

THE LAST CENSUS NO. 382

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 14, 1861,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“The LORD shall count, when he writes up the people,
that this man was born there.”
Psalm 87:6.*

SEVERAL times, according to the record of Scripture, there was a census taken of the people of God. When Jacob went down into Egypt all his offspring were numbered, and they were three score and ten souls. How small, then, the visible church of Christ! It could be contained within a single tent, it had sprung of but a solitary man. All those, then, who feared JEHOVAH, as far as it is known to us, were of the race of Jacob.

There was another census taken when the people came up out of Egypt, and if you read in the earlier chapter of the book of Numbers you will be astonished at the wonderful multiplication which had taken place in the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. Truly, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied. There were six hundred thousand footmen, all prepared for battle, besides women and children, and aged men who were exempt from the toils of warfare.

There was another census taken after the people had been thirty-eight years in the wilderness. Through their sin they had not been multiplied. So many had fallen in the wilderness, that notwithstanding the natural increase, the population stood at very nearly the same rate, or—taking the armed men as the standard—about two thousand less than it was when they first entered into the howling wilderness.

You have further on in history another instance of the taking of the census, or rather of an attempt to do it, when David commanded Joab, the captain of the host, to go through all the tribes and number the people from Dan even to Beersheba. The people were God’s people. When He numbered them, well and good, but none but the sovereign power has a right to take the census of the people. David, forgetting that he was only God’s viceroy, that he stood not as king in Israel, except as under the constitution which God had established, presumes to invade the priestly prerogative and commit to Joab the Levitical office of numbering the people, and that without offering the shekels of sanctuary or giving the tribute of redemption.

So flagrant was the breach of the laws of Israel, that even Joab was quick to remonstrate. But before David could effect the task, the Word of God had come out against him, and three days of pestilence, or three years of famine, or a period of flight before their enemies, who would defeat them in war, were offered to him as dread alternatives for the punishment of his sin.

So did God seem to say, “JEHOVAH shall number the people, but David shall not.” God shall count His redeemed, and number His elect, but man shall not venture to touch the mysterious roll. None but the Lamb shall take that book and open every seal. That Lamb’s book of life is not to be read except by the eyes of Him who bought the people with His blood, nor are the people to pass under any hand to be counted except under the hand of Him that counts them, even the great Shepherd Himself.

My brethren, according to the text, there is one day to be a great census taken of the church of God. It is concerning that one census, final and decisive, that I shall have to speak this morning. May God grant that of all of us it may be said, when the Lord writes up the people, “This man was born there.”

Concerning this writing up of the census I shall take four or five points. First, we shall notice *what this writing will involve*, “When the Lord writes up the people,” secondly, *whose names will not be*

found written in the census, thirdly, whose names will be there, fourthly, who will write up the people, and then lastly, why will it be done at all?

I. When this dispensation shall come to its close, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven, when all His people shall be gathered to Him to share His splendors and to delight themselves in His triumph, then we believe the Lord shall write up His people. WHAT WILL THIS WRITING BE?

There will be written in this census nothing but *personal matters*. If you note my text, it says, “This man was born there.” They are not taken in the plural—*these men*. They are not taken as a corporate body—this nation, this church, this family—but one by one each man’s name shall be found either written there or else left out. Personal matters alone will come into the great census paper of eternity.

There is no truth which we need more frequently to hold up before the eyes of our people than the truth that nothing but personal godliness will ever avail. If you could trace your pedigree through a line of saints up to the apostles, nay, up to Mary herself, the mother of our Savior, yet, unless you did yourself believe in Christ, and had yourself been the subject of the personal change which is called regeneration, you should in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. No connections, however admirable, no relations, however desirable, no proxies, however excellent, shall ever avail for any dying man.

We must ourselves stand before God, each man for himself, to be acquitted, or to be condemned to hear, “Come, you blessed,” or “Depart, you cursed one.” There may be, and there always must be, when we take men in the mass (and God often in His providence deals with men in the mass), there may be innocent persons who suffer in the common calamity. There are likewise wicked men who rejoice in common mercies. But at the last the evil shall be unto the evil and the good shall be unto the good. The wheat shall be unmixed with chaff, the wine shall no more be mingled with the water, the gold shall not become dimmed through alloy. God’s people, each of them personally accepted, and the wicked, each of them personally condemned, shall meet their final doom. See to it, sirs, each one of you, that you personally have an interest in the blood of the Lamb.

Again, you will perceive that this great census deals not merely with personal matters, but with *vital* matters which concern a man’s birth. Here you have it that this man was *born* there. ’Tis true the things we have thought, and those we have done, shall be mentioned at the last, but not for their own sakes. They shall be mentioned only as means of proving that we were born-again, or else as evidence that regeneration had never taken place in us.

The vital question which the Lord’s great day shall touch will be this, “Was that man ever called from darkness into marvelous light? Was that heart ever turned from stone to flesh? Were those eyes ever opened to the celestial light? Were those ears ever ready to listen to the divine command? Was there a vital, radical change insomuch that old things had passed away, and all things had become new? For if not, in the golden roll of the Redeemed our names can have no place. When the roll is called, our names will not be mentioned, and we shall stand shivering with dismay because our names are left out when God calls, “Gather my saints together unto me, those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”

Remark, once more, the matters with which the census shall have to do will be *decisive*. Perhaps, my hearer, your name could not be written today among the regenerate, but there is hope yet, and we trust by God’s grace ere you go hence, you may have a portion among the sanctified. If we could take today the number of God’s people, at present converted, I thank God that before another hour it would be imperfect, for there would have been others added to the visibly-called of God.

But the last census shall be final. To its number none shall be added, from its multitude none subtracted. Once let that be taken, and the angel shall cry in heaven, “He that is holy let him be holy still.” And his voice shall reverberate to hell, but other words shall he sound there, “He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.” That shall be the last polling of the people, the last counting of the jewels and casting away of the counterfeits, the last bringing in of the sheep and banishment of the goats.

This makes it all-important that you and I should know today whether, “When the Lord writes up the people, it shall be said that this man was born there.” Oh that we were wise to look into futurities! We are so bat-like, we see but so small a distance. We only see time and its trickeries, its paint, its gilt. Oh that we were wise that we understood this, that we would remember our latter end! So that come the census day when it may, we may each have our name written beneath our Lord the Lamb in some humble place among the chosen of the Lord our God. This census, then, will involve personal, vital, decisive matters.

II. Let us now ask—WHOSE NAMES WILL NOT BE FOUND WRITTEN WHEN THE LORD COUNTS UP HIS PEOPLE?

Now this is a question which no man can answer to the full. But with God’s Word before us, supposing that the characters I mention shall be at the last day what they are now, we can tell you with a decision that is infallible, whose names will not be found there.

And first, for these are the most likely people to be deceived, the name of *the hypocritical church member* will not be found there. You have entered the church for the sake of gain or respectability. You have made a profession which is a lie. You have assumed a garb which is but the sheep’s skin while you yourself remain a wolf. You have a name to live, but are dead. You have whitewashed the sepulcher, but a sepulcher it is still.

Oh sir! It is one thing to have deceived the elder or the deacon, it is one thing to have misled and to have cajoled the minister, it is one thing to have won the respect and the esteem of the church, but it is another thing to escape undetected from the fiery glance which can read the secret things of the belly, and before which even hell and death are naked and unveiled. Do not, I pray you, hope that your masquerading, your spiritual pretenses, shall be of any use before Him. He shall rend your garments in pieces, and you shall stand naked to be the target for all His arrows. You shall be banished to the place where the hissing, the rebuke, and the reproach of all the ungodly shall descend forever and ever.

I tell you, your name may be in the church book without a blot, and no man may have suspected you, but except a man be born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Church members, try yourselves, the oldest and the best of you. Ay, and do you try yourself, O preacher, lest after having preached to others, you also should be a castaway. Oh, let us never take our religion from other men’s opinions, not even from the opinion of the best of men! I would not be satisfied even with the assurance of an apostle, if it came from his own judgment. We must have the assurance of the Holy Spirit, the witness within us that we are born of God.

Again, among the names that will *not* be found there, we may mention the man who is a *mere hearer*. How many there are among you today whom we could but describe as hearers only! The ear is tickled, the mind is interested, the gaze is fixed upon the preacher. ’Tis well, God be thanked that so many are willing to listen to the Word of God. But to be a hearer and not a believer will involve no salvation. To have had the seed sown, but for the seed never to have taken root will never give a harvest. To have had the light shining upon sightless eyeballs will have been of no avail, or giving of sight.

To have sat in these pews, though some of you may sit for twenty years, unless the Word be received into the heart through the grace of God, will minister rather to your damnation than to your salvation. Mark this, my hearers, if we are not “a savor of life unto life,” we must be “a savor of death unto death,” and in either case, we are unto God a sweet smelling savor as well in those that perish as in those that are saved.

I know what a great many people think if they are regular church-goers, if they are always in their place twice on the Sunday, that is as much as can be expected of them. I tell you, sirs, that you may make your church-going into a sin if you go to hear a Gospel which you reject. If you rest in your church-goings or your chapel-goings, you have rested in a lie, you have built upon the sand and in the last great day if you shall cry, “We have eaten, we have drunk with You, and You have taught in our streets,” He shall say, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of iniquity.”

There is a man yonder, too, whose name is not written and will not be found written there, unless some great change shall take place—I mean yonder young man, who is saying, “I will repent, I will seek a Savior, I desire to be washed in His blood.” Young man, you have said that twenty times before. You said it when you left your mother’s roof, and she rejoiced in the resolution. You said it when last the fever came into the establishment and you lay sick. You said it, sir, when last time conscience pricked you, because you had retired to rest at night, and had omitted the prayer in which you had been so early trained, and you say it today. But “unstable as water you do not excel.”

Your promise made in your own strength is but a broken reed. Your penitence is as the morning cloud and as the early dew. You are paving your road to hell with your good intentions. Up, sluggard! Up! Pull up those paving stones and hurl them at the old fiend who longs to keep you at this dreary work of making a smooth path to your destruction.

Oh, my dear friends, perhaps one of the worst of Satan’s snares is the promissory note. Under a sermon, when the sinner has been awakened, the devil gets him to say, “Well, I will think of these things by-and-by.” As you heard the other night, indifferent people are the most hopeless of all, because even when aroused, procrastination lulls them to sleep again. If Felix had hastily said to Paul, “Paul, I hate and despise you, you are an impostor,” there had been some little hope that in his quiet mood reason might reverse the words which he had uttered, but when he said in bland tones, tones which deceived himself though not the apostle, “Go your way for this time, when I have a more convenient season I will send for you,” then might you have read upon the brow of Felix with the spiritual eye these words, “This is one who knows the truth, but follows not its dictates. His damnation is as sure as it is just.”

I had infinitely rather hear, as I have sometimes heard, and as we constantly do, words of abuse against the minister, and language of hatred against the Gospel, than I would hear some of you who speak fair but mean foul, those who protest but belie, whose resolutions are like bad money or forged checks, which he that takes loses thereby, and he that believes is deceived. Your name, sir, unless there is something more than this, will never be found written there.

Scarcely necessary is it, I think, to say that those men and women who are *living in vice and open sin, and who die as they live*, will never find their names written there. No drunkard shall ever reel across the golden streets. No oath of the blasphemer shall ever shock the ear of angel. No light frothy or lascivious song shall ever taint the ear of perfection. Eden is not the place for thieves. Paradise is not the spot for harlots. Men and women who die with such blots upon their character, and such sins upon their souls shall find at heaven’s gate the angels say, “There shall in no wise enter here anything that defiles.”

And you, too, you *moralists*, against whose character no accusation can be brought, if you never received the new heart, you will be as surely shut out as the immoral. The honest tradesman, who was only dishonest to his God, shall find dishonesty there to be damnable. The upright man, who had no crooked ways except towards Christ and His holy Gospel, shall find those crooked ways destroy his soul. The man who said he loved his neighbor but forgot his God, shall find that “The wicked shall be cast into hell with all the nations that forget God.”

Oh, my dear hearers, except you have faith in Christ, except you have the Spirit of God in you, except you repent and are converted, there is a bar sterner than iron, and more endurable than steel, which will shut you out of the place of happiness, and in the number of the saints your names shall never be found.

III. We shall now turn to a more pleasing work—WHOSE NAME WILL BE FOUND THERE?

When you made up the census paper last Monday morning, there may have been a thief in the house in the night. I suppose you did not put his name down. There may have been some person who, that night, knocked at the door and was, for some short time under your roof, but who went out from you because he was not of you, for if he had been of you, doubtless he would have continued with you. I know that you did not put his name there.

You recorded there the names of the inhabitants of the house, but of none beside. Now, then, it shall be so at the last great census taking. Whose name shall be there? We reply, there shall be the name of

every soul who ever believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, whosoever fled to the cross for refuge, whosoever turned his tearful eye to Calvary as his hope, whosoever stretched out his finger to touch the hem of the sacred garment, shall find his name surely there as well as the mightiest of the prophets or the chief of the apostles.

Brethren, we will take those who think themselves most likely to be left out, and we remark that there will be found there the name of the poorest. When this last census was taken, the paper was sent as much to the hovel of the poor in St. Giles's, as to the palace of the rich in St. James's. None were left out. The Act of Parliament was not passed to take a census of the rich, it was not needed that there should only be those written who paid a certain amount of tax, but as they were all subjects, the name of the beggar was recorded in the register as well as the name and title of the peer.

So shall it be at the last. If you have believed in Christ, though you did never glitter on the pages of heraldry, though rags were your dress and penury your portion, yet in as fair a place as those who have worn a coronet, and have yet feared God, shall you find your name. Oh! let us never imagine that because a man wears peasant clothes, or is clothed in corduroy, he has the slightest less reason to hope that he shall be saved. Not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are chosen, but God has chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, to be heirs of the kingdom, so that if there be an advantage either way, it is where some would dream it should least be given.

But then, as the poorest, so the weakest saint shall be found there. You did not omit the name of your daughter because with some spinal complaint she has been so long afflicted that she can scarcely sit upright. You put her name there as well as that of your stalwart son, who could boldly wield arms if it were needed to defend this country from the invader.

And I take it, when you wrote out the list, the infant child had a place as well as the full-grown man. You felt that the census would not be complete, and your family list would not be well made out even if that infant whose voice was but a cry, and whose life was but a pain, should miss his place. All were recorded there.

And so, at the last, Benjamin shall be written as well as Judah, Mephibosheth as well as David, he who is lame in the feet as well as the giant in strength. Father Earnest and Mr. Great-Heart shall have their place, but Mr. Fearing and Miss Much-Afraid shall not miss their portion. Every one of those who believed in Christ, though their faith was but as a grain of mustard seed, and their spiritual life was but as the smoking flax, shall find their names written there.

I would that I could speak out this truth so that the cast down, and the all-but destroyed could lay hold upon it. Are you miserable today? Your misery does not erase your name. Have you sinned, but do you cry, "Father, have mercy upon me"? Your sin has not blotted the writing. Engraved as in eternal brass, there stands your name. The powers of darkness shall never prevail to erase the everlasting characters.

Are you today so conscious of your unworthiness that you dare not look up? Are you thinking, "If I said, 'Abba, Father,' it would be presumption. If I claimed the privilege of a child, it would be arrogance"? Yet if Christ is yours, if you can stretch out your hand now and say,

*"My soul would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand
And there confess my sin,"*

you need not be afraid but that among the blood-bought you shall share your lot.

"Ah! my soul, will *you* be there?" Pass the question now through this vast throng, and let each soul put itself into the balances with this as the test-weight, "What do you think of Christ? Is He your only help? Do you find cleansing in His blood, healing in His wounds, life in His death, heaven in His

pains?" If so, you shall be found when the Lord writes up the people, and of you it shall be said, "That man was born in her."

IV. I shall now turn your attention to the next point of the subject, briefly. WHO IS TO MAKE OUT THE CENSUS PAPER?

"The LORD shall count when *he* writes up the people." But why shall the Lord make out the census? The first reason is—*Who else could do it?* Suppose our enemies had the making out of the roll! "Oh, Lord, deliver me not over unto the will of my enemies, for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty." I think there is none among us who would be willing to have his eternal fate decided by an evil and gain-saying world. If we could put the pen into the hand of the wicked, they would write down the offscouring, but omit the jewels. They would surely record the base and the reprobate, while the chosen and precious would have no lot or portion.

Imagine for a moment, my dear friends, that the pen could be given to the old Pope of Rome, and that he had the writing up of the people. Now, my lord Pope, with your triple crown upon your head, write them out. I am sure he would omit yours and mine, because we are not obedient to the pontifical see, and even if he were under authority and command, I am sure he would make a great splutter in trying to write the name, "Martin Luther," and he would throw down his pen and utterly refuse to obey, if he had to write the glorious name of John Calvin. Well, thanks be to God, the pen is not in the hand of that arch-deceiver, nor in that of any of our enemies, but the Lord shall make out the census Himself.

Suppose now we put the pen into the hand of Bigotry—Bigotry, who lives not quite so far off as Italy—but takes up her residence in our own land, and hard by our own abode. I think I see her with her face bitter as wormwood, and with her eyes full of darkness and she, having written all the names down, reads, "There are few that shall be saved. They are so few that a child can count them." She makes a dash against the name of this man, for he did not hold all the five points of a certain system. She runs her pen right through another man's, because he dared to preach to sinners and she takes a double dip for another, who had once ventured to say that faith was the duty of man, and unbelief was a high and damning crime. Oh, how few would ever go to heaven, if Bigotry had the making out of the census paper.

I might thus run through the list of all the enemies of Christ's church, and show you that it would not be safe to trust any of them, from the devil downward to the Pope upward, with the making up of the list of those who shall enter into the King's palace. But suppose our friends had the task. "Yes," says one, "let my mother have the pen." Ay, if this were left with our dear friends, they would not be long before some of them would write in bold text hand the name of their most reprobate son or most hardened daughter. Affection in this world overmasters the understanding, and doubtless there would be many in heaven who would defile its purity, if affection had the keeping of the gates and if understanding had no place.

Yes, but young man, your mother cannot save you. She can pray and plead, but if your iniquity be written as with an iron pen, and engraved on the horns of the altar, her tears cannot—acid even though they be—eat out the dire inscription from the brass. You must be washed in blood or else a baptism of tears will not avail. You must have the Spirit of Christ, for your mother's spirit cannot bear you on its wings to heaven.

Indeed, dear friends, if the making out of the census paper were left even to ourselves, it were left to the wrong persons, for I take it, that the great end of all God's dispensations is His glory, and if our entrance to heaven were left to ourselves, there are many who would go there with a lie on their lips, and with blasphemy in their hearts. They would go to glory fresh from their sins, rising from beds of lusts to beds of bliss, they would go red with murder, black with crime, dripping with the oozings of their vices, and heaven would become a Sodom, and Paradise an Aceldama. The throne of God would be no better than the throne of Moloch, and the place of perfection would not be preferable to hell itself. God and God only—God the only wise—shall have the writing up of the people, for there is no one to be found but God who could do it.

There is a second reason which I think will strike the spiritual mind with force. “The LORD shall count when *he* writes up the people.” Instructions were given at the late census, that the paper should be made out by “*the head of the family.*” Now, I suppose, though it is not always the fact, that the husband is the head of the household, and that the father stands in the position of the head of the family. Well, then, the church must not make up the census paper, for she is the spouse. But He who is Head over all things to the church, which is His body, He by whose name the whole family in heaven and earth are named, He shall “write up the people.”

It were, indeed, impious for you or me, it would bring down upon our heads a penalty as heavy as that which fell on David, if *we* thought we could write up the people. We have said, perhaps, “There are only such-and-such people that shall be saved,” and we have turned about and said of another, “Lord, what shall this man do?” And like John, loving spirit though he was, we have been ready to call fire from heaven upon some, and to say of others, “Master, forbid them, because they follow not with us.”

But brethren, I hope we have done with all that now. We believe the Lord knows them that are His, they are a multitude that no man can number, and no man should ever attempt the task. They are more than bigotry would include, they are fewer than a latitudinarian charity would affirm. But be they more, or be they less, they are known only to the eternal mind, and this is a secret into which we must not pry. The angelic footstep treads not here. Let us not be rash and foolish to pry where angels stand back, and do not desire to look.

I would give another reason why God, and God alone, should make up this paper, had I not already anticipated myself. I meant to have said because He is the *only wise God*. You know it is said in Scripture that God is wise, but then it is added He is, “*only wise.*” There is not another wise being upon the face of the earth. There is not another wise being, even in heaven itself. God is only wise.

Even the heathen knew this. You will remember when some fishermen had found a spoil, the old Greek legend says, “Not knowing how to divide it, they repaired to the Delphic oracle, which said, ‘Let the wisest have it.’” They sent it to Thales, the Miletian, they sent it to Solon, it went the round of the wise men of Greece, but they all refused it. They said no, confessed they were not the wisest, till at last one of them advised to send it to the altar of the gods, for the gods were the wisest of all.

What the heathen thus pictured in poetic fiction, we know to be true. We will not question this man or that, this denomination or that. It is not for us to use our fingers to count the brands plucked from the burning, but to use our hands to pluck them from the fire, and we will pass the roll to the only wise God, and He shall at the last decide whether they be His or not.

V. I now come to my last point. May the Spirit of God bless it to us, and seal it on our hearts, WHY WILL THE CENSUS BE TAKEN AT ALL?

Why should God write up the people? We answer not that God may receive fresh information. He knows all things. Not that there is any fear of God’s purposed number being incomplete. The Lord knows those who are His, and this is one of the stones on which the security of the church is built. Why then? Of course we are dealing now with a noble picture, and you must view it as a picture, though within its bowels it bears a mighty fact.

The Lord counts up His people, in the first place, *to show His value of them*. You remember that passage, “They shall be mine, says the LORD, in that day when I make up my jewels,” as though the jewels had to be put each into their proper place, and then the divine eye should run along them all and say “Yes, they are made up. Those in the casket tally in number with those in the inventory. They are made up. Neither ruby, nor emerald, nor pearl is lacking. They are all there.”

God makes up His jewels, it is impossible for the human mind to conceive how dear is the poorest believer to the heart of his Father—dearer than the widow’s only child to her soul—dearer than the new-made bridegroom to his bride—dearer than life to those who stand in peril—dearer than honor to those who could give life rather than sacrifice their integrity.

We love, but we love not as God loves. Love with us may be an abiding passion, but with God it is an all-penetrating principle. Of us it may be said, that we are loving, but of God, that He is love itself.

And well does the idea of counting up the loved ones set forth the esteem and value which He sets upon them, and the intensity and deep-seatedness of that affection which He bears towards their persons. The Lord will make up His jewels, He will recount His sheep, He will remember the children of His family, to see if they be there who were written in the register of old.

Another thought strikes us. The last census shall be taken *to show to Satan his entire defeat*. They are all there, fiend of hell, they are all there. What did you say, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my lust shall be satisfied upon them." What say you now, fiend of hell? There is not one of them lacking. You greedy lion of the pit of hell, have you rent one sheep? Has so much as a lamb been dragged to your infernal den? You legion hosts, who with cunning, sharpened by malice, sought to tear from the arms of Christ those whom He had sworn to save, say, has the Surety done His work or not?

Have you defeated Him? You have nailed Him to the tree, have you broken His bones, and robbed Him of His members? You took away His life, could you keep it? Do they not live because He lives? You struggled through eighteen hundred years and more, you grappled with these poor men and women who wrestled hard with you, did you overcome one of them?

You were worsted when you fought with Job in the slippery standing of a dunghill. You were defeated when you fought with David on the pinnacle of the palace top and brought him down. You won not the victory when you seemed to win it over Peter in the hall of Pilate. You were defeated not once or twice, but many thousand times in the heirs of life, who fought with various success in time, but with sure success as time merged into eternity.

Oh! all you hosts, look there and be ashamed, and let the songs of the white-robed be howlings to you, let the shoutings of the complete host of the redeemed sink into your ears like death-knells and re-begin your hell, for you are defeated, you are cast down, the pride of your looks is lowered, and JEHOVAH alone is exalted in that day.

Yet once more, I think the counting up of the redeemed will be performed for another reason, to let all men see that *the great riddle which has distracted human intellect was no riddle but a fact*—and facts are not riddles. What is the great mystery? It is that God decrees, that man acts, yet that God's decrees and man's acts tally with one another. Of old, before the sockets of the eternal hills were carved out of the enduring granite, before the peaks lifted themselves white with snow to glitter in the sun, ere stars had visited the mountain summit, and looked down upon a world that had fallen into sin, ay, when this world was not, when it was uncreated, sleeping in the womb of the divine thought as yet unborn, when suns and stars, and this brave universe itself had not begun to be formed, then in His book His chosen were all written, and the members of Christ fixed and ordained. That book was closed and sealed, it has not been opened.

Now what effect can a book, a clasped sealed book, have upon the deeds of men? "None," say you. "None," say I. The decree of God as such has no effect on any man. There it is, there it stands. But see! The world is all confusion. Never were the waves of the sea more wanton in their play. Man sins, rebels, revolts, revolts again, the checks of mercy hold him not, he breaks the bit, he scorns the yoke, and yet despite the hardness and the freedom of man to rebel against his God, I see at last through grace omnipotent a multitude come streaming slowly in, year after year, through the golden gates, and at last I hear the gate closed. I see it barred, and how strange shall it seem as that great sealed book is now unclasped, it is found that all who were written there have come. Nay, come as they were written, come at the hour ordained, come in the place predestinated, come by the means foreknown, come as God would have them come, and thus free agency did not defeat predestination, and man's will did not thwart the eternal will.

God is glorified, and man free. Man—the man as he proudly calls himself—has obeyed God as truly as though he knew what was in God's book, and had studied to make the decree of God the very rule and method of his life. Glorious shall it be when thus that book shall prove the mystic energy which went out from between the folded leaves—the mysterious Spirit that emanated from the eternal throne—

that unseen, unmanifested, sometimes unrecognized mysterious power, which bowed the will, and led it in silken chains, which opened up the understanding, and led it from darkness into light, and melted the heart and moved the spirit, and won the entire man to the obedience of the truth as it was in Jesus.

I will say no more except this. Shall I be there? Will you be there? I cannot put the question better than in the words of that solemn hymn—

*“When Thou, my righteous Judge, shalt come
To fetch Thy ransom’d people home,
Shall I among them stand?
Shall such a worthless worm as I,
Who sometimes am afraid to die,
Be found at Thy right hand?*

*I love to meet among them now,
Before Thy gracious feet to bow,
Though vilest of them all;
But can I bear the piercing thought—
What if my name should be left out,
When Thou for them shalt call?*

*Prevent, prevent it by Thy grace;
Be Thou, dear Lord, my hiding place,
In this the accepted day;
Thy pardning voice, O let me hear,
To still my unbelieving fear;
Nor let me fall, I pray,*

*Let me among Thy saints be found,
Whene’er the archangel’s trump shall sound,
To see Thy smiling face;
Then loudest of the crowd I’ll sing,
While heaven’s resounding mansions ring
With shouts of sovereign grace.”*

May that be your prayer and mine. May God hear it, and hear it He will, if to that prayer we add the obedience of faith. “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved and your house.” Sinner, believe. God help you to believe this morning for His name’s sake.

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

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