sending His Gospel to the poorest and the vilest of mankind. Many of them do come, and thus the Lord provokes you to jealousy by a people who were not a people, and astonishes you as you find that many come from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South, and sit down in the kingdom of God, while you, who reckoned yourselves to be the children of the kingdom, because you have long been privileged to hear the Gospel, shall be cast out.

The king's servants "gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good." The best gathering into the visible church is sure to be a mixture, there will be some coming into it who should not be there.

11. *And when the king came in to see the guests,—*

For whom he had provided sumptuous garments suitable for the wedding—for as we provide what is supposed to be appropriate array for mourners at a funeral, so in the East they provide, on a much larger scale, suitable apparel for wedding guests.

11. *He saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:*

He might have had one, for it was provided. The fact that he had not one was as great an insult to the king as a refusal of his invitation would have been. He was not bound to provide himself with a wedding garment, he could not have done it, for he was probably one of those swept up out of the highways. But there it hung, and he was requested to put it on, but he refused, and he had the impertinence to sit there without the indispensable wedding garment. If he could not show his contempt for the king in one way, he would do so in another, and he dared, in the midst of the wedding feasters, to defy the authority of the king, and to refuse to do honor to the newly married prince.

12. *And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.*

He could give no reply, the king's presence awed him into silence.

13. *Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

You may manage to get into the church even though you are not converted, but if you are not trusting in Christ, you are not saved, and your false profession will only make your destruction the more terrible. Woe unto us unless we are found wearing the righteousness of Christ—unless our lives are made holy by the gracious influence of His blessed Spirit! These are the wedding garments which we are to wear. If we have them not, our presence at the festival will not avail us in the great testing time that is coming.

14. *For many are called, but few are chosen.*

All who hear the Gospel are called, but the call does not come with equal power to every heart. And with some, the power with which it comes is not that which saves, it only convinces the intellect, so that an outward homage is paid to the Word, and the inward obedience of the soul is not rendered to the

Lord. God grant that each of us may have on the wedding garment when the King comes in to see the guests!

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—571, 519

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