

THE DESIRE OF THE SOUL IN SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

NO. 31

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 AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL.

“With my soul have I desired You in the night.”
Isaiah 26:9

NIGHT appears to be a time peculiarly favorable to devotion. Its solemn stillness helps to free the mind from that perpetual din which the cares of the world will bring around it. And the stars looking down from Heaven upon us shine as if they would attract us up to God. I know not how you may be affected by the solemnities of midnight, but when I have sat alone musing on the great God and the mighty universe I have felt that indeed I could worship Him, for night seemed to be spread abroad as a very temple for adoration, while the moon walked as high priest amid the stars.

The worshippers and I myself joined in that silent song which they sang unto God—“Great are You, O God! Great in Your works. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have ordained, what is man, that You are mindful of him? And the son of man, that You visit him?” I find that this sense of the power of midnight not only acts upon religious men but there is a certain poet, whose character—a man very far from understanding true religion—one whom I may, I suppose, justly style an infidel, a libertine of the worst order and yet he says concerning night in one of his poems—

*“Tis midnight on the mountains’ brown,
 The cold round moon shines deeply down;
 Blue roll the waters, blue the sky
 Spreads like an ocean hung on high,
 Bespangled with those isles of light,
 So wildly, spiritually bright;
 Who ever gazed upon them shining,
 And turning to earth without repining,
 Nor wish’d for wings to flee away,
 And mix with their eternal ray.”*

Even with the most irreligious person, a man farthest from spiritual thought, it seems that there is some power in the grandeur and stillness of night to draw him up to God. I trust many of us can say, like David, “I have thought upon You continually, I have mused upon Your name in the night watches and with desire have I desired You in the night.” But I leave that thought altogether. I shall not speak of night natural at all, although there may be a great deal of room for poetic thought and expression. I shall address myself to two orders of persons and shall endeavor to show what I conceive to be the meaning of the text. May God make it useful to you both.

First, I shall speak to *confirmed Christians*. And from this text I shall bring one or two remarks to bear upon their case, if they are in darkness. Second, I shall speak to *newly awakened souls* and try if I can find some of them who can say, “With my soul have I desired You in the night.”

I. I am about to address this text to the more confirmed Believer. And the first fact I shall educe from it—the Truth of which I am sure he will very readily admit—is THE CHRISTIAN MAN HAS NOT ALWAYS A BRIGHT SHINING SUN—that he has seasons of darkness and of light. True, it is written in God’s Word, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace.” And it is a great Truth that religion—the true religion of the living God—is calculated to give a man happiness below as well as bliss above. But, notwithstanding, experience tells us that if the course of the just is “as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day,” yet sometimes that light is eclipsed.

At certain periods clouds and darkness cover the sun and he beholds no clear shining of the daylight but walks in darkness and sees no light. Now there are many who have rejoiced in the presence of God for a season. They have basked in the sunshine God has been pleased to give them in the earlier stages of their Christian career. They have walked along

the “green pastures” by the side of the “still waters” and suddenly—in a month or two—they find that glorious sky is clouded—instead of “green pastures” they have to tread the sandy desert. In the place of “still waters” they find streams brackish to their taste and bitter to their spirits. They say, “Surely, if I were a child of God, this would not happen.”

Oh, say not so, you who are walking in darkness! The best of God’s saints have their nights. The dearest of His children have to walk through a weary wilderness. There is not a Christian who has enjoyed perpetual happiness, there is no Believer who can always sing a song of joy. It is not every lark that can always carol. It is not every star that can always be seen. And not every Christian is always happy. Perhaps the King of Saints gave you a season of great joy at first because you were a raw recruit and He would not put you into the roughest part of the battle when you had first enlisted.

You were a tender plant and He nursed you in the hothouse till you could stand severe weather. You were a young child and therefore He wrapped you in furs and clothed you in the softest mantle. But now you have become strong and the case is different. Capuano holidays do not suit Roman soldiers. And they would not agree with Christians. We need clouds and darkness to exercise our faith, to cut off self-dependence and make us put more faith in Christ. And less in evidence, less in experience, less in frames and feelings. The best of God’s children—I repeat it again for the comfort of those who are suffering depression of spirits—have their nights.

Sometimes it is a night over the whole Church at once. And I fear we have very much of that night now. There are times when Zion is under a cloud, when the whole fine gold becomes dim and the glory of Zion is departed. There are seasons when we do not hear the clear preaching of the Word. When the doctrines are withheld. When the glory of the Lord God of Jacob is dim. When His name is not exalted. When the traditions of men are taught instead of the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. And such a season is that when the whole Church is dark.

Of course each Christian participates in it. He goes about and weeps and cries, “O God, how long shall poor Zion be depressed? How long shall her shepherds be ‘dumb dogs that cannot bark?’ Shall her watchmen be always blind? Shall the silver trumpet sound no more? Shall not the voice of the Gospel be heard in her streets?” Oh, there are seasons of darkness for the entire Church! God grant we may not have to pass through another! But that starting from this period on, the sun may rise never to set, till, like a sea of glory, the light of brilliance shall spread from pole to pole!

At other times, this darkness over the soul of the Christian rises from *temporal distresses*. He may have had a misfortune as it is called—something has gone wrong in his business, or an enemy has done something against him. Perhaps death has struck down a favorite child—bereavement has snatched away the darling of his bosom—or the crops are blighted. The winds refuse to bear his ships homeward. A vessel strikes upon a rock, another founders, all goes ill with him and, like a gentleman who called to see me this week, he may be able to say, “Sir, I prospered far more when I was a worldly man than I have done since I have become a Christian—for, since then, everything has appeared to go wrong with me. “I thought,” he said, “that religion had the promise of this life as well as of that which is to come.”

I told him, Yes, it had. And so it should be in the end. But he must remember there was one great legacy which Christ left His people. And I was glad he had come in for a share of it—“In the world you shall have tribulation. In Me you shall have peace.” Yes! You may be troubled about this, you may be saying, “Look at So-and-So—see how he spreads himself like a green bay tree. He is an extortioner and wicked man, yet everything he does prospers.” You may even observe his death and say, “there are no bands in his death.”

They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Ah, Beloved! You are come into the sanctuary of God this morning and now shall you understand their end. God has set them in slippery places and He casts them down to destruction. Better to have a Christian’s days of sorrow than a worldling’s days of mirth. Better to have a Christian’s sorrows than a worldling’s joys. Ah, happier to be chained in a dungeon with a Paul than reign in the palace with an Ahab. Better to be a child of God in poverty than a child of Satan in riches. Cheer up, then, you downcast spirit, if this be your trial. Remember that many saints have passed through the same. And the best and most eminent Believers have had their nights.

“But oh,” says another, “you have not described my night, Sir. I have not much amiss in business. And I would not care if I had—but I have a night in my spirit. O Sir,” says one, “I have not a single evidence of my Christianity now. I was a child of God, I know. But something tells me that I am none of His now. There was a season when I flattered myself that I knew something about godliness and God. But now I doubt whether I have any part or lot in the matter. Satan

suggests that I must dwell in endless flames. I see no hope for me. I am afraid I am an hypocrite. I think I have imposed on the Church and upon myself also. I fear I am none of His.

“When I turn over God’s Scriptures there is no promise. When I look within, corruption is black before me. Then while others are commending me, I am accusing myself of all manner of sin and corruption. I could not have thought that I was half so bad. I am afraid there cannot have been a work of grace in my heart, or else I should not have so many corrupt imaginations, filthy desires, hard thoughts of God—so much pride, so much selfishness and self-will. I am afraid I am none of His.”

Now, that is the very reason why you *are* one of His, that you are able to say that—for God’s people pass through the night. They have their nights of sorrow. I love to hear a man talk like that. I would not have him do so always. He ought at times to enter into “the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free.” But I know that frequently bondage will get hold of the spirit. But you say, “Surely no one ever suffers like that.” I confess I do myself constantly and very often there are times when I could not prove my election in Jesus Christ, nor my adoption, though I rejoice that for the most part I can cry—

*“A debtor to mercy alone
Of covenant mercy I sing.”*

Yet at other seasons I am sure the meanest lamb in Jesus’ fold I reckon ten thousand times more in advance than myself. And if I might but sit down on the meanest bench in the kingdom of Heaven and did but know I was in, I would barter everything I had—and I do not believe there ever existed a Christian yet who did not now and then doubt his interest in Jesus. I think, when a man says, “I never doubt,” it is quite time for us to doubt *him*. It is quite time for us to begin to say, “Ah, poor Soul, I am afraid you are not on the road at all, for if you were, you would see so many things in yourself and so much glory in Christ more than you deserve, that you would be so much ashamed of yourself, as even to say, ‘It is too good to be true.’”

2. The first part, then, is fully established by *experience* that Christian men very frequently have their nights. But the second thing here is that *a Christian man’s religion will keep its color in the night*. “With my soul have I desired You in the night.” What a mighty deal of silver-slipper religion we have in this world. Men will follow Christ when everyone cries “Hosanna! Hosanna!” The multitude will crowd around the Man then and they will take Him by force and make Him a king when the sun shines, when the soft wind blows. They are like the plants upon the rock which sprang up and for a little while were green—but when the sun had risen with fervent heat they straightway withered away.

Demas and Mr. Hold-the-World and a great many others are very pious people in easy times. They will always go with Christ by daylight and will keep in company so long as fashion gives religion the doubtful benefit of its patronage. But they will not go with Him in the night. There are some goods whose color you can only see by daylight—and there are many professors the color of whom you can only see by daylight. If they were in the night of trouble and persecution you would find that there was very little in them. They are good by daylight but they are bad by night.

But, Beloved, do you not know that the best test of a Christian is the night? The nightingale, if she would sing by day when every goose is cackling, would be reckoned no better a musician than the wren. A Christian, if he only remained steadfast by daylight when every coward is bold, what would he be? There would be no beauty in his courage, no glory in his bravery. But it is because he can sing at night—sing in trouble—sing when he is driven well near to despair—it is *this* which proves his sincerity. It has its glory in the night. The stars are not visible by daylight, but they become apparent when the sun is set.

There is full many a Christian whose piety did not burn much when he was in prosperity. But it will be known in adversity. I have marked it in some of my Brethren now present, when they were in deep trial not long ago. I had not heard them discourse much about Christ before, but when God’s hand had robbed them of their comfort, I remember that I could discern their religion infinitely better than I could before. Nothing can bring our religion out better than that. Grind the diamond a little and you shall see it glisten. Do but put a trouble on the Christian and his endurance of it will prove him to be of the true seed of Israel.

3. A third remark from this to the confirmed Christian is, *all that the Christian wants in the night is his God*. “With desire have I desired You in the night.” By day there are many things that a Christian will desire besides his Lord. But in the night he wants nothing but his God. I cannot understand how it is unless it is to be accounted for by the corruption

of our spirit, that when everything goes well with us we are setting our affection first on this object and then on another and then on another. And that desire which is as insatiable as death and as deep as Hell never rests satisfied.

We are always wanting something, always desiring something else. But if you place a Christian in trouble you will find that he does not want gold, then—that he does not want carnal honor—then he wants his God. I suppose he is like the sailor—when he sails along smoothly he loves to have fair weather and wants this and that to amuse himself with on deck. But when the winds blow all that he wants is the haven. He does not desire anything else. The biscuit may be moldy, but he does not care. The water may be brackish, but he does not care. He does not think of it in the storm. He only thinks about the haven.

It is just so with the Christian—when he is going along smoothly he wants this and that comfort. He is aspiring after this position, or is wanting to obtain this and that elevation. But let him once doubt his interest in Christ—let him once get into some soul-distress and trouble, so that it is very dark—and all he will feel then is, “With desire have I desired You in the night.” When the child is put upstairs to bed it may lie while the light is there and look at the trees that shake against the window and admire the stars that are coming out. But when it gets dark and the child is still awake it cries for its parent. It cannot be amused by anything else.

So in daylight will the Christian look at anything. He will cast his eyes round on this pleasure and on that! But, when the darkness gathers, it is, “My God! My God! Why have You forsaken me? O why are You so far from me and from the word of my roaring?” Then it is—

*“Give me Christ or else I die;
These can never satisfy.”*

4. But now one more remark before I leave my address to confirmed saints. *There are times when all the saints can do is to desire.* We have a vast number of evidences of piety—some are practical, some are experimental, some are doctrinal. And the more evidences a man has of his piety the better, of course. We like a number of signatures to make a deed more valid, if possible. We like to invest property in a great number of trustees in order that it may be all the safer and so we love to have many evidences. Many witnesses will carry our case at the bar better than a few—and so it is well to have many witnesses to testify to our piety.

But there are seasons when a Christian cannot get any. He can get scarcely one witness to come and attest his godliness. He asks for good works to come and speak for him. But there will be such a cloud of darkness about him and his good works will appear so black that he will not dare to think of their evidences. He will say, “True, I hope this is the right fruit, I hope I have served God but I dare not plead these works as evidences.” He will have lost assurance and with it his enjoyment of communion with God. “I have had that fellowship with Him,” perhaps he will say and he will summon that communion to come and be an evidence.

But he has forgotten it and it does not come and Satan whispers it is a fancy. And the poor evidence of communion has its mouth gagged so that it cannot speak. But there is one witness that very seldom is gagged and one that I trust the people of God can always apply, even in the night. And that is, “I have *desired* You I have *desired* You in the night.” “Yes, Lord, if I have not believed in You, I have *desired* You. And if I have not spent and been spent in Your service, yet one thing I know and the devil cannot beat me out of it, I have *desired* You—that I do know—and I have *desired* You in the night, too, when no one saw me, when troubles were round about me.”

Now, my Beloved, I hope there are many of you here this morning who are strong in faith. You do not, perhaps, want what I have said. But I will advise you to take this cordial and if you do not want to drink it now, put it up in a small vial and carry it about with you till you do. You do not know how long it may before you are faint. And as Mr. Great-Heart gave Christiana a bottle of wine to take with her that she might drink when she was fatigued, so you take this and do not laugh at a poor despised Believer because he is not so strong as yourself. You may want this yourself some day.

I tell you there are times when a Christian will be ready to creep into a mouse hole if he might but get into Heaven. When he would be glad to throw anything away to get into the smallest crevice to escape from his fears. When the meanest evidence seems more precious than gold. When the very least ray of sunlight is worth all the riches of Peru. And when a drop of comfort is more sweet than a whole Heaven may have been at other seasons. You may be brought into the same

condition, so take this passage with you and have it ready—have it ready to plead at the Throne—“With desire have I desired You in the night.”

II. The second part of my sermon is to be occupied by speaking to NEWLY AWAKENED SOULS. And as I have made four remarks to confirmed Christians, I will now endeavor to answer three questions to those who are newly awakened.

The first question they would ask me is this. *How am I to know that my desires are proofs of a work of grace in my soul?* Some of you may say, “I think I can go so far as the text—I have desired God. I know I have desired to be saved. I have desired to have an interest in the blood of Jesus but how am I to know that it is a desire sent of God and how can I tell whether it will end in conversion?” Hear me, then, while I offer one or two tests.

1. First, you may tell whether your desires are of God by their *constancy*. Many a man, when he hears a stirring sermon, has a very strong desire to be saved. But he goes home and forgets it. He is as a man who sees his face in a glass, goes away and straightway forgets what manner of man he is. He returns again—once more the arrow sticks hard in the heart of the King’s enemy. He goes home, only to extract the arrow and his goodness is as the morning cloud. And as the early dew, it passes away. Has it been so with you? Have you had such a desire? Will tomorrow’s business take it away? Are you wanting Christ today? And will you despise Him tomorrow?

Then I am afraid your desires are not of God. They are merely the desires of a naturally awakened conscience, just the stirrings of mere nature and they will go as far as nature can go and no farther. But if your desires are constant ones, take comfort. How long have they lasted? Have you been desiring Christ this last month or these last three or four months? Have you been seeking Him in prayer for a long season? And do you find that you are anxious after Christ on the Monday as well as on the Sunday? Do you desire Him in the shop when the intervals of business allow you to do so? Do you seek Him in the night—in the solemn loneliness, when no minister’s voice breaks on your ear—when no Truth is smiting your conscience?

Is it but the hectic flush of the consumption that has come upon your cheek? Which is not the mark of health. Or is it the real heat of a true desire which marks a healthy soul? Are you desiring God constantly? I admit there will be variations even to our more sincere desires, but a certain measure of constancy is essential to their real value as evidences of a Divine work.

2. Again—you may discern whether they are right or wrong by their *efficacy*. Some persons desire Heaven very earnestly but they do not desire to leave off drunkenness—they desire to be saved but they do not desire salvation enough to shut their shops up on Sunday morning. Or to bridle their tongues and leave off speaking ill of their neighbors. They desire salvation. But they do not desire it enough to come sometimes on the weekday to hear the Gospel. You may tell the truthfulness of your desires by their efficacy. If your desires lead you into real “works meet for repentance,” then they come from God. Wishes, you know, are nothing unless they are carried out. “Many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able” “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

Seeking will not do—there must be *striving*. Our Prophet here informs us that while he desired God in the night, that desire was very efficacious. For, in the 8th verse he declares, “In the way of Your judgments, O Lord, we have waited for You.” This desire made me wait for Your judgments. How many do I hear say I am waiting for God, it is all I do—there I lie at the pool of Bethesda and one of these days an angel will come and stir the pool. Stop! How do you know you are not deceiving yourself? There is a friend waiting for me to tea—I will step into the room. There is no kettle on the fire—there is not a bit for me to eat. “Sir, we have been waiting for you.”

But there is nothing ready in the house! I do not believe them. They could not have been waiting for me, or else they would have been ready. And waiting for God always implies being *ready*. Says a man, “I am waiting for God.” But he is not ready for God at all—he still keeps on his drunkenness, the house is still unswept. He is as worldly as ever. He is waiting—yes—but waiting implies being ready. And nobody is waiting that is not ready. You are not waiting for the coach until you have your coat and hat on and are looking out at the door for it. And you are not waiting for God until you are ready to go with God. No man ought to say, I am waiting for God. No, Beloved, it is God who is waiting for us generally, rather than any of us waiting for Him.

No sinner can be beforehand with Him. But the Prophet waited “in the way of God’s judgments”—that is, waited in the right place—waited in the house of God—waited under the sound of the Gospel. And then this desire led him to

seek. “With my spirit within me will I seek You.” It led him to seek after God. Oh, the poor pitiful desires of some of you are very little good. An old writer says, “Hell is paved with good intentions.” I was not aware that there was any pavement at all—because it has no bottom—but at the same time I believe that the sides of the pit are hung round with good intentions.

And men will feel themselves pricked and goaded from side to side with good designs that they once formed but never carried out—children that were strangled at birth—desires that never were brought into living acts—desires that sprang up like the mushroom in the night and like the fungus were swept away. Like smoke from the chimney that stopped as soon as the fire had gone out. Oh, Brethren, if these are your desires, they are not practical, they do not come of God. But if your desires have made you give up your drunkenness—have compelled you to renounce your theater-going—have constrained you to seek God with full purpose of heart—have brought you to give up one lust and another—take comfort, you are in the right road if your desires are practical desires.

3. Again—you can tell these desires by their *urgency*. Ah, you want to be saved, some of you, but it must be this day next week. But when the Holy Spirit speaks, He says, “*Today* if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” It must be now or never. “*Today* give me grace. *Today* give me mercy. *Today* give me pardon.” Some of you hope to be saved before you die, before the pit closes on you. You hope Jesus Christ will look down upon you in some years to come. You have not set down how many years, I suppose. But it is always in the distant hazy future.

But the true desire is *now*. Does the poor man who stands upon the scaffold with a rope round his neck say, “Pardon me in a year’s time?” No, he is afraid he shall the next minute be launched into eternity. He who feels his danger will cry, “Now!” He who wants Christ, really, will cry, “Now!” He who is spiritually awakened will cry out, “Now or never!” What? Sinner, will it do to postpone salvation? Does your heart tell you it will do by-and-by? What? When the fire is just coming through the boards of your little chamber? What? When your ship has struck upon the rock and is filling?

Yes, she is filling, while the fire at the other end is rushing up. And fire and water together are seeking your destruction. Will you say, “Tomorrow?” Why, you may be dead before tomorrow’s sun has risen. Tomorrow? Where is it? In the devil’s calendar? It is not written in any book on earth. Tomorrow? It is some fancied islet in the far off sea that the mariner has never reached. Tomorrow? It is the fool’s desire—which he never shall gain. Like a will-o-wisp it dances before him, but only lands him in the marshes of distress. Tomorrow? There is no such thing! It is God’s. If there is such a day, ours it cannot be. Tillotson well remarks—“To be always intending to live a new life but never to find time to set about it. This is as if a man should put off eating and drinking and sleeping, from one day and night to another, till he is starved and destroyed”

But you say, “If I have desired God, why have I not obtained my desire before now? Why has not God granted my request?” In the first place, *you have hardly a right to ask the question*. For God has a right to grant your petition or not as He pleases. And far be it from man to say to God “What are You doing?” He is sovereign and has power to do what He will. But since your anxiety has dictated the question, let my anxiety attempt to answer it. Perhaps God has not granted your desire because He wishes your own profit thereby. He designs to show you more of the desperate wickedness of your heart, that in future you may fear to trust it. He wants you to see more of the blackness of darkness and of the horrible pit of sin—that like a burnt child you may shun the fire forever.

He lets you go down into the dungeon, that you may prize liberty the better when it comes. And He is keeping you waiting, moreover, that your longings may be quickened. He knows that delay will fan the desire and that if He keeps you waiting it will not be a loss to you, but will gain you much, because you will see your necessity more clearly, seek Him more earnestly, cry more bitterly and your heart will be more in earnest after Him. Besides, poor Soul, God keeps you waiting, perhaps, in order that He may display the riches of His grace more fully to you at the last. I believe that some of us who were kept by God a long while before we found Him, loved Him better perhaps than we should have done if we had received Him directly. And we can preach better to others, we can speak more of His loving kindness and tender mercy.

John Bunyan could not have written as he did if he had not been dragged about by the devil for many years. Ah, I love that picture of dear old Christian. When I first read that book and saw the old woodcut in it of Christian carrying the burden on his back, I felt so interested for the poor fellow that I thought I should jump with joy when, after the poor creature had carried his burden so long, he at last got rid of it. Ah, Beloved, God may make you and me carry the burden

for a long time till He takes it off that we may leap all the higher with joy when we do get deliverance. For depend upon it, there is no poor penitent who loves mercy so well as he who has been ferrying for it for a season. Perhaps that is the reason why God keeps you waiting.

One more thought here. *Perhaps it has come already.* I think some of you are pardoned and you do not know it. I think some of you are forgiven, though you are expecting something wonderful as a sign which you will never receive. Persons have got the strangest notions in the world about conversion. I have heard persons tell the strangest tales you could imagine about how they were converted—though of course I did not believe them. And I fancy some of you think you will have a kind of electric shock—that a sort of galvanism, or something or other, will pass through you, such as you never had before. Do not be expecting any miracles now.

If you will not think you are pardoned till you get a vision, you will have to wait many a year. Some people fancy they are not pardoned because they have never heard a voice in their ears. I should be very sorry to have my salvation dependent on a text of Scripture applied to my heart. I should be afraid that the devil had applied it, or that it was the wind whistling behind me. I want something more sure than that. Perhaps you are forgiven and you do not yet know it. God has spoken the tidings of mercy to your spirit and you have not yet heard it, because you are saying, “It cannot be that.” If you could but sit down and think of this—“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief,” methinks you would find that after all you are not excluded.

There is no great need for any of these miraculous things that you are reckoning upon. God may have given them to some of His people but He has never *promised* them. Perhaps, then, the question may be answered by saying, “The pardon is there, but you do not know it.” Oh, May God speak loudly in your soul, that you may know really and certainly that He has forgiven you!

But there is one more serious enquiry—and it is, “*Will God grant my desire at last?*” Yes, poor Soul, verily He will. It is quite impossible that you should have desired God and should be lost, if you have desired Him with the desire I have described. Suppose that you should go down into the chambers of the lost with the desire still in your spirit—when you entered within the gates you would have to say, “I desired mercy of God and He would not give it me—I sought grace at the hands of Jesus and He would not give it.” You know what would be said at once? Satan would be so pleased. “Ah,” he would say, “here is a sinner that perished praying—God has not kept His promise, for He said, ‘Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’—“and here is one that did it and he is lost!”

Ah, how they would howl for joy in Hell! They would sing a blasphemous song against the Almighty God—that one poor desiring soul should be there! I tell you one thing—I have heard many wicked things in my life—I have heard many men swear and blaspheme God. I have trembled at their speech but there is one thing I never did hear a man say yet and I think God would scarcely permit any man to perpetrate such a lie—I never heard even a drunken man say, “I sincerely sought God with full purpose of heart and yet He has not heard me and will not answer me, but has cast me away.” I scarcely think it possible—although I know that men can be infinitely wicked—that any man could utter such an abominable falsehood as that.

At any rate, I can say I never heard it. And I believe there are some of you who can say, “I have been young and now am old, yet have I never seen one penitent sinner who could say, in despair, ‘I am not saved. I have sought God and He will not hear me, He has cast me away from His face and will not give me mercy.’ ” And, I think, as long as you live you will not meet a case. Then why should *you* be the first? Why, poor Penitent, should *you* be the first? Do you think you are a chosen mark for all the arrows of the Almighty? Has He set you for a butt against which He will direct all the thunderbolts of His vengeance? Are you to be the first instance in which mercy fails? Are you to be the one who shall first out-do the infinity of love? Oh, say not so.

Despair is mad. But for one instant gather up your reason you despairing one. Would God wish to see you damned? Has He not said, “As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, but would rather that he should turn to Me and live”? Do you think it would be a pleasure to the Almighty to have your blood? Oh, far be it from you to conceive it. Do you not think that He loves to pardon? Has he not said Himself He delights in mercy? And is it not written, “As the heavens are higher than the earth so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts”? What advantage would it be for God to destroy your soul? Would it not be more to His honor to save you?

Ah, assuredly—because you would sing His praise in Heaven, would you not? Yes, but recollect, the best argument I can use with you is this—Do you suppose that God would give His Son to die for sinners and yet would not save sinners? It is written in the Scriptures that, “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” and you are a sinner. You feel that you are a sinner—you know it. Then He came to save you! Only believe that. As a poor penitent you have a right to believe it. If you were a Pharisee you would not have that right. But as a penitent, humble, contrite soul, you have a right to believe in Jesus. The Pharisee has none, for it is never written that he came to save the righteous. And if he believed he did he would believe a lie.

But every man who is a sinner, every man who lays claim to that title, has a right also to believe that Christ died for him. And not only so but it is true. He came into the world for a certain purpose and what He came for He will do. He came into the world to save sinners and now it is written, “Whosoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. He that believes not shall be damned.” When, last Friday, I had the honor of preaching to many a thousand persons in the open air—such an assembly as I never dreamed of seeing and such a vast number as I could scarcely have fancied would have met for any religious purpose—I noticed a most singularly powerful echo, constantly taking up the last words of my sentences and sending them back, as if some great giant voice had spoken to confirm what I had said.

When I had repeated the words, “he that believes and is baptized shall be saved,” my echo said, “Saved!” And when I proceeded, “he that believes not shall be damned,” I heard the echo gently say, “Damned!” Methinks this morning I hear that echo—“he that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” And the saints above cry, “Saved!” Hark! How they sing before the Throne! Hark! How your glorified parents and your immortalized relatives, cry, “Saved!” Hear you not the echo, as it echoes from the blue sky of heavens—“Saved!”?

And, oh, doleful thought, when I utter those words, “he that believes not shall be damned,” there comes up that dread word—“Damned!” From the place where there are “hollow groans and sullen moans and shrieks of tortured ghosts.” God grant that you may never know what it is to be damned! God give you grace to believe now. Remember, “today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”

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