

FLESH AND SPIRIT—A RIDDLE

NO. 467

A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 31, 1862,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You: You have held me by my right hand. You shall guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.”
Psalm 73:22-25.

OUR Lord Jesus was tempted in all points like we are. With some reserve we might almost say the same of David. Of all the worthies whose lives are written out at length in Holy Writ, David possesses an experience of the most striking, varied, and instructive character. In his history we meet with temptations, and complications of temptations not to be discovered, at least as a connected whole, in other saints of ancient times. Trials which stand out in the lives of other men as isolated hills, form whole chains and ranges of mountains in the case of the son of Jesse; David knew the trials of all ranks and conditions of men. Kings have their troubles, and David wore a crown—the peasant has his cares, and David handled the shepherd’s crook. The wanderer has many hardships, and David abode in the caves of Engedi—the captain has his difficulties, and David found the sons of Zeruiah too hard for him. The psalmist of Israel was tried by his friends. His counselor, Ahithophel, forsook him. “He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me.” His worst foes were of his own household. His children were his greatest afflictions. Amnon disgraces him, Absalom excites revolt, and Adonijah disturbs his dying bed. The temptations of poverty and wealth, of honor and reproach, of health and sickness, all tried their power upon him. He had tribulations from without; I need not remind you that during his long life they came from every quarter. He had temptations from within, for the man after God’s own heart not only knew what it was to be assailed, but to be carried by storm, by fierce and terrible passions. I may grant, perhaps, that Job’s trial was more severe than any *one* that fell to David; but yet I know not. Possibly the burning of Ziklag—when his wives were carried away captive, and all that he had was consumed, and his men spoke of stoning him, may have been even a severer trial than Job’s when he sat upon a dunghill and scraped himself with a potsherd. And I am not sure, but I think that mournful procession over the brook Kidron in David’s later life, when his own son thirsted for his blood, had in it a Gethsemane bitterness that is hardly to be found in the tribulation which fell to the patriarch of Uz. Job must fairly yield the palm in one respect, for his was no life-long siege, but only one sharp and furious attack.

David, however, no sooner escaped from one trial, than he fell into another! He no sooner emerged from one season of despondency and alarm, than he was again brought into the lowest depths, and all God’s waves and billows rolled over him. Now, it is from this cause, I take it, that David’s Psalms are so universally the delight of experienced Christians. Into whatever frame of mind we may be cast, David seems to have described our emotions, whether they are of ecstasy or depression, to the very letter. He was an able master of the human heart, because he had been tutored in that best of all schools, the school of real, heartfelt, personal experience! You will find that as we grow matured in divine grace and in years, we love the Psalms more. Many young believers are most fond of the doctrinal parts of Scripture, and I admire that holy curiosity which leads them to desire to understand all the revelation of God in the doctrines of grace. Practical Christians are often more fond of studying the Evangelists and Proverbs, but I find that the gray-headed veterans, the sorely troubled Christians, those who have done business on great waters—while they love the doctrines, while they delight in the practices set forth in the life of Christ—yet somehow or other the Psalms of the sweet Singer of Israel yield them savory meat such as their soul loves! And they are made in the Psalms to “lie down in green pastures” of tender grass.

Probably the first remark which will be suggested by reading the Psalms will be this—how varied they are. What an extraordinary man David is, what changes there are in the weather of his soul, what

bright sunlight days, what dark cloudy nights, what calms as though his life were a sea of glass, what terrible trials as if the glass were mingled with fire! One time we find him crying, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” And another he sings, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name.” One hour we hear him sigh forth, “I sink in deep mire where there is no standing,” and then we find him exulting, “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear: the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?” How wondrously he rises to heaven, and how awfully he dives into the deeps! Surely, brothers and sisters, we who have known anything of spiritual and inner life do not marvel at this, for we also change. Alas, what a contrast between the sin that does so easily beset us, and the divine grace which gives us to reign in heavenly places! How different the sorrow of an abject distrust which breaks us in pieces as with a strong east wind, and the joy of a holy confidence which bears us on to heaven as with a propitious gale! What changes between walking with God today, and falling into the mire tomorrow, triumphing over sin, death, and hell yesterday, and today led captive by the lusts of the flesh and of the mind. Verily, we cannot understand ourselves, and a description which would suit us yesterday would be ill-adapted for today and quite out of place for tomorrow! Scarcely ever are we in the same mind even an hour. Great God, how infinitely glorious are You in Your immutability, when contrasted with Your fickle, frail, unstable creature—man.

It falls to my lot, this morning, to open up in some humble measure, the secrets of inward experience. I can but hope to do it in a very shallow measure, for I am but a youth, and am not worthy to instruct some of you who have been men of war from your youth up! Yet I may serve the weaklings of the flock, if I inform them of the strife they must expect from the flesh, and comfort their hearts with a foretaste of the certain victory which the Lord has secured to them through the Holy Spirit. We shall *first listen to the confessions of the psalmist concerning the flesh*; then, *to his expressions with regard to the spirit*; then, *to his soul’s exultation when looking to both flesh and spirit, he cries out, “Whom have I in heaven but You? There is none upon earth that I desire besides You.”*

I. First, we are to listen to THE PSALMIST’S CONFESSION CONCERNING THE FLESH.

Remember, beloved, this is a saint of God. This is a highly advanced saint; this is the man after God’s own heart; this is one of the special favorites of heaven—one of the men to whom God revealed Himself as He does not unto the world! And yet you hear him telling us his inner life, and he begins by saying, “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before You.”

The word “*foolish*,” when it issues from David’s mouth, means more than it signifies in ordinary language. To be called a fool is no great compliment to any man, but when that word means atheist, despiser of that which is good—when it means a forgetter of God, a lover of evil, a destroyer of one’s own soul, then to be called a fool is something at which a man may take offense, indeed! David, in one of the former verses of the Psalm, writes, “I was envious of the *foolish* when I saw the prosperity of the wicked,” which shows that the folly he intended had sin in it. Now he puts himself down as being one of these fools, and adds a little word which is to give intensity to the adjective—“SO foolish was I.” How foolish he could not tell. It was a sinful folly, a folly which was not to be excused by frailty, but to be condemned because of its perverseness and willful ignorance. What? And do *we* call ourselves wise? Do we, followers of the lowly Savior, profess that we have attained perfection, or have been so chastened that the rod has whipped all our willfulness out of us? Ah, this is pride, indeed! If David was foolish, what fools should you and I be in our own esteem if we could but see ourselves. Look back, believer—think of your not trusting God when He has been so faithful to you—think of your foolish outcry of, “Not so, my Father,” when He crossed His hands in affliction to give you the larger blessing. Think, I say, of the many times when you have read His providences in the dark, misinterpreting His dispensations, and groaning out, “All these things are against me,” when they were all working together for your good! Think how often you have chosen sin because of its pleasure, when indeed, that pleasure was a root of pain and bitterness to you! How often you have forgotten to honor God when you had noble opportunities of serving Him. I for one must take my place at the bar and plead guilty to the indictment of a sinful folly; and I think everyone who knows his own heart, however far advanced in divine grace he may be, must do the same! In the present tense I put it sorrowfully, “So foolish am I.”

Further, our psalmist adds, “and ignorant.” A man who, after years of such experience as David, to say, “I am ignorant,” must either be very humble, or else there must be such a force upon his conscience that he cannot resist the confession. And indeed, if you will read the Psalm, and see into what a mistake

David had fallen—that of envying the present prosperity of the ungodly—you may grant that he *was* ignorant, indeed, to forget the dreadful end of those who only prosper that they may be fattened like bullocks for the slaughter! But you and I have been quite as ignorant. We said yesterday, “Now I shall never doubt God again; he has helped me through this great trouble, and I know that I shall be able to trust Him, come what may.” But this very morning you awoke with a distrustful thought! What ignorance is this, to forget the lesson which you learned but yesterday, and which you thought you knew by heart? Here you have been trying for months to resign yourself to God’s will. He took away from you one very dear to you, and you longed to say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” And you did say it by an overwhelming effort, but you cannot say it now, for feeling has trod down faith; you are so foolish and so ignorant that you have forgotten what you vowed to learn! And what you meant to say perpetually, you have failed to say in this, perhaps the first great trial in your life! Some men think when they have learned six or seven doctrines, that now they know everything. And certain other folks I know of, when they pass through a few years of experience set themselves up for standards. Ah, beloved, when we think we know best, and fancy that we have grown wise, then we prove our folly! Our impudence is engraved on our foreheads, and FOOL is written there in capital letters, when we think we are wise! Oh, the depths of the wisdom of God! Who can understand the full meaning of the doctrines of grace? Oh, the depths of the experience of the believer who shall dare to profess that he has passed over all the seas, and has crossed all the mountains over which a believer must climb! If we could but see ourselves, we would consider our knowledge to be nothing, and our ignorance to be all. We are in the twilight, let us not call it noon! We are in the mists and fogs; let us not suppose that we are in an unclouded atmosphere! When we think we see all wisdom, it is because we are blind; and when we fancy we have discovered everything, it is because we are mocked by the illusions of our pride, and see nothing as yet aright!

I know I address some of you who, when you are alone, quietly engaged in meditation, think to yourselves “Well, if ever there was such a stupid saint as I am, I am much mistaken. I seem to have the least understanding of any man. I read the Scriptures, and by God’s grace I sometimes get a hold of them, but at seasons I cannot for the life of me even believe them to be true! I know the power of prayer, but yet there are times when I could not pray if my soul depended on it, and can only groan. In fact, sometimes, ‘if anything is felt, it is only pain to find I cannot feel.’ Yet I have been fed under the ministry; I have had many troubles, and much communion with Christ, but yet here I am, knowing nothing, just a schoolboy, sitting on the lowest form, and trying to spell out his A, B, Cs—such a thorough fool that I often pride myself upon my knowledge, and condemn my brother for ignorance, not seeing the beam that is in my own eye, trying to pull the mote from his eye.” Is this the soliloquy of your heart? I know it has often been mine. If it is yours, we have just hit the meaning of David when he uses this expression—“So foolish was I, and ignorant.”

But now comes the crowning word, which you would think too degrading for David—“I was as a *beast* before You.” Indeed, the original has in it no word of comparison. It ought to be translated, “I was a very beast before You,” and we are told that the Hebrew word being in the plural number gives it a peculiar emphasis, indicating some monstrous or astonishing beast. It is the word used by Job which is interpreted “Behemoth”—“I was a very monster before You”—not only a beast but one of the most brutish of all beasts, one of the most stubborn and intractable of all beasts. I think no man can go much lower than this in humble confession. This is a description of human nature, and of the old man in the renewed saint which is not to be excelled. How far does this hold true in your experience and mine? Well, I think first we have often been made to compare ourselves to beasts because of our *worldly-mindedness*. There is the swine grubbing in the earth for its roots; what does it care about the stars? And even the fleet horse, as it crosses the meadow, what does it know about the angels and the harps of heaven? Educate the beast as you may, it has no care beyond its fleshly appetite! Oh, how much are we like this, even we who are renewed by divine grace! The last six days it has been, “Shop, shop, shop,” with you from morning to night. You bowed at the family altar, and you tried to pray at eventide, but carking care depressed you till it was hard to offer real supplication. A thousand things have bewildered you! The cashbook, the daybook, those losses, those many workmen to be looked after, or the servants in the house have distracted your mind, and the world comes in till you feel, “O that I could get rid of these things for a moment! O that I had wings like a dove that I might fly away and be at rest!” But you can-

not, for your soul lies cleaving to the dust. Perhaps there comes a knock at the door just when you *need* to be knocking at God's door, and someone wants to see *you* when you need to see your God! You cannot rest in Jesus as you would. You are called upon to look after accounts, shillings, five pound notes, creditors and debtors, until you cry, "O God, I am like a beast before You. How can I ever hope to enter heaven?" You remember that hymn of Dr. Watts, commencing—

"Come Holy Spirit, heavenly dove."

What a sweet beginning, but how dolefully true are the middle verses. Surely they never ought to be sung, but to be sighed—

*"Dear Lord, and shall we always live
At this poor dying rate—
Our love so faint, so cold to You,
And Yours to us so great?"*

What is this but the same confession in different words, "I was as a beast before You"?

Let us add another shade of black to the picture. We might often compare ourselves to the beast from *our lack of any emotion towards heavenly things*. I am quite sure Rutherford was right when he said, "No devil in the world is as bad as having no devil." Not to be tempted is perhaps the worst temptation that can befall a man! There are times—I suppose it is so with you, it is with me—times when my soul is like a dead calm, and these seasons I dread—

*"No stir in the air, no stir in the sea
The ship was as still as a ship could be."*

What mariner likes these dead calms? I am sure I tremble to encounter more of them. Better the healthy hurricane than the pestilential quiet. You would pray, but you cannot command the earnestness and fervor you desire; you would repent, you *feel* that you would repent, but no tear will flow, for the heart is hard! You *would* praise God, and the lips can utter the words, but the soul cannot join the music; you *would* stir yourself to some lofty emotion, but you cannot. The heart *will* not feel, it has grown cold, and a sort of death-sleep has come over you like the sleep which is said to fall upon the wanderer in the snow when he comes near to death. Oh, to be awakened from this is a blessing sent from heaven, to be stirred even though it is by a hurricane of affliction, or a thunderclap of trouble! It is an awful thing to be in this apathetic state. Then it is that the believer cries, "I am as a beast before You." You are dead as the seat you sit on each Sunday; going to the ordinance itself, eating the bread, and drinking the wine, yet feeling no fellowship with Christ; joining in the song, and loving it, but singing with no feeling, no heart. Going to prayer meetings, feeling you would not stay away for the entire world, and yet no life, no power, no thought, no vigor! Does some young Christian look at me and say, "What? Do old Christians feel like that?" I say, "They do at times." Sad is it that we should have to confess man to be so vile, but such he is, and such each of us have found ourselves out to be! And let the believer live but a little while, and he will have to use David's language and cry, "I was as a beast before You."

See yet again, how often we have had to complain that we are like the beasts for our *short-sightedness*! The beast cannot look forward to eternity; it cannot cast its eye down the centuries, and look to the fulfillment of prophecy in the fullness of time. It has to be content with the things that are near, the things of the hour, and of the day. Even so short-sighted are you and I! We think we see the end when we are only viewing the beginning! We get our telescope out sometimes to look to the future, and we breathe on the glass with the hot breath of our anxiety; and then we think we see clouds and darkness before us if we are in trouble. We see every day new straits, attend and wonder where the scene will end; but we conclude that it must end in our destruction. "God has forgotten to be gracious," we think, "He has in anger shut up His heart of compassion." Oh this short-sightedness! When you and I ought to believe in God—when we ought to look at the heaven that awaits us, and the glory for which these light afflictions are preparing us—when we ought to be looking through the clouds to the Eternal Sun which never knows an eclipse—when we should be resting on the invisible arm of the Immortal God, and triumphing in His love, we are mourning and distrusting. God forgive us for this; in these things, verily, we have been as beasts before Him!

I might add again, how often believers have to complain that the *animal passions* will bestir themselves in them until they feel the beast within them. I shall not go deep into this path of painful experience; I only hint at it that some who may have been surprised at it as though it were a novelty, may

know that it is common to man. He who has fellowship with God will sometimes feel the devil within him till he thinks himself a devil, and sometimes, too, (the Lord have mercy upon His servants) when the temptation comes in an unguarded moment they may be betrayed, and Satan may triumph. If then, they can look back upon a burst of anger or sin, and not say after it, “I was as a beast before You, O God,” then I despair of them! Other men commit these sins; other men fall into these iniquities, but it remains for the Christian, only, to abhor himself on account of them! To sin is no spot of God’s children. But to *hate* sin, humbly to *confess* it, and to lay in the very dust with abasement on account of it—this is one of the choice requirements of the truly begotten sons of heaven! Oh, I know that many of you, with a groaning that could not be uttered, have been made to feel in your heart that though you are the elect of God, and bought with precious blood, and the Spirit of God dwells in you, yet still you are, when the flesh prevails, as beasts before God! Indeed, my text, as I have said, seems to make us even *worse* than the beasts, for the comparison which David uses is not to a common and ordinary creature, but to some dread monster, a Behemoth. When we look within, there is nothing lovely; we are all a mass of distorted parts wrongly joined together. There is much of pride, and lust, and anger—and what is there of good? Brothers and sisters, our apostle said in him there dwelt no good thing, and you and I are no better than he; nothing good, but everything that is evil! And all the evil put into the most exaggerated form and shape, until he that has seen himself, has been ready to go mad to think that he should ever be such a being as he is! O grace divine! O sovereign love! Were it not for these we would lie down in despair, when we think of the uncomeliness of our nature. More stubborn than Behemoth are we! God can tame the creatures; man can even put a bit into the mouth of the horse, and he has a bridle for the donkey. But we, more intractable than the brutes, are not to be restrained from sin! They are obstinate, but their obstinacy may be quelled and overcome. Sometimes harshness, and another kindness, can subdue the most stubborn brute, but our tongue and heart can no man tame! Evil, only evil, and that continually, still remains in our heart, kicking against the pricks even to the last; remaining even unto death like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. What shall I say of human nature as the Christian discovers it in himself? I will only say it is impossible to exaggerate its evil! You shall describe it in the blackest and foulest terms, and you shall find after all, believers who will say man is worse than your black portrait, for only David’s language will suit us, “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before You.”

I shall not dwell longer on this part. I have, indeed, only brought it out because I know there are so many young Christians who are dreadfully alarmed when they discover what they are by nature, and who, indeed, begin on a wrong theory by supposing that the grace of God comes to make old Adam new—whereas the grace of God does not change our *old* nature. It gives us a *new* nature, which subdues the old—but the old nature is there, still! Old Adam is old Adam even when the new Adam is in the heart! The flesh is evil, undiluted evil, and just as much as before Christ entered the soul. Therefore, divine grace struggles with the flesh, good strives with evil, and the life of the believer becomes a constant and perpetual battle—the one principle striving against the other till divine grace, at last, gets the victory, and the saint is “afterwards received to glory.”

II. We shall now turn to the faithful EXPRESSIONS OF THE SPIRIT, and God help us while we enlarge upon them! How changed the language now is! Nothing of the beast, here, but rather the spirit seems to grow angelic, and to borrow heaven’s harps. Hear its first sweet word like music. “*Nevertheless*.” As if, notwithstanding all, not one atom the less was it true and certain that David was saved, and accepted, and that the blessings he is now about to speak of were his by a perpetual entail—“Nevertheless I am continually with You.” Here is *divine regard*! Fully conscious of his own lost estate, and of the deceitfulness and vileness of his nature, yet, by a glorious burst of faith, he says, “Nevertheless I am continually with You”! I shall not preach on that, but just let you think it over. Let each one soliloquize—“I today, a black and detestable sinner, am nevertheless, if I believe in Jesus, continually with God! Continually upon His *mind*! He is always thinking of me for my good! Continually before His *eyes*; the eyes of the Lord never sleep, but perpetually watch out for my good! Continually in His *hands*, so that none shall be able to pluck me from them until omnipotence itself shall be overcome! Continually on His *heart*, engraved there, worn there as a memorial, even as the high priest wore the names of the twelve tribes upon his heart forever. Tried and afflicted soul, vexed with the tempest within, look at the calm without. “Nevertheless”—O say it in your heart, and suck the comfort from it, “I am continually with You.” You always think of me, O God; the heart of Your love continually yearns towards *me*! You

are always making providence work for my good! You never pluck me from Your heart; You have set me as a signet upon Your arm; Your love is strong as death—many waters cannot quench it. Your affection is hot as coals of juniper, and yet, yet it is true, I am as a beast before You, and when You look at me You can see nothing in me, apart from Christ, but what is debased and beast-like! Surprising grace, You see me in Christ, and though in myself, abhorred, You behold me as wearing Christ's garments, and washed in His blood—

*“With the Savior's garments on
Holy as the Holy One.”*

And I am thus continually in Your favor—“continually with You.” Oh, it is a child's faith—an infant faith, to be able to say, “I am with God,” when I have the light of His favor shining on me. But oh, when I see the blackness of my heart, still to believe that I am continually with Him—this is a man's faith, what if I say, brothers and sisters—a *giant's* faith? It is so easy when you have many graces and many virtues to say, “Christ can save me.” Yes, but when your follies stare you in the face; when your sins rebuke you, still to say, “Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean,” this is faith, indeed! Blessed faith is that that does not shut its eyes to the disease, but seeing it, and knowing all its venom and deadly power, still trusts it to the Balm of Gilead, and believes that it can heal!

But you will notice next that our psalmist is not content with claiming divine regard, he goes on to speak of *divine help and gracious operation*. “You hold me by the right hand.” Here is a recognition of *the past*. I am black, and full of sin and treachery, why have I not fallen more? Because Your hand has held me up! O God, if You had not kept Your saints, they would have been the vilest of transgressors! Oh, what should any of us have been, though we may be as stars now, if it had not been for God's right hand? What should we have been but black blots forever, if God had left us? Look back, beloved, at the temptations from which you have been delivered, and the trials from which you have escaped—to what do you owe all these? Why, to the fact that He has held you by your right hand, and is holding you by your right hand now! Let *the present* be a theme for gratitude. At this hour your feet are almost gone, but not quite, for He holds you! At this moment you are ready to say, “The Lord has forgotten me; God will be gracious no more.” But He has as firm a grip of you today as ever He had! Oh, what joy it is to feel that God has a firm hold of us! If we only feel that *we* have a hold of Him, then *our* hand may fail, but if He has a hold of us, then neither death nor hell shall ever triumph in casting us down! And this is true of *the future*. He will hold us with His right hand. If we believe on Christ today, we shall certainly be kept till we see the face of Christ in glory everlasting! Here am I but a stripling, fresh come to the battle, and there may be many years of wars and fighting for me but, “I know that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” Here are some of you whose hair has turned gray with many years of trial in the wilderness. What do you say, has God forgotten you? Veterans in God's army, has He forsaken you? Has He deserted any of you in the moment of trial? No! Then let us, together, young and old, bless His name, that He holds us with His right hand!

But what next? We must not tarry long on any one sentence. Our psalmist goes on to speak of *divine guidance*. “You shall guide me with Your counsel,” he says. “I am foolish, I shall be sure to choose the wrong way. I am ignorant; I do not even know the right way. I am a beast and those beastly instincts of mine will constantly lead me astray. But You shall guide me by Your counsel.” See, brothers and sisters, how he throws himself on his God—he will have nothing to do with himself. “YOU *shall*” is his confidence. He is completely weaned from looking within. He casts himself flat on his God. “You shall guide me *with Your counsel*.” That *counsel* I take it, means first, *God's decrees*—

*“He who formed in the womb,
He shall guide me to the tomb.
All my times shall ever be
Ordered by His wise decree.”*

Graciously has He ordained every step of our way from this time till we arrive in heaven! Graciously has He ordained every temptation and trial—

*“Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love sees fit.”*

I shall do, after all, what He decrees, have nothing but what He ordains, suffer nothing but what He thinks fit. I shall do nothing without His permission or aid. I *must* prevail, for thus His counsel runs to

bring His many sons to glory—“You shall guide me by Your counsel.” Many people do not like *predestination*, but I think when they get washed up on a rock in some dark troublous day, they will be glad to cling to this truth of God! Brothers and sisters, I thank God that I know there is as much in the decrees of God for a grain of dust that pains my eye, as there is in the cloud and tempest. The chaff from the hand of the winnowing is steered as the stars in their courses. In the great, and in the little, Jehovah reigns! Standing in the chariot of providence He holds the reins, and when the horses seem to be wild, and to know no bit or bridle, He guides them according to His will. O rest in this, believer—He shall guide you with His counsel! But this counsel also represents *the written Word*—His decree is *His* counsel, His written Word is *our* counsel, *His* counsel to us. Happy is the man who has God’s Word always to direct him! What was the mariner without his compass? What were the Christian without the Bible? This is the unerring chart, the map in which every shoal is described, and all the channels from the port of destruction to the haven of salvation mapped, and marked by one who has sailed along the sea. Blessed, blessed be You, O God, that we may trust You to guide us now, and guide us even to the end! And all this is to us who are like brutes before Him! O my soul, have you ever known what it is to be thoroughly cast down till there was no hope left for you, and yet to be carried up till there was no doubt left? ‘Twas but yesterday I knew the whole of this experience in my own heart! A more wretched miserable being than I, hell could scarcely produce, and yet a happier joyful-hearted creature heaven could hardly find! How, you say, how was this? When I looked within, and marked depravity and death everywhere, my soul was troubled almost unto death; but when I looked to Christ, and saw the fullness of the covenant, and the complete way in which He covered all my sins, and blotted out all my iniquity, my spirit was like a bird that had escaped from the fowler and soared singing up to heaven with joy and gratitude. “You shall guide me with Your counsel.”

Then comes the last, *divine reception*. “And afterward receive me to glory.” Oh, how sweet is this—“receive me to glory.” Catch it, Christian? I do not want you to think of what I say this morning! I want you to think of what you have felt, and what your Lord is doing for you! *He* will receive *you* to glory—*you*! Why, if it had been said, “He shall damn you to all eternity,” your heart would have said, “Ah, that I richly deserve.” But He says, “I will receive you to glory.” Slipping, sliding, falling, and yet I will bring you safe at last! Wandering, erring, straying, yet I will receive you to glory! Full of sin, even to the last; full of sin, haunted with unbelief even to your dying hour—tempted, perhaps on your deathbed—your very couch a part of the battlefield, and your pillow a castle to be stormed or to be defended—yet I will receive you to glory! Beloved, that moment when you and I shall be received into glory—can we conceive it? You are gone, frail body, no more pain from you; but still better, you are gone, vile flesh—no more temptation, no more *sin*! Old Adam, you shall rot. Let the worms devour you—glad am I to be rid of you—

*“Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in.”*

And this is your portion and my portion, though doubts and fears prevail, and we hardly dare to say that Christ is ours. Yet, resting on Him, on Him only, having nothing of our own, looking to His flowing wounds, covered with His matchless righteousness, saved at last we shall be, and we will sing forever to that matchless divine grace which saved us even to the end!

III. To conclude, the psalmist has been looking at his complex self—at the flesh and groaning over it and then at his spirit, confident in its God, and he winds up the whole story thus—“WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN BUT YOU?” I have known men lose their property, and yet they did not say, “Whom have I in heaven but You?” I have known a man lose his wife, and yet look to earth to find some comfort. I have known him lose child after child, and yet he still thought the world had many charms. I have known him sick, yet he has had pleasure in vanity. But there is one thing which cannot happen—a man cannot know himself so as to feel his folly, and his ignorance, to feel the beast-like character of his nature, without at once turning his eyes to Christ! There is nothing that makes one love Christ, I think, as much as a sense of His love balanced with a sense of our unworthiness of it. It is sweet to think that Christ loves us. But oh, to remember that we are black as the tents of Kedar, and yet He loves us! This is a thought which may well wean us from everything else besides. That He should love me when I have some graces and some virtues is not a great marvel; but that He should love me, when in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells no good thing? When I have no charms, no beauties, not one attractive attribute,

not one trait of character that is worthy of His regard—that He should love me then—oh, if this does not make me swear a divorce to the world, what can? I think, believer, you will come to Jesus and put your hand in His, and say, “You, You alone are mine; no other love can I have but this. I cannot love the world, when I have known such affection as Yours; and when I see how little I deserve it, I must love You.” Then, the spirit flies to heaven, thinking of all that joy and rapture which is to come, but remembering, as it enters paradise, that it was on earth but as a beast before God. It looks all round through heaven, and says to angels, “I cannot think of you, I can only think of Him who could love so base, so vile a creature as I am.” Surely, passing by principalities and powers, forgetting for a while the blood-washed company, the sacramental host of God’s elect, we shall look for the throne where Jesus sits, and we shall sing to Him, and this shall be the song, “Unto Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, unto Him be glory forever and ever.” Contemplate much, believer, your own sad state. Contemplate yet more your own safety and perfection in Christ! And these two things together shall make you despise the world and its joys, make you tread on the world and its trials, and make you feel such a knitting and union of heart to Christ, to Christ Jesus only, that you may say, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.”

I thought I saw just now before my eyes a dark and horrible pit, and down deep below, where the eyes could not reach, lay a being broken in pieces, whose groans and howling pierced the awful darkness, and amazed my ears. I thought I saw a bright one fly from the highest heaven, and in an instant dive into that black darkness till He was lost and buried in it! I waited for a moment, and to my mind’s eye I saw two spirits rising from the horrid deep, with arms entwined, as though one was bearing up the other. I saw them emerge from the gloom. I heard the fairest of them say, as He mounted into light, “I have loved you, and given Myself for you.” And I heard the other say, who was that poor broken one just now, “I was foolish and ignorant, I was as a beast before You.” Before I could write the words, both spirits had risen into midair, and I heard one of them say, “You shall be with Me in Paradise,” and the other whispered, “Nevertheless I am continually with You.” As they mounted higher, I heard one say, “None shall pluck you out of My hand,” and I heard the other say “You hold me by my right hand.” As still they rose, they continued the loving dialogue. “I will guide you with My eyes,” said the bright one. The other answered, “You shall guide me with Your counsel.” They reached the bright clouds that separate earth from heaven, and as they parted to make way for the glorious one, He said, “I will give you to sit upon My throne even as I have overcome, and sit upon My Father’s throne,” and the other answered, “And You shall afterward receive me to glory.” Lo, the clouds closed their doors, and they were gone! I thought again they opened, and I saw those two spirits soaring onward beyond stars, and sun, and moon—right up beyond principalities and powers—on, beyond cherubim and seraphim; right on beyond every name that is named, until in that ineffable brightness, dark with insufferable light, the awful glory of the Deity whom eyes cannot see, both those spirits were lost, and there came the sound of joyous hallelujahs from the spirits which are before the throne of God!

May it be your lot and mine thus to be brought up, for we are thus fallen. May it be ours to be thus caught up to the third heaven, for we are thus broken, and cast down into the lowest hell by nature. God give us faith in Christ! Faith in Christ—that is the link, the bond, the tie! “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.” “Lord, I believe, help You my unbelief.”

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

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