

GOD'S STRANGE CHOICE

NO. 587

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence.”
1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

THE apostle Paul had been led to make the confession that Christ Jesus was despised both by Jew and Gentile. He confessed that this was no cause of stumbling to him, for what others counted foolishness, he believed to be wisdom, and rejoiced that the foolishness of God was wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men. Lest, however, any of the Corinthian church should be confused by the fact that Christ was despised, the apostle goes on to show that it was the general way of God's proceeding, to select means which men despised, in order that, by accomplishing His purpose through them, He might have all the glory; and he refers them for the proof of this to the one instance of their own election and calling—“You see your calling, brethren,” he says, “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called,” but you, the poor, illiterate, the despised, you have been called—still for the same reason—that God may be all in all, and that no flesh may glory in His presence. It is clear to everyone who will observe either Scripture or fact that God never did intend to make His gospel fashionable; that the very last thing that was ever in His thoughts was to select the *elite* of mankind, and gather dignity for His truth from the gaudy trappings of rank and station. On the contrary, God has thrown down the gauntlet against all the pride of manhood; He has dashed mire into the face of all human excellence; and with the battle-ax of His strength, He has dashed the shield of man's glory in two. “Overturn! Overturn! I overturn!” seems to be the very motto of the Lord of hosts, and shall be so “Until He shall come whose right it is to reign, and He will give it to Him,” for His is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. There is no doctrine more truly humbling than the doctrine of election; and it was for this reason that the apostle Paul refers to it—that the disciples at Corinth might be quite content to follow the humble and despised cross-bearing Savior, because the election of grace consists of the humble and despised, who, therefore, cannot be ashamed to follow one, who, like themselves, was despised and rejected of men.

Coming then, at once to our text, we observe in it very clearly, first, *the elector*; secondly, *a strange election*; then, *the elected*; and when we have considered all these a little, we shall pause over *the reasons which God has given for His election*—that “No flesh should glory in His presence.”

I. First, then, let us this morning soar aloft upon the wings of thought, to consider for awhile, the ELECTOR.

Some men are saved, and some men are not saved; it remains as a fact never to be questioned, that some enter into eternal life and some pursue the evil way and perish. How is this difference caused? How is it that some mount to heaven? The reason why any sink to hell is their sin, and only their sin; they will not repent, they will not believe in Christ, they will not turn to God—and therefore, they perish willfully by their own act and deed. But how is it others are saved? Whose will is it that has made them to differ? The text three times most indisputably answers the question. It says not, “Man has chosen,” but it says three times, “*God has chosen, God has chosen, God has chosen.*” The grace which is found in any man and the glory and eternal life, to which any attain, are all the gifts of God's election, and are not bestowed according to the will of man.

This will be clear to any thoughtful person if we, first of all, turn *to facts*. Wherever we find a case of election in the Old Testament, it is manifestly God who makes it. Go back, if you will, to the very earli-

est time. Angels fell—a multitude of bright spirits, who surrounded the throne of God and sang His praises, were deceived by Satan and fell into sin. The great serpent drew with him the third part of the stars of heaven—they fell from their obedience; they were condemned to chains and to eternal fire forever. Man also sinned; Adam and Eve broke the covenant with God, and ate of the forbidden fruit—were they condemned to eternal fire? No, but God, in the plenitude of His grace, whispered this promise in the woman's ear—"The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Some men are saved, but no devils are saved. Why? Did man make the difference? Silence, you vain boaster who dreams of such a thing! It is God Himself who testifies, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." It was from such sovereignty as this that the Lord virtually declared, "I purpose and decree that, of the race of man, I will save a multitude that no man can number, who shall be the vessels of My mercy; while yonder angels, once My servants, but now traitors to their liege Lord, shall, without hope forever, vindicate the terror of My righteousness, the majesty of My justice."

Here no one ever raises a question. I have never heard the most ultra-Pelagian enter a plea for the devil! I have heard of Origen, who did seem to plead that Satan should be included in the general law of mercy, but very few persons nowadays talk so. Here is an instance of divine election—some of the human race saved, and the angelic race left forever to perish. Who could have made this distinction but Jehovah Himself? And we must say there of our favored race, "God has chosen." We are not at a loss to see the same discriminating sovereignty at work among the individuals of our own race. All men in the patriarchal age were sunk in heathenism with but a few exceptions; there were a few patriarchs who still, chosen of God, held fast to the pure worship of the Most High. The Lord determined to adopt a special people who should read the oracles of God, and preserve and maintain His truth; He selected Abram as the progenitor of the chosen race. Did Abram choose God, or did God call and choose Abram? Was there anything naturally in Abram to entitle him to be the servant of the Most High? We have very plain proof in Scripture that there was not. He was, on the contrary, described as a Syrian ready to perish, and his race was like the rest, tainted, to say the least, with idolatry; nevertheless, he was called out of the east, and made the father of the faithful by God's own special will. What was there, let me ask you, in the Jews? Why should they be blessed with prophets, and the sacrifices, and the rites and ordinances of true worship, while all the nations were left to bow down before gods of wood and stone? We can only say God has done it—His will lights upon the race of Israel and leaves the rest in sin. Take any particular case of divine grace mentioned in the Old Testament, as, for instance, that of David. Do we find that David chose the throne that David selected, and set himself apart to be the chosen messenger of God to Israel? Was there some manifest fitness in the youngest son of Jesse? No, on the contrary, men had chosen his brothers; even Samuel said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before me," as he saw Abinadab go forth. But God sees not as man sees and He had chosen the ruddy David that he might be king in Jesurun. So might we multiply cases, but your own thoughts will spare my words. All the facts of the Old Testament go to show that God does as He wills in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of this lower world; He pulls down and He raises up; He lifts the beggar from the dunghill that He may set him among the princes of His people. God has chosen, God has chosen, and not man! "It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy."

Let us look at the matter in another light. Clearly the Lord's will must determine the matter if we consider His office and position towards men. God's office—God is a King. Shall not the King have His own will? Men may set up a constitutional monarchy, and they are right in so doing; but if you could find a being who was perfection itself, an absolute form of government would be undeniably the best. At any rate, God's government is absolute, and though He never violates righteousness, for He is holiness and truth itself, yet He regards this jewel of His crown as being the dearest that He has. "I am, and there is none beside Me." He gives no account of His matters. Unto all questions, He gives this answer, "No, but, O man, who are you who replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, 'Why have you made me thus?' Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" The absolute position of God as King demands that, especially in the work of salvation, His will should be the great determining force. Let us state the case and you will see this. A number of criminals are shut up in prison, all deserving to die. Their guilt is the same. If they are all taken out to execution tomorrow morning, no one can say a word against justice.

Now, if some of these persons are spared, to whose discretion should the sparing be left? To their own? True, it will be most gracious to send a messenger, and bid them all come forth and receive sparing mercy if they will come; but suppose they all, with one consent, refuse to be saved? Suppose that, having been invited to be saved, every one of them refuses to accept pardon; if in such a case, superior mercy determines to override their wicked wills, and sets itself to secure that some of them shall effectually be saved, with whom shall the choice be left? If it were left with them, they would all of them still choose death rather than life; therefore, it were useless to leave it with them. Besides, to leave the attribute of mercy in the hand of the criminal would be an exceedingly strange mode of procedure. No, let it be the king. Let it be the king who shall say who it is that shall be spared in mercy, and who shall die according to the rule of justice. The position of God as King, and the position of men as criminals, demands that salvation shall depend upon the will of God; and truly we may better leave it with His will than with our own, for He is kinder to us than we are to ourselves; He is more full of love to man than man is of love to himself. He is justice. He is love; justice in full-orbed splendor, love in unbounded might. Mercy and truth have met together in Him and kissed each other, and it is well, it is well, it is best of all that the rule and management of salvation should be left with Him!

We will now introduce to you a few figures made use of in Scripture in connection with the work of salvation, and I think you will then see that the will must be left with God. Salvation consists in part of an *adoption*. God adopts sinners who were heirs of wrath, even as others, into His family. Who is to have authority in the matter of gracious adoption? The children of wrath? Surely not; and yet all men are such! No; it stands to nature, to reason, to common sense that none but the parent can have the discretion to adopt. As a father, I have a right, if any desire to enter my family, to adopt or to refuse to adopt the persons in question; certainly no person can have a right to force himself upon me, and say that I shall be considered as his reputed parent. The right must, I say, according to reason and common sense, lie with the parent; and in adoption, it must be God who chooses His own children.

The church, again, is called a *building*. With whom does the architecture of the building rest? With the building? With the stones? Do the stones select themselves? Did that stone over yonder in the corner choose its place? Or that which is buried there in the foundation, did it select its proper position? No; the architect alone disposes of his chosen materials according to his own will. And thus, in building the Church which is the great house of God, the great Master Builder reserves to Himself the choice of the stones, and the places which they shall occupy.

Take a yet more apparent case. The Church is called Christ's Bride. Would any man here agree to have any person forced upon him as his bride? There is not a man among us who would for a single moment so demean himself as to give up his rights to choose his own spouse; and shall Christ leave to human will who His Bride shall be? No; but my Lord Jesus, the Husband of the Church, exercises the sovereignty which His position permits Him, and selects His own Bride.

Again, we are said to be *members of Christ's body*. We are told by David, that in God's book, "All our members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them"—thus, every man's body had its members written in God's book. Is Christ's body to be an exception to this rule? Is that great Body of divine Manhood, Christ Jesus, the mystical Savior—is that to be fashioned according to the whims and wishes of free will, while other bodies, vastly inferior, have their members written in the book of God? Let us not dream thus—it were to talk idly, and not to know the meaning of the metaphors of Scripture!

It seems clear to me, according to the figures and illustrations of Scripture that the final choice of the men to be saved must be left with God. Is not this, dear friends, most agreeable to your own experience? I am sure it is to mine. There may be some who hate this doctrine—there may be some whose very mouths foam while they hear us talk of the sovereignty of God; but I confess, it touches a secret spring in my nature which can compel me to weep when nothing else can. There is a something in my consciousness which seems to say, "He must have chosen me, for I never could have chosen Him." I was determined to live in sin; prone to wander; fond of iniquity; drinking down evil as the ox drinks his fill of water—and now saved by grace—dare I for a moment impute that salvation to my own choice? I do choose God most freely, most fully, but it must be because of some previous work upon my heart changing that heart, for my unrenewed heart never could have chosen Him. Beloved, do you not feel at this very time that the natural bent of your thoughts is away from God? If the grace of God were taken from

you, what would you be? Are you not just like the bow which is bent when the string keeps it so—but cut that string and it flies back to its old place? Would it not be so with you? Would you not at once return to your former ways if the mighty grace of God were withdrawn from you? Well then, you clearly see that, if even now that you are regenerate, your corrupt nature does not choose God, much less could it have chosen Him when there was no new nature to keep it in check and to control it. My Master looks into your faces, O you His people, and He says, “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.” And we each feel that He wakes the echo of our hearts, for we reply, “Yes, Lord, we have not chosen You in our natural estate, but You have chosen us, and unto Your free and sovereign choice be honor forever and ever.”

II. May we feel the present influences of the Holy Spirit while we dwell upon the ELECTION ITSELF.

The Lord is about to choose a people who shall give honor to the cross of Christ. They are to be redeemed by precious blood and they are to be in some sense a worthy reward for the great sufferings of Jesus. Now, observe how *strange* the choice He makes is. I read with astonishment, “He has not chosen many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.” If man had received the power of choosing, these are just the persons who would have been selected! “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confuse the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confuse the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised.” If man had governed the selection, these are the very persons who would have been left out! The choice is very strange, very strange; I believe even in heaven it will be the subject of eternal wonder, and except for the reasons given in our text, we should have been at a loss to know why it was that, with divine scorn, He passed by the palaces of haughty kings, and looked after the base-born and the lowly to make them the subjects of His choice.

Observe that while it is strange, it has this peculiarity about it—it is *directly contrary to human choice!* Man chooses those who would be most helpful to him—God chooses those to whom He can be the most helpful. We select those who may give us the best return—God frequently selects those who most *need* His aid. If I choose a friend, the tendency is to him because of certain serviceableness that there may be in him to myself—this is the selfishness of man; but God chooses His friends according to the serviceableness which He Himself may render to the chosen one. It is the very opposite way of choosing. We select those who are best because they are most deserving; God selects those who are worst because they are least deserving, so that His choice may be more clearly seen to be an act of grace and not of merit. I say it is clearly contrary to man's way of choosing. Man selects the most beautiful, the most lovely; God, on the contrary, seeing the blackness and filthiness of everything which is called lovely, will not select that which is called so, but takes that which even men discover to be unlovely, makes it lovely with the loveliness which He puts upon it. Strange choice! Is this the manner of men, O Lord?

You will observe that the choice is *very gracious*—oh, how gracious in your case and in mine! It is gracious even in its exclusion. It does not say, “Not any wise men,” it only says, “Not many,” so that the great ones are not altogether shut out. Grace is proclaimed to the prince, and in heaven there are those who on earth wore coronets and prayed. How blessed is the condescending grace of the choice—it takes the weak things, the foolish things. One would have thought that when God said, “No,” to the prince, He must have said it in order that He might be excused from giving mercy to anybody—for we are in the habit of saying, “Well, we have refused Mr. So-and-So, and he is a much more important person than you are, therefore, I cannot give the favor to you. Why, the king asked me such a favor, and I would not do it for him; why do you think I should do it for you?” But God reasons another way; He passes by the king on purpose that He may meet with the beggar; He leaves the noble that He may lay hold upon the base; He passes over the philosopher that He may receive the fool. Oh, this is strange, it is unbelievably strange! It is marvelous! Let us praise Him for this wondrous grace!

Oh, how *encouraging* is this for us this morning. Some of us cannot boast of any pedigree; we have no great learning; we have no wealth; our names are all unknown to fame; but oh, what a mercy! He has been pleased to choose just such foolish things as we are, such despised creatures as ourselves; such things that are not to bring to nothing the things that are!

Not to spend all the time, this morning, in simply pointing out this strange choice and wondering at it, let it suffice us to observe that every Christian who finds himself chosen will think his own election to be the strangest choice that could have been made—

*“What was there in you that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
‘It was even so, Father!’ you ever must sing,
‘Because it seemed good in Your sight.’”*

III. We will now turn to THE ELECTED. The chosen ones are described negatively and positively.

They are described *negatively*. “Not many wise men after the flesh.” Observe, it does not merely say, “Not many wise men,” but, “Not many wise men *after the flesh*,” because God *has* chosen truly wise men, since all His people are *made* truly wise, but it is the “wise *after the flesh*” who God has not chosen. The “*sophoi*,” as the Greek calls them—the philosophers, the men who pretend to have wisdom or to love wisdom, the cunning, the metaphysical, the great students, the keen observers, the rabbis, the doctors, the infallibles, the men who look down with profound scorn upon the illiterate and call them idiots, and treat them as if they were the dust beneath their feet—these are not chosen in any great number. Strange, is it not? And yet a good reason is given. If they were chosen, why then they would say, “Ah, how much the gospel owes to us; how our wisdom helps it!” If the first 12 apostles had all been doctors or sages, everybody would have said, “Why, of course the gospel was mighty; there were the 12 picked wise men of Judea, or of Greece, to support it.” But instead of that, God looks round the creeks and bays after 12 poor fishermen, who are as ignorant as any He can find! He takes them and they become the apostles. They spread the gospel, and the gospel has the glory, and not the apostles. The wise are passed by in the wisdom of God.

Observe next, He says, “Not many mighty.” The wise might have forced their way to heaven by their wit, one would think, but there they are with their blind learning, fumbling for the latch of heaven’s door, while the illiterate and simple-minded have already entered in! Blind wisdom gropes in the dark, and like the wise men, it goes to Jerusalem in vain, while poor, humble shepherds go to Bethlehem and find Christ at once! Here comes another order of great men! The mighty men, the valiant champions, the princes, his imperial highness, the conquerors, the Alexanders, the Napoleons—are not these chosen? Surely, when the king becomes a Christian, he can, with his sword, compel others to receive Christ—why not choose him? “No,” says the text, “not many mighty.” And you see why—because if the mighty had been chosen, we would all say, “Oh, yes, we see why Christianity spreads so—it is the good temper of the sword blade, and the strength of the arm that wields it.” We can all understand the progress of Mohammedanism during its first three centuries. Men like Ali and Khaled were ready to strike whole nations; they leaped upon their steeds, waved their scimitars over their heads, and dashed against hundreds, fearless of the fight. And it was only when they met such men as our Richard Coeur de Lion that Mohammedanism was put back for a while; when the sword met sword, then they who took it perished with it. Christ chose no warriors—one of his disciples used a sword, but it was to very poor effect—for he only cut off a man’s ear, and Christ touched that and healed it, and that was the end of poor Peter’s fighting. So the glory of the Lord’s conquests does not depend upon the mighty; God has not chosen them.

Then he says, “Not many noble,” by which he means those with a long pedigree, descended through a line of princes, from the loins of kings, with blue blood in their veins. “Not many noble,” for nobility might have been thought to stamp the gospel with its prestige. “Oh, yes, there is no wonder that the gospel spreads when my Lord this, and the Duke of that bends to it.” Yes, but you see there were few such in the early Church; the saints in the catacombs were poor, humble men and women; and it is a very memorable fact that, out of all the inscriptions in the catacombs of Rome, written by the early Christians, there is scarcely one which is properly spelled; but nearly all of them are as bad in grammar as they are in spelling—a clear proof that they were scratched there by poor, illiterate, ignorant men, who were then the defenders of the faith, and the true conservators of the grace of God.

We have thus the negative side—not the wise, not the mighty, not the noble. But now, the *positive* side, and I want your careful attention to the expression used by the apostle. “God has chosen the foolish men”?—no, it does not say so—“the foolish *things*,” as if the Lord’s chosen were not by nature good enough to be called men, but were only “things.” As if the world looked down on them with such scorn

that they did not say, "Who are these men?" but, "Who are these things?" Once or twice in Luke you will observe Christ called a "fellow," but the word "fellow" is put in italics, not being in the original—for the Greek runs, "as for this _____, we know not where He is." They did not say what He was, did not even call Him a "fellow," though the translation is very good, as giving a correct idea to the ordinary reader. They seem to say of Christ, "As for this _____, well, call Him a *beast* if you like, a *thing* if you like." And so Paul has put it here—"the foolish *things*"—not simply foolish *men*, whom the world would consider to be unlearned, ignorant, stupid dolts, led by the nose, and easily deceived into believing this or that, but—"foolish things," which are nothing but stupidity, has God chosen.

Next, God has chosen, "The weak things." Observe the word "things" with care; they were not merely weak men, but the world thought them weak *things*. "Ah," said Caesar in the hall, if he said anything at all about it—"Who is King Jesus? A poor wretch who was hanged upon a tree! Who are these men who are setting Him up? Twelve poor fishermen who could hardly muster one single talent of gold between them! Who is this Paul who raves so lustily about Christ? A tentmaker! Who are his followers? A few despised women who meet him at the waterside! Is Paul a philosopher? No, he was publicly laughed at upon Mars' Hill—they counted what he said to be mere babbling." No doubt, Caesar thought they were altogether too inconsiderable to be worthy of his notice, but the "weak things" God has chosen.

Observe the next description, "The base things." The word there signifies things without pedigree, things without a father, things which cannot trace their descent—no Sir Harry, no Right Honorable is akin to them. Their father was a nobody and their mother was a nothing. Such were the apostles of old—they were the base things of this world, and yet God chose them!

As if this were not enough, it is written, "Things that are despised," sneered at, persecuted, hunted about, or treated with what is worse—with indifference—which is worse than scorn. They are not worth notice—inconsiderable fools—pass them by and let them alone." And yet these had God chosen!

Once more, as if to outdo all and sum it up in one word, "Things that are not" has God chosen. Nothings, nonentities. "Oh," says the man of the world, "yes, I did just hear that there were a parcel of fanatics of that kind." "Oh," says another, "I never even heard of them! I never mix myself up in any way with such a low-bred, vulgar set. Did they ever have a bishop among them? A Right Reverend Father in God?" No, nothing of the kind, sir, they are foolish, base, mean, despised; the world, therefore, rejects them. "Yet," says God, "I choose them." They are the very people that He chooses. Now, observe that what was true in Paul's day is true now, for the Bible does not change as years revolve; and in 1864, God chooses the things which are despised just as much as in the year 64; and He will yet let the world know that those who are ridiculed, styled fanatics, thought to be mad and wicked, are yet, after all, His chosen ones destined for God and for His truth to rally the sacramental host of the elect, and win for God the battle of the last day. In this, we are not ashamed to glory, that God chooses the things which are despised; and we can take our place with the despised people of God, hopeful to partake in the election of His sovereign grace.

IV. To conclude, you have THE REASONS WHY GOD HAS CHOSEN THESE PEOPLE. There are two reasons given—the first is the immediate reason; the second is the ultimate reason.

The first, or *immediate reason*, is contained in these words, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confuse the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confuse the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are."

Observe, then, the *immediate reason* is, first, *to confuse the wise*. For one wise man to confuse another wise man is remarkable; for a wise man to confuse a foolish man is very easy; but for a foolish man to confuse a wise man—ah, this is the finger of God! You know how it was with the first apostles. A philosopher listened to Paul, and when he had heard him, he said, "There is nothing in it! Perfect foolishness! Pack of stuff from beginning to end! No need for us to take the trouble to answer it." Years rolled on, and when the philosopher was getting very gray, that pestilent heresy of Christianity was spreading everywhere—his own daughter was converted, even his wife used to steal out at night to the secret assembly. The philosopher could not understand it. "There," he said, "I proved without a doubt that it was all stupidity, and yet these people stick to it! I answered all their arguments, did I not? I not only answered and confuted, but I clinched my arguments in such a way that I thought I had put an end to the folly altogether. But here, I see it in my own household!" Sometimes the philosopher had to stand

with tears in his eyes, and say, "I feel it in my own heart, it has beaten me, it has confused me—I could reason and rationalize and beat poor Paul—but Paul has beaten me! What I thought was folly has confused my wisdom." Within a few centuries after the death of Christ, the Christian religion had spread over the civilized world, while paganism, which had all the philosophy of the east and of the west to back it up, had fallen into disrepute and was laughed to scorn.

Again, God has chosen the weak things to *confuse the mighty*. "Oh," said Caesar, "we will soon root up this Christianity—off with their heads!" The different governors hastened one after another of the disciples to death, but the more they persecuted them, the more they multiplied. The proconsuls had orders to destroy Christians; the more they hunted them, the more Christians there were, until at last, men pressed to the judgment seat and asked to be permitted to die for Christ! They invented torments, they dragged the saints at the heels of wild horses, they laid them upon red-hot gridirons; they pulled off the skin from their flesh piece by piece, they were sawn in two, they were wrapped in skins and daubed with pitch—and set in Nero's gardens at night to burn. They were left to rot in dungeons, they were made a spectacle to all men in the amphitheater, the bears hugged them to death, the lions tore them to pieces, the wild bulls tossed them upon their horns and yet Christianity spread! All the swords of the legionaries which had put to rout the armies of all nations, and had overcome the invincible Gaul and the savage Briton, could not withstand the feebleness of Christianity—for the weakness of God is mightier than men! If God had chosen the mighty men, they would have turned round and said, "God is beholden to us." If He had chosen the wise, they would have said, "Our wisdom has done it." But when He chooses the foolish and weak, where are you now, philosopher? Has not God laughed you to scorn? Where are you now, O sword and spear? O mighty man, who wields them, where are you? God's weakness has routed you!

It is said that He chose the things that are not *to bring to nothing the things that are*. This is even more than confusing them to bring them to nothing. "The things that are." What were they in the apostles' days? Jupiter, seated upon his lofty throne, holds the thunderbolt in his hand; Saturn reclined as the father of the gods; Venus delighted her worshippers with her lustful pleasures; the chaste Diana sounded her horn. Here comes Paul with, "There is no God but God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent," He represents, "The things that are not." So contemptible is the heresy of Christianity that, if a list were made out of the religions of different countries, Christianity would have been left out of the catalog! But see the result! Where is Jupiter now? Where is Saturn? Where are Venus and Diana? Except as classical names in the dictionaries of the learned, where are they? Who bows before the shrine of Ceres in the day of harvest, or who lifts up his prayers to Neptune in the hour of storm? Ah, they have gone; the things that are have been brought to nothing by the things that are not!

Let us reflect that what is true in Paul's day is true today. This year, 1864, shall see repeated the miracles of the olden times—the things that are shall be brought to nothing by the things that are not. See in Wickliffe's time; the things that are were the holy crucifixes in every church; St. Winifred, St. Thomas of Canterbury are worshipped by all the multitudes of Englishmen. There comes my lord Archbishop through the street; yonder is the Pope worshipped by thousands, and there is the Virgin adored of all! What do I see? A solitary monk at Lutterworth begins to preach against the begging friars, and in preaching against them, he finds out the truth of God, and begins to preach that Christ is the only ground of salvation, and that they who trust in Him are saved! Well, it was such a contemptible thing that, at first, they did not care to persecute him. It is true, at last, he was brought up before his grace at St. Paul's, but there was a strong man, one John O'Gaunt, who came up with him, and said a word or two in his rough way, and Wickliffe was allowed to sit down; and though condemned, he returns to his parish of Lutterworth. "The thing that was not!" It was not worthy to be put down by blood. It would die out of itself. Did it die out? Where are your holy crucifixes today? Where is St. Thomas of Canterbury, where are St. Agnes and St. Winifred? Ask our Puseyite friends, for they alone can tell you. True consorts of the moles and of the bats—they know where the idols have been cast, and they seek to restore the superstitions of the past. But by God's grace, their task shall be no easy one!

The present system of English superstition, with its water regeneration, its baptismal grace, its confirmations, and its giving of grace through bread and wine—though it is attacked by those who are things that are not—shall yet cease to be; and the truth as it is in Jesus, and the pure simple faith that no man is a priest distinctively above his fellows—that every Christian is a priest unto God; and the pure

truth, I say, that no water can necessarily bring the Spirit of God with it, and that no outward forms and rites have any virtue in them—apart from the faith of those who receive them—these, backed by the Spirit of God, shall bring to nothing the things that are! Herein we fall back upon the strength of God. I would not have God's champions stronger. Brethren, were they stronger, they would take glory to themselves. Let them be weak, and let them be few, and let them be despised; their fewness, their poverty, their weakness shall make the shout of praise unto the eternal Conqueror yet more loud, and the music shall be undivided—there shall be only this refrain—"Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory for Your truth's sake."

This, then, is God's immediate objective in choosing foolish things, weak things, things that are not—to confuse the mighty. But His *ultimate reason is* "That no flesh may glory in His presence." I want you to notice that last sentence, and I have done. He does not say, "That no man"—no, the text is in no humor to please anybody—it says, "That no *flesh*." What a word! What a word, I say! Here are Solon and Socrates, the wise men. God points at them with His finger and calls them, "Flesh." Flesh is sold in the shambles, is it not? Dogs tear it. Worms eat it—nothing but flesh. There is Caesar with his imperial purple cast about him, and as he stands erect, the mighty Emperor, how the Praetorian guards unsheathe their swords and shout, "Great is the Emperor! Long may he live!" "*Flesh*," says God's Word, "*Flesh*." Here they come tramping on, hundreds in a line, the strong legionaries of Rome; who can stand against their swords and shields? "Flesh," says the Word of God, "Flesh." Here are men whose sires were of royal lineage and grandsires of imperial rank, and they can trace back the long line of honor. "Flesh," says God, "flesh, nothing but flesh," dogs' meat, worms' meat, when God wills it. "That no flesh may glory in His presence." Do you see, then? God puts this stamp upon us all—that we are nothing but flesh—and He chooses the poorest flesh, and the most foolish flesh, and the weakest flesh—that all the other flesh, that is only flesh and only grass, may see that God pours contempt on it, and will have no flesh glory in His presence!

Now, what is your spirit this morning towards this subject? Do you kick at it? Do you say you cannot bear it? I am afraid you want to glory in God's presence. Your view of things and God's view of things differ, and therefore, you need to have a new heart and a right spirit.

But, on the contrary, do you say this morning, "I have nothing to boast of, I would not glory in Your presence, but I would lie in the very dust and say, 'Do with me as You will'?" Sinner, do you feel that you are nothing but flesh and sinful flesh? Are you so broken before God that you feel, let Him do as He will with you, and He will be just, and you can only appeal to His sovereign mercy? Then, God and you are one, you are reconciled! I can see that you are reconciled. When God and you are agreed that God should reign, then God is agreed that you should live! Sinner, touch the scepter of His grace! Jesus crucified stands before you now and bids you look to Him and live! That you are bid to look is an instance of mighty grace—and that you are *enabled* to look this morning will be a wonder of divine love, for which you will have to bless Him in time and eternity! And now, may that God, whose name we have sought to honor this morning, bless these stammering lips of ours, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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