

“THE LOVE OF JESUS, WHAT IT IS—NONE BUT HIS LOVED ONES KNOW”

NO. 455

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, JUNE 18, 1862,
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AT SURREY CHAPEL, BLACKFRIARS ROAD.**

*“And to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.”
Ephesians 3:19.*

IT is the distinguishing mark of God’s people that they know the love of Christ. Without exception, all those who have passed from death unto life, whatever they may *not* know, have learned this. Without exception, all those who are not saved, whatever they may know besides, know nothing of this. An ungodly man may know something about Christ’s love; he may believe in the fact of it; he may perceive something of the theory of it. He may even be able to follow believers in certain expressions of its enjoyments. But to know the love itself, to taste its sweets, to realize personally, experientially, and vitally, the love of Christ as shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit is the privilege of the child of God, and of the child of God, alone! This is the secure enclosure into which the stranger cannot enter; this is the garden of the Lord, so well protected by walls and hedges that no wild boar of the woods can enter. Only the redeemed of the Lord shall walk here. They, and only they, may pluck the fruits and content themselves with the delights thereof. We may begin the exercises of this evening with a question of self-examination, and we may continue them throughout the whole service, trying to press that question home to your consciences—Do I know the love of Christ? Have I felt it? Do I understand it? Do I feel it now? Is it now shed abroad in my heart? Do I know that Jesus now loves me? Is my heart quickened, and animated, and warmed, and attracted towards Him through the great truth of God that it recognizes and rejoices in—that Christ really loves me, and has chosen me, and set His heart upon me?

We have started the first point. Every child of God knows the love of Christ. We advance another step. All the children of God do not know this love to the same extent. There are in Christ’s family, babes, young men, strong men, and a few who are fathers. Now, as they grow and progress in all other matters, so they most certainly make advances here. Indeed, an increase of love, a more perfect apprehension of Christ’s love, is one of the best and most infallible gauges whereby we may test ourselves whether we have grown in divine grace or not. If we have grown in grace, it is absolutely certain that we shall have advanced in our knowledge and reciprocation of the love of Christ! Many here present have believed in Jesus, and they know the love of Jesus, but oh, they know it not as some others here do who have gone into the inner chamber, and have been made to drink of the spiced wine of Christ’s pomegranate! Some of you have begun to climb the mountain, and the view which lies at your feet is lovely and passing fair, but the landscape is not such as would greet your eyes if you could but stand where advanced saints are now standing, and could look to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south, and see all the lengths and breadths, and depths and heights, of the love of Christ which passes knowledge. To change the figure—the love of Christ is comparable to Jacob’s ladder; some of us are standing on the lower rungs, and there are others who are ascending and who rest half way; others, still, are getting up so high that we can scarcely see them by reason of the dimness of our sight; and there are some, perhaps at this hour, who have just reached the topmost rung of this knowledge, and are now stepping, as it were, into the arms of Christ who awaits them at the top! They have attained unto their perfection. Here they shall find repose. They shall rest in His love, and with the eternal songs of heaven, they shall rejoice forever and forever!

I want tonight, to bring you, who are the people of God, to the bottom of the ladder; I want to encourage you to put your feet upon the first rung of it; and then, go step by step with you till, I hope, before we have done, if God the Holy Spirit is with us here, we shall have gotten very high up that ladder, and then, we shall go away hoping never to come down again, only wishing, with Peter, that we may

tarry on the mountain, and build for us tabernacles that we may sit on the summit of the mountain with our Lord forever!

I. Well then, to come first of all to the bottom of the ladder. One of the lowest ways of knowing the love of Christ may be described as *the doctrinal method*—very useful one, but nothing to be compared to those that we shall have to mention afterwards. If a man would know the love of Christ, he should endeavor to study the Word of God with care, attention, constancy, and with dependence upon the Spirit’s illumination, that he may be enabled to understand aright. It is well for a Christian to be thoroughly established in the faith once delivered to the saints. It is an ill day for a man when he ceases to hold fast to the form of sound words which was delivered to us by Christ Himself and His holy apostles. Depend upon it, doctrinal ignorance will always make churches weak! But where saints are fed upon the finest of the wheat, and are made to suck of the honey out of the rock, and to eat of the manna and fatness of gospel doctrine, they will, all other things being equal, become the strongest and most valiant believers on the face of the earth. There is a tendency in these times to depreciate the value of gospel doctrines. Oh, I beseech you, be not led astray by this error! There are in the Word of God certain things really taught. Do not believe that the Bible is a lump of wax to be shaped just as you please. Do not imagine that “Yes,” is right, and that “No,” which contradicts it, is right, too! The Lord has written this book intending to teach us something, and a moderate understanding, sanctified by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, will enable you to know what the Lord does mean to teach you, especially upon such a vital point as this. Do not, I beseech you, say, “Oh, it does not much matter what doctrines I hold.” You are as much responsible for using your judgment as you are for using your hands and your feet! God never did free a conscience from His jurisdiction. Conscience is free, but not before God. You have a right to your convictions as far as *I* am concerned, but if your convictions are wrong, you have no right to them before *God!* There are certain things that are truths of God, and there are others that are contradictions; see that you get fast hold of wisdom, and that you do not let her go! There is a tendency, however, on the other hand in certain quarters, to make “doctrinal” knowledge *everything*. I have seen, to my inexpressible grief, the doctrines of grace made a huge stone to be rolled at the mouth of the sepulcher of a dead Christ, and I have seen sound doctrine, so called, made as a very seal to seal in the dead Christ, lest by any means the energy of His grace should come out for the Salvation of sinners! Oh, what is doctrine, after all, but a throne whereon Christ sits, and when that throne is vacant, what is the throne to us? It is the Monarch and not the throne who we reverence and esteem! Doctrines are but as the shovel and the tongs of the altar, while Christ is the smoking sacrifice. Doctrines are Christ’s garments; verily, they all smell of myrrh, and cassia, and aloes out of ivory palaces, whereby they make us glad, but it is not the garments we care for so much as for the person, the very person of our Lord Jesus Christ! And therefore, while I entreat you, (and I hope not to be misunderstood here), while I entreat you to be very jealous and earnest in attaining unto a clear doctrinal knowledge of the love of Christ to His people, yet, when you have got it, do not say—“I am the man! I have attained to eminence; I may now sit still and be content.” sirs, this is but the threshold; this is but one of the first arches of a long vista of glorious truths of God; this is but the lowest step of the ascent! You have but sat down on the lowest form in the school; you have much to learn! Oh, be not wise in your own conceits, lest you lose the blessed things which as yet have not been discovered by you! Verily, it is a sweet thing to know Christ’s love in the doctrine, and to understand that it is without beginning; that it existed when as yet this world had not been made; when sun, and moon, and stars slept in the mind of God, like unborn forests in an acorn cup; when as yet the solemnity of silence had never been startled by the songs of seraphs, and the wings of cherubs had never stirred the unnavigated ether! It is delightful to believe that—

*“Before the daystar knew its place,
Or planets went their round,
The saints in bonds of sovereign grace,
Were one with Jesus found!”*

Equally precious is it to know the doctrine that this love is without end. When all we see around us shall have passed away, as the foam dissolves into the waves that bear it, the love of Christ to His people shall be the same. And on, and on, and on throughout eternity He shall never cast them from His heart! Sweet, too, is it, passing sweet, to know that He loves them without change, and without limit; that He loves them because He will love them; that He loves them not for anything in them, but simply because

He has so much love in His heart that He must let it out, and that He ordains to let it flow forth to them that they may rejoice in it. All this is precious but, O brothers and sisters, if you only know these things as they stand in the creed book—if you only understand them as you find them in the catechism, I tell you that you know nothing yet as you ought to know! If this is all your knowledge, you have just begun to learn! May God help you to go further, and to mount to higher and clearer regions than these! It is a blessed privilege to know Christ doctrinally, but it is only the beginning, the steppingstone to something better, even as love longs for intimacy.

II. And what next? Let us lift our feet and take another step. True saints know Christ’s love *gratefully and thankfully*, having experienced it. O dear friends, let me refresh your memories, and tell you what you do know, rather than attempt to say anything which might be new to you. Do you remember the place, the spot of ground where Jesus met with you? Some of us do. Oh, that day of days! That first day of our spiritual life! Other days have lost their freshness in our recollection, but this one is like a coin newly minted from time, though it is years ago with some of us. Oh, that day! That marriage day! That feast day! That day of heaven on earth! Our soul was burdened, and bowed down to the very dust, and we thought we would soon descend into the pit where despair would be our portion forever, but as we went mourning on our way, we heard a voice saying to us—

“Come here soul, I am the way.”

We turned our eyes to see what way this could be, when lo, we saw one nailed to a cross! We marked the blood as it flowed from His hands and feet, and side; we saw His eyes as they looked on us with inexpressible compassion, and we heard Him as He opened His lips and said, “Come unto Me, you weary one, and I will give you rest.” Oh, do you remember when you looked unto Him, and when you came to trust Him, just as you were, with your soul? You had been learning about Christ, perhaps, for years; you had been taught about Him; you had got some knowledge of Him, and some desire towards Him, but did you not learn more of Christ in five minutes then, than you could have learned in a whole course of college education in theology, in years before? And since that time, dear friends, have we not learned Christ’s love thankfully to a very high degree? Day after day, He comes to us; night after night He draws the curtains of our bed; He is always with us, and all that He has is ours; He talks sweetly to us by the way, and He sits down by us in our afflictions and comforts us, and makes our hearts to burn within us. And as we think of all that He has done for us, we feel we do know something of Him, for gratitude has been our schoolmaster.

I know some Christians say they do not feel the love of Christ as much now as they did at first. Oh, shame on you, brothers and sisters, shame on you, if this is true! What? When you owed Him for one mercy, did you love Him? And now when you owe Him for fifty thousand, do you love Him less? Why, if it is true that saints grow necessarily colder and colder, then it does not say much for their estimation of Christ! It would make Him out to be like some people we know, who are very agreeable to see once in a while, but we should not like to live with them long. Let me share my witness that my Lord and Master improves upon acquaintance. The more I know of Him, the more I wish to know, and I think I do but speak the mind of all the Lord’s people when I declare that instead of having less love to Him, the more I experience of His favor, the more warm is my heart towards Him! “Alas,” says one, “but I do not feel as I once did.” Well, dear friend, it may be that you make some mistake in reference to your own experience. When the passion of love was first lighted in your breast, there was, as it were, a blaze of the match, the paper and the wood, although the coals had not yet ignited. Yours was then the flush of joy, but not the vehement heat. Now your heart is all on fire like a solid ruby. There is much more heat, though there is less blaze. So it is with some young converts. The first love they have is wildfire, and to tell you the truth, I would rather have wildfire than no fire at all. But as men grow older in divine grace, the fire will not diminish in intensity, if God has kindled it. But perhaps the flash and the flame, the glitter and the noise, may not be quite so palpable. Yet I fear that if you do not love Christ better than you did; if you do not feel that there are new tendrils which bind you to Him; if you do not feel that it would be harder now than ever to give up your hold on the Savior, you have not begun to learn the love of Christ. When we know *that* love, when we feel gratitude for mercies received, then, we see every mercy, temporal and spiritual, coming from that love! Ungrateful souls cannot learn this love. They have the book of mercy, but they are blind and cannot read it. Grateful souls, in every Letter from Jesus their ab-

sent friend, whom having not seen, they love, and in every second of daily fellowship, and of daily mercy, read again that glittering sentence—“He loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

III. Let us pass on to the third step, we have not got far yet. We are only as schoolboys at our first school, and we have now to go on to something higher. The true children of God know Christ’s love in a way which I can only describe by the word *practically*. If any man would know His doctrine, let him keep His commandments. You know if a man is to be taught to swim, you could not teach him in Surrey chapel; you might get the most skillful master in the world, who would come and explain the way in which he should spread his hands, and move his feet, but he never can be taught to swim on dry land! And we cannot make Christians know Christ except by imitating Christ, and by obeying Christ. When soldiers are needed, the best place to make them is, doubtless, the battlefield. If we would have veterans, there must be the smoke and the smell of powder, for great commanders are not to be manufactured in Hyde Park; and we cannot expect to have men who shall win victories, drawn out from mere loungers at the clubs; they must attend the drills, and by practice become qualified for their duties. A young man cannot learn farming by the study of books. To read books may be useful, if he takes them as companions to the great book of nature. But he must be made apprentice to some farmer who sends him out into the fields to see how they plow, how they sow, how they mow, how they reap, and how they house their corn. By entering practically into the various toils and duties, he becomes skilled in them. Just so, if we would learn Christ, we must be practically engaged in His service! We must learn His love by keeping His commandments. You may sit in these pews and be preached to every Sunday; you may hear God’s truth plainly and simply unfolded, but if you want to learn, and learn in such a way that you never will forget, it is the back streets that must teach you, the lodging houses, the haunts of poverty, and the dens of vice. If any man would know the love of Christ, let him go where Christ went, and to the place where a Savior is needed. Let him carry Christ’s light to give light to others, and it shall enlighten himself; let him go forth to water other men’s vineyards, and his own soul shall be watered, also. Whatever his Master bids him do, let him do it, and he shall *learn* his Master’s will while he is *doing* his Master’s will! But when men, at the very outset, make a profession of religion, and then disobey Christ—when they refuse to keep His commandments—when they say of this one, “It is non-essential,” and of the next, “It is unnecessary,” and of some duty, “Well, I can leave that to others,” and of some sphere of action for which they are especially adapted, “I need not attend to that; others can do that quite as well”—when men, I say, enlist into Christ’s army, and begin at once to refuse to march as they are told, and decline to go out to battle when the captain gives them the command—it is a sure sign that they never will learn much of their Master, their Captain, and their Lord!

If you had asked Whitefield in his day, how he came to know so much about Christ’s love, I think he would have said that he learned more of it when he stood in Moorfields, or on Kennington Common, when the dead cats and filth were thrown at him as he preached Christ, than he ever learned in his bed-chamber, or even in his closet! If you had asked Rowland Hill how it was that he had learned so much of the love of Christ, I think he would have told you that he learned it while he was speaking to the poor, and to the needy, and while he was condescending to men of low estate, that by any means he might win some! Why, if a man should want to know about slavery, he might go and hear a lecture by an escaped slave, and it would be very well for him to do so, but, if he could go to the place where the whip is cracking, and the back is bleeding, and see the thing for himself—then he would understand the cruelty of slavery, indeed! So, if a man would know the love of Christ, he must lay himself out to discover the deformity of sin, and the awful degradation into which crime casts mankind, and then he will know that love which stoops from the highest heaven, reaches down to the gates of the deepest hell, thrusts its arms up to the very elbows in the mire to pull these accursed ones out of the pit of destruction, and make them blessed forever among the shining ones before the throne of God! Strict and practical obedience to the Master’s commands gives an amount of knowledge which is not to be attained by sentiments of gratitude, much less by systems of doctrine! This is a higher stage of divine grace, though not much higher. Yet, I would to God that more of us had even got here, for I fear there are many who have a name to live, but who do not obey Christ; many, perhaps, to whom the minister’s command would be more potent than Christ’s command, and upon whom the law of the land would have far more influence than the law of Christ. A believer ought to be such an one that a mere word from Christ is enough for him; or, as a Quaker was likely to express it, his heart should be like a cork upon the waters, which every undula-

tion of the waves would affect; thus should his heart float, as it were, in the Spirit’s influences, till every motion of the Holy Spirit, every law and wish of Christ should affect him instantly! I would be passively active—if you can comprehend such a contradiction—I would be passive, so as never to have will or wish of my own, and active, so as to have the will and wish of Christ impelling me always to keep His commands. When a man comes here, he begins to show real progress in knowing “the love of Christ which passes knowledge.”

IV. There is a fourth and higher stage, by far, than these. There is a way, not known to many moderns, but much practiced by the ancients, of knowing the love of Christ by *contemplation*. Do you know that in the early ages of the Church, they spoke more of Christ and of His person, and thought more of Him than we do? When I have sometimes read the fathers, and some of the devotional books of believers who are not much known, I have frequently had to say, “Well, I do not see much here about justification by faith, but I see a great deal about the efficacy of the precious blood.” I do not read, perhaps, about the pardon of sin, but I read about the blood-shedding, and about being washed therein. The early preachers preached not so much of the atonement—though they preached it—it was the five wounds, the bloody sweat, the cross, and the passion. We talk of the fruits and the effects; they seem to speak of the first great cause—the man, the Christ, the cross, the vinegar, the nails, the spear, the cry of, “It is finished,” the “*Lama sabacthani*,” the burial, and the resurrection. And in those times, whether or not it was that men had not so much to do as they have now, I cannot tell, but they found time to have long seasons of contemplation, and they would sit alone and worship, and draw near to Christ, and steadily fix their gaze upon His person. To them, He was a real person, whom the eyes of their faith could see as clearly as the eyes of sense can see outward objects, and they looked, and looked, and looked again, till the love of Christ grew brighter to them than the sun at his meridian, and for very dimness of mortal sight, they veiled their faces and paused their speech—while their souls were bathed in inward joy and unspeakable peace!

There have been some such in these later times, but not many. There was Isaac Ambrose, author of that book, *Looking Unto Jesus*. He was pastor of a church at Preston, in Lancashire, and, “It was his usual custom once a year,” says Dr. Calumy, “for the space of a month to retire into a little hut in the woods, and avoiding all human converse, to devote himself to contemplation.” It was true, he then only had 11 months in the year to preach, but those 11 were a great deal better than the 12 would otherwise have been, for there, alone with his Master, he received such riches from Him, that when he came back, he threw about jewels with both his hands, and scattered glorious thoughts and words broadcast in his ministry! That book, *Looking Unto Jesus*, is a blessed memorial of his quiet hours, and his secret communion with Jesus. Then, there was Rutherford, the man who has expounded the whole of Solomon’s Song without knowing it, in his celebrated letters. When he was in the dungeon at Aberdeen, he exclaimed, first of all, “I had only one eye, and they put that out.” It was the preaching of the gospel, and before long he had got both his eyes back again. Hear him writing in his letters, “My foes thought to punish me by casting me into a prison but lo, they have blessed me by taking me into Christ’s withdrawing room, where I sit with Him, and am with Him both night and day without disturbance.” The expressions he sometimes uses are so rapturous that I would not quote them here. love letters are not to be read in the streets, and the words which souls inflamed with heavenly fire sometimes use towards Christ are not fit for public repetition; for there are passages of love, there are sweet embraces of affection which we must not speak of, for this were to commit a treason such as Paul might have done if he had told on earth those words which he had heard in heaven, and which it would not be lawful for a man to utter here!

Do you know anything about this, dear friends? Oh, I pray you do not think I dream! These things are realities. I pray you think not that I am enthusiastic or fanatical. There are many believers who could tell you that it is their daily delight to be much with Christ. Oh, perhaps some of you know what it is to have Christ with you in your shop; your hands are busy weighing your goods or measuring out your wares, but Christ is with you, and your hearts are content. Or, as I remember hearing an old saint say one Sunday, when he was preaching from that text, he pronounced so strangely, “When I saw Him I fell at His feet as dead.” “Ah,” he said, “you do not know where I live. You think I live at so-and-so, on such-and-such a street, but I do not, for I am dead, and my life is hid with Christ in God.” Now, there are some saints who, though they are in the world, are dead to it. It has no attractions for them; it cannot get

their hearts; their hearts are with Jesus; they are not here; and they have sent their souls onward to that place where their bodies are one day to go, to the throne where Jesus sits and reigns!

I remember hearing these expressions once used at a prayer meeting; they struck my mind, and they still abide in my memory. A brother had been praying, and had asked a very great benefit. “O Lord,” he said, “give me Mary’s place—

*‘Oh, that I might forever sit
With Mary at the Master’s feet,
Be this my happy choice.’*

Lord, I would sit at Your feet and hear what You have to say, and receive it as a willing scholar receives his master’s words.” I thought he would stop there, but he said, “No, Lord, I have not asked enough; I have not asked according to the royalty of Your nature. Lift me higher! Lift me higher! Not at Your feet would I sit, but I would lean upon Your breast. Oh, put me where John was, so I may lean my head upon Your bosom. Let me not merely learn the truth You teach, but may I feel Your heart beat, and know Your love to me—

*‘Oh, that I might with holy John
Forever lean my head upon
The bosom of my Lord.’”*

Well now, I thought that second prayer was a noble one; but he had yet a third one to offer and he said, “No, Lord, no; that is not enough; I have not asked yet according to the tenor of Your promise. You have lifted me from Your feet to your breast, now lift me higher, to your lips.” And then he quoted the words of the Song—“Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for His love is better than wine.” And he very beautifully paraphrased it like this—“Lord, let me give to You the tokens of my love, and receive from You the present tokens of Your love to me; and not only know it, and feel Your heart beat, but receive the token of it as my lips of prayer meet Your lips of blessing, and my lips of thanksgiving touch Your lips of benediction.” Oh, there are heights and depths in this blessed contemplative life which I must not tell you here, and I thank God that there are some men who, though they go very far wrong in doctrine, are very right on this point; and if they are right here, verily, they are right in the essential! When a man can come right up to Christ and throw his arms around Him; when he can say, “That blood is mine; that Christ is my joy; His love is my love; His presence is my heaven; His character is my great example; I trust in Him, and I love Him”—that man may say 50 things that are not right, but he has said the things that are essentially right, and his soul is safe.

“Well,” says one, “I shall never get to know Christ’s love by *contemplation*; I have no time.” Ah, you had better have an hour’s less sleep than lose this blessed contemplation of Christ! “Oh, but I have so much to do.” Dear friends, we can sometimes do more in one half an hour, than we can do at other times in hours, according to the tenor of our minds. Now, I think that contemplating Christ winds up the soul, and puts it into a right frame, so that when we come back, we can do more for the Master than we ever did before! Perhaps you have seen them driving piles in the marshes. There is a large piece of timber that has to be driven deep into the ground, and you have seen those pile-driving machines. There is an immense weight, and they pull it up, and up and up, before they let it fall. Now, if they only pull it up a little way and then let it drop, well it comes down with some force, but not a great deal; but when they lift it as high as they can draw it up, and then let it come down at once, why what a drive it gives the pile! It is the going up that gives it such force in coming down. And I believe that those are the best sermons for driving the truth of God into the sinner’s heart that come from ministers who have been wound up very high before they come down in the sermon; and I think your usefulness will be sure to be powerful and mighty, if in private you are wound up to the very summit of contemplative delight by thinking of the work, the sufferings, and the triumphs of Christ! Certainly the sweetness of it alone is reward, and then, the benefit which follows will be a sevenfold recompense for a most pleasant exercise.

V. Well now, we have taken you up some height, but we must prepare for a flight which is higher, still. To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge by contemplation is very high, but there is a higher stage than this. There are times when I almost fear to speak of these things, but there are some here, surely, who will understand me, some here who have passed through the same state, and will not think that I am dreaming. There are times when the soul has long contemplated Christ, and there are some who know not only to contemplate, but *to enjoy*. Even on earth, faith sometimes gives place to a

present and conscious enjoyment. There are times with the believer when, whether he is in the body, or out of the body, he can scarcely tell; God knows, and though not caught up to the third heaven, he is brought to the very gates, and if not permitted to see Christ on His throne, he does so see Him on His cross, that if an infidel should say to him, “There is no Christ,” he could say, “I have seen Him; my eyes have looked upon Him, and my hands have touched Him after a spiritual sort.” There are many such rapturous seasons as this on record in the biographies of good men. I shall quote but one or two, and I hope there are some here who have known them in their own experience. In the life of Mr. Flavel, who was one of the most temperate of the Puritans, and one not at all given to anything like fanaticism, there is an event mentioned which once occurred to him. He said that being once on a journey alone on horseback, the thought of the love of Christ came upon him with great power, and as he rode gently along the road, the thought seemed to increase in force and strength, till at last he forgot all about earth, and even where he was. Somehow or other his horse stood still but he did not notice it; and when he came to himself, through some passerby observing him, he found that he had bled very copiously during the time. Getting off his horse, he washed his face at the brook, and he said, “I did verily think as I stood there, that if I was not in heaven, I could hardly hope to be more blessed in heaven than I was then.” He mounted his horse and rode on to a place of lodging where he was to pass the night. Supper was brought in, but left untasted on the table. He sat all night long without sleep, enjoying the presence of Christ, and he says, “I was more rested that night than with any sleep I ever had, and I heard and saw in my soul, by faith, such things as I had never known before.”

The like occurred to Mr. Tennant, who was a man who spent many hours in private, and sometimes, when it was time to preach, he was quite unable to stand unless first carried into his pulpit, when he would put his hands out and lean there, and say such glorious things of Christ, that those who looked upon him verily thought that they looked upon the face of an angel. Rutherford, too, is another specimen. When he preached about Christ, he preached so wonderfully, that on any other subject he was not at all like himself; and the Duke of Argyle was once so warmed when Rutherford got upon that subject, that he cried out in church—“Now, man, you are on the right strain! Keep to it.” And he did keep to it, and the little man’s thin voice seemed to swell with supernatural grandeur when he began to talk of his precious, precious Lord Jesus, and to extol, and exalt Him who was the Bridegroom of his soul, his brother, and his blessed companion! “Oh, these are flights of the imagination,” you say. Yes, they may be, indeed, beloved, but if you could get them some times, you would come back to the world’s cares and troubles like giants refreshed with new wine, caring nothing for anything that might happen! Christ would be so sweetly and blessedly within you, that you could bear the burden, and think nothing of it, and though the grasshopper was a burden before, you could now carry it right readily.

Well, I have taken you up to where not many go in these times, but I hope there are some who will yet ascend there till they shall even embrace Christ, and who will sit down at His table till they shall know Ralph Erskine’s blessed sickness of love and, in the conscious enjoyment of a precious Savior, shall say in the words of the spouse, “Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick with love; His left hand is under my head, and His right hand does embrace me.”

VI. But I want to take you higher than this. Not higher in some senses, but higher, really, for these raptures are, of course, only like angels’ visits, few and far between; but here is something which may be more lasting and which, certainly, is a higher state of mind as to the knowledge of Christ. To know Christ *sympathetically*, is a yet higher stage than any to which we have attained before. What do I mean by this? I will show you, first of all, what I do *not* mean. We will suppose ourselves standing on the brow of the hill with Jerusalem in the valley below. Jerusalem is to be destroyed by the Romans; the decree has gone forth that its sin must be punished. Now, here is a brother who holds very high doctrines in his head, but who has not much sympathy in his heart. Come up here, brother! Do you see that city there? That is all to be destroyed! Do you see its streets? They are all to be crimsoned with blood! Do you see its temple? Not one stone of it is to be left upon another! What do you think of it? “Well,” he says, “if they are to be saved, they will be saved; if it is in the purpose, and the decree, it will be so. I am sure I am very sorry if they should not be, but I do not see that it is any particular business of mine; the Lord will have His own, and it will all be well.” Get down, sir! What do you know about the love of Christ? Nothing! Give such a man as you that text, “He beheld the city and wept over it,” and you would not know how to preach from it, for you do not know the Savior’s heart, and have not known His love!

But bring here another man. He holds the same doctrinal truths of God, but he looks down on the city and what does he say?—

*“Oh, gladly my pity would reclaim
And snatch the firebrands from the flame.”*

“Lord, what must I do? Give me anything to do for them! My heart’s desire and prayer for them is that they may be saved,” and the tears begin to flow, and when he turns to the book and reads that Jesus beheld the city, and wept over it, and said, “If you at least in this, your day, had known the things which belong unto your peace,” he says, “Well, I do not know how to explain that to my doctrinal friend; I do not know how to make these feelings quite square and tally with the doctrine; but somehow or other I know there is no disagreement, for I feel the one is true, and I also feel the sympathy in my heart; I know that God will have His own, but I hope He will have them through my instrumentality; I believe that His chosen will be brought in, but, O that it may be my happy lot to bring in some of them to the praise and the glory of His grace!” “Why,” some professors say, “I am not my brother’s keeper.” No, but if you are not, I tell you what you are—you are your brother’s killer! You are one of the two! If you say you are not your brother’s keeper, rest assured that you are a Cain, and that you will be your brother’s murderer—for we either do good or hate. It is impossible for us to be devoid of influence. If the brook runs through the marshes, it makes them fertile; if you dam it up and make it stagnant, you have not destroyed its influence. Ah, no, you have only changed it into a fetid pool and its influence shall curse the valley with disease. So with a good man, if he serves his Master, he is scattering mercy abroad; but let him, if it were possible for him to do so, let him cease to serve the Lord, and become idle, and then he scatters plague and death. Oh, do we know the love of Christ by feeling it in our own hearts? There are some of us who can say that we have felt that we could do anything for souls; when we have heard it said of the Master, “He saved others, Himself He cannot save,” we have felt that we would not spare ourselves if God would only spare them! And when Paul said he could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren, while commentators have been thinking that over, and cannot make it out, we have had sympathy with it and have been able to say, “We have felt the same.” We have felt that we could even be lost to save others. and we have said, “Let my name perish; let me be forgotten if my congregation may only be saved; if my children may be blessed; if my hearers may be converted to God.” Men in this state know Christ’s love after a wonderful and marvelous sort. May God teach you each this way; may He help you to weep like Christ, to work like Christ—yes, and to be ready to die like Christ—if it were necessary by such means to bring sinners to their Savior and their Lord! O that we could get here! I know my dear brother, the pastor of this church, would desire nothing more for you than that you might know Christ’s love by feeling it in your hearts. O that Christ would come and look out of these eyes, and weep down these cheeks! O that He would speak through these lips, till it should not be the old self, man, that thought, and spoke, and acted—but the new-born Spirit of the Lord Jesus that had come into us and possessed us with a higher and a nobler life, that we might spend and be spent for Him!

I think I shall have but one step further to take you, though there are some which are still higher. Before I do so, I must tell you one anecdote to guard you against a possible mistake. There is a tendency, in the contemplative knowledge of Christ’s love, to self-indulgence. I know at the present moment a dear servant of Christ; I shall always regard him as such; he may be known to some of you, though I would not like to mention his name. He was once a notable minister in this city, and was exceedingly useful. He began the contemplative life. He lived very near to Christ, and his preaching was exceedingly sweet to his hearers; there were many converts; he had a large church, and it exceedingly prospered. But so sweet were his private enjoyments that he began to relax in his public duties. He did preach, but he seldom allowed himself to see his hearers, and at last arrived at such a pitch of retirement, that he could walk into his pulpit without even speaking to his deacons, and then deliver himself. But the man’s usefulness ceased. Though still a gracious soul, yet he has missed his way, and ceased to be one of the honored leaders of Christ’s Church. Now, there is a tendency, a wrong tendency, mark you, of getting so high, and not wanting to get any higher. Even the contemplative life, itself, ought only to be considered as a steppingstone to something beyond, and when we get to the very highest point, we are still to say with Paul, as we sit down upon the mile-stone, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, press forward to those which are before.” It is related of a certain monk, who, having been long in his cell alone, thought while

in his devotions that he saw the Lord Jesus. Of course the tale is a fable, but I relate it for the sake of its moral. He thought he saw the Lord before him as crucified, and he heard His voice speaking sweet and comfortable words to him. Just at that moment, when his soul was in a very flood of delight, he heard the convent bell ring, and he remembered it was his turn to go out to the gate and give away bread to the beggars who stood there. Oh, he had never heard that bell ring so dolefully before! It seemed to him like the knell of all his joys. The impulse of duty, however, was stronger than that of delight, and he went his way with a heavy heart to distribute the bread. As he came back to his cell, he thought, “Ah, I shall never see that again; Christ is gone from me, and I shall never know these enjoyments again!” When, to his surprise, the vision was still there. As he bowed before it with delight, he heard a voice which said, “If you had stayed I would have gone; but since you did My work I tarried to give you your reward.”

Now, there is a tendency, when we have been alone and in private, and have had sweet fellowship with Christ, for us to feel—“I do not want to go out from this; I do not want to be disturbed just now; I would rather not do anything just now.” I do not suppose there are very many of you who get into this state, but there may be some who think at such times, “I do not want to preach today; I would rather not do anything; It is best that I should be alone.” Ah, it is a strong temptation, and you must strive against it and say, “No, I have enjoyments in my religion, but I did not seek my religion for the enjoyment it would give me. I must look higher than that, to the God I serve, and to the Lord and Master whose I am and whom I serve. I love the jewels He gives me to wear upon my fingers, but I love Him better and I am not to look upon these rings, and forget to look into His eyes; I love the sweet couch that He makes for me at night, but I am not to lie there and forget the fields that are to be plowed, and the battles that are to be fought. I must be up and doing. The contemplative life must lead me to duty, and then shall I know Christ even as I am known.

VII. And now, the last and highest step of all, upon which we can only say a few words, is that which is called by deep writers and experienced believers on this point, the *absorbing* love of Christ. How shall I tell you what this is? I cannot, except I quote Wesley’s words—

*“Oh, love divine, how sweet you are!
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up with you?”*

“I thirst”—can you get as far as that? “I faint”—that is a high state, indeed! “I die”—that is the top—

*“I thirst, I faint, I die to prove
The fullness of redeeming love,
The love of Christ to me.”*

“I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me,” said the apostle Paul, and that is where we must get, when the man ceases to feel himself the “I”—and only recognizes himself as part of Christ. It is our individuality that we really have to get rid of in this matter; it is our selfish separateness, I mean. We need to feel that we are a part of Christ, a member of His body, flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone; we have to get to where we have no more desire to act, or think, or feel according to anything that is here—but to send our hearts up to the great heart of Christ in heaven—only tarrying here while our souls are walking the golden streets with Christ. I do not know if I might be bold enough to say, “Blessed is the man who shall be able to attain to the state when that which thinks is the head of Christ, and that which feels is the heart of Christ, when the great seat of all the sensations, spiritually, is in Christ, and not in himself and he himself is—

*Plunged into the Godhead’s sea
And lost in its immensity!”*

The Brahmins believe that the highest perfection is to be absorbed into God, and there is a certain truth in it, though not as they mean it. When we are lost in God, we are highest, and when it is not we, but Christ, and we have come to be with Him, and His heart is ours, and His love and soul, and wish are ours, then it is that we comprehend the height, and depth, and length, and breadth, and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

Now, I have not said much tonight to the ungodly. But if I could make any of you feel your mouths a-watering after Christ by what I have said, I would be pleased, indeed. Oh, if you did but know the sweetness of the love of Christ, you would not be careless about it—

*“His worth, if all the nations knew,
Surely the whole world would love Him, too.”*

Blind bat’s eyes are those that cannot see beauty in Christ! Hard, stony hearts that cannot feel any love to Him! What do you say, sinner? Do you say, “O that I knew Christ’s love! O that I knew His love to me!” sinner, He has sent me to you tonight to preach to you His gospel; and this is His gospel, though not the gospel which some preach, for I have heard some finish their sermons thus—“Go home and pray; go home and do your best to find Christ.” All this is good enough advice, but it is not the gospel! The gospel is—“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.” Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. To believe in Christ is to trust in Him. That is all it is—to trust in Him. “But I must repent,” one says. Repentance is a change of mind, and is a blessed *fruit* of faith, and comes *with* faith. That repentance which comes *before* faith is not true repentance, for it is a repentance that needs to be repented of! Where there is no *faith*, it is impossible to please God. That repentance which has no faith in it must be displeasing to God, and needs to be repented of! The first business you have, sinner, is not to *feel* anything, but to put your trust in Christ. Your business is not to try to make yourselves fit to come to Christ, but to come to Him just as you are! You are to trust Christ, and to trust Him now. “Oh, but I am black with sin!” Come and be washed! “Oh, but I am a naked sinner.” Come and be clothed! “But I am lost.” Oh, sirs, the Master has come to seek and to save that which is lost; you are not to find yourselves first, and then think He will come and find you. He is come to seek you. Listen! While the trumpet sounds in the street without meaning, I would sound the gospel trumpet here. Come and welcome! Come just as you are! To come is to trust, and simply to fall flat at the foot of the cross, and say, “Jesus, I trust You to save me.”

That done, you are saved, and your sin is gone! He took it and was punished for it. You are righteous in God’s sight, for His righteousness is yours, and you are saved. Christ, the Head, is your Representative. You are delivered. Christ has broken the neck of your foe, and you are emancipated the very moment when you believe. Some persons dislike instantaneous conversions. Let them read the Bible and see what sorts of conversion there are. There is Saul of Tarsus, there is the Philippian jailer; there are the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost—these are *all* instantaneous conversions! There is a man over there, near the door, who came in here, perhaps he did not know what for, or to listen to some strange, out-of-the-way matter. That man, if Christ shall meet with him tonight, and lead him in the way of His grace, may go out of this chapel as much saved as if it were seven years ago when he first believed on Jesus, for—

*“The moment a sinner believes
And trusts in a crucified God,”*

he is saved; it is all done! The work is finished, and there is no need that anything else should be done. The robe of righteousness has been completed; there is not a stitch to be added to it. Sinner, this is the glory of the gospel! Trust Jesus, and you are saved and saved forever, beyond the reach of destruction. May God meet with some soul here tonight, and especially may He now stir up you, His people, to grow in divine grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen and Amen!

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