

A FEAST FOR FAITH NO. 711

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 16, 1866
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“This also comes forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.”
Isaiah 28:29.*

ISAIAH admired the farmer’s skill in his calling. He mentions with admiration the various methods adopted by the farmer in the rotation of crops, in the choice of different soils for certain seeds, in the methods of binding up and stowing away his produce; and he enlarges especially upon the different methods of threshing which were used by the Orientals, some tender grain being threshed out by a staff in a man’s hand, and others being dragged out of the husk by coarser means, such as by being trampled upon by the feet of oxen, pressed by the turning of a cart wheel upon them, or by the dragging them through a sharp threshing instrument having teeth. He considered, I suppose, that the art of agriculture was in a high state of perfection; I wonder what he would say if he could observe it now, and see the wonderful machines which no sooner go into a field or a brickyard than they accomplish with ease in a few hours that which was once the labor of days or even weeks! Certainly he would exclaim with even greater emphasis than he did concerning the agriculture of his own day—“This also comes forth from the Lord of hosts.”

The sentiment of the text on its surface is, that *the art, and science, and skill of man, are the gifts of God*. The prophet instances only agriculture, but the same principle applies to all the arts and manufacturing, and in a higher degree still to those more sublime sciences which elevate the human mind and make us acquainted with the majestic and mysterious powers of nature. We are bound to trace human wisdom up to Divine wisdom, even in those things which have no relation to the eternal interests of men, but which have a beneficial influence upon their present state. We read of Bezalel, the son of Uri, that the Lord said, “I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.” Then it is added, “And in the hearts of all who are wise-hearted I have put wisdom.” We are to ascribe the thoughtful, inventive mind, and the dexterous, clever hand, to Him who is the great Instructor of man. We trace directly to God the marvelous philosophy of Newton, and the skill of Watt and Stevenson, because the very slightest consideration shows us that there was originally a peculiarity in the constitution and formation of such minds as theirs. The most of us could have done nothing of the kind if we had tried all our days. There may be men of inventive genius here, but I suppose that nine out of ten of us can make no pretense to the possession of anything of the sort, and therefore we are led to ask, “Where did the faculty come from?” Surely the fertile brain of invention must be the Creator’s gift. A later providence also has a hand in the business, for many men whose minds would naturally have gone in the direction of invention, are turned into quite another course by the force of circumstances—

*“Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
And chilled the genial current of their soul.”*

It was surely God’s providence which in other cases found a channel for the natural passion, and allowed the soul to flow as it willed. And how often, too, some of the greatest inventions have been due to the simplest accidents! The puffing of steam from a kettle, or the falling of an apple from a tree have led thoughtful minds to discover great and important truths, and who shall attribute these circumstances to any but to Him, who “works all things according to the counsel of His will,” and who gives wisdom to the wisest of the sons of men? Let us adore the Mighty God, not only as we read our Bibles, but as we traverse the halls of art and science, and visit the exhibitions which in these days of ours are being reared on every side. Let us make man’s skill speak to us of God’s glory, and as we look upon them, instead of saying, “Great are you, O man! And great are the marvels of your genius,” let us say, “Great are You, O

God, in thus instructing man, and guiding him to those principles and properties of matter, by the knowledge of which his mortal existence is cheered and brightened.”

The drift of the writer of the text is this—*if God thus instructs man in wisdom, how wise must He be Himself!* If the mere rays which come from Him convey to us so much light that we are perfectly astonished at what man can do, what must be the infinite wisdom in counsel, and the excellence of works which are to be discovered in God Himself! If the human mind at last has linked two far-divided continents together, and annihilated space and time, and even made the old ocean to be the preserver rather than the destroyer of the slender line along which the fluid lightning flashes at man’s bidding—if man has bridged the mightiest rivers, and has forced his roads through pathless forests and rocky mountains, being taught to do so by God, then what cannot God do? If the pupil, the poor puny pupil, can accomplish these marvels, what cannot the Master perform? Must He not be wonderful in His counsel? Must He not be excellent in His works? Thus the prophet conducts our mind from man to God. I wish that all teachers did the same; but how many there are whose main business appears to be to divert the mind *from* God, and to ignore His existence!

There are two things which shall occupy our attention this morning; the first is—*the vision of God which the text presents to us*, and the second is—*the lesson which such a vision is calculated to teach us*.

I. First, let us behold THE VISION OF GOD WHICH IS PRESENTED TO US IN THE TEXT.

The Lord of hosts is seen by the enlightened eye, first of all, in His council-chamber, and then in His great workshop, and in both He is the subject of prophetic admiration; He is “wonderful in counsel.” He is “excellent in working.”

Let us remark at the outset that *it is clear from the text that God does not work without a plan*. God has not left the world to *chance*. There are some men who are always kicking against the doctrine of an eternal purpose, and who grow angry if you assert that God has settled what shall occur. It is by the consent of all agreed that man is foolish if he works without a plan, and yet they cry out when we insist that God also, in all His working, is fulfilling a well-arranged design. Depend upon it, however, let men rebel against this truth of God as they will, that God has determined the end from the beginning. He has left no screw loose in the machine; He has left nothing to chance or accident. Nothing with God is the subject of an “if,” or a “perhaps,” but even the agency of man, free as it is, as untouched and undisturbed as if there were no God, even this is guided by His mysterious power, and works out thoroughly His own purpose in every jot and tittle. He wings the thunderbolt, and shall He not guide the most passionate spirit? He puts a bit into the mouth of the whirlwind, and shall He not control the most ambitious will? He takes care that even the sea shall come no farther than He bids it, and shall not the heart of man be equally subject to the divine purpose? Yielding to man his free agency, giving to him his responsibility, leaving him as free as if there were no purpose and no decree, yet the eternal Jehovah works out His plans, and achieves His purpose to the praise of His glory.

The great principle of the text is that *God has a plan, and that this plan is wonderful in itself, and is found to be excellent when it is carried out*. This may be illustrated in many ways, and let us remark at once that *it is illustrated in nature*. All creation is full of traces of a divine Design. It is true that the Lord took no counsel with His angels, nor sought direction from any beings. “With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him?” He alone meted out the heavens with a span, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance; but they were weighed and measured, and nothing was made without the most accurate calculation. Even that which appears to us to be irregular in the divine work is only undiscovered order. The stars seem cast about upon the floor of heaven as men might fling gold dust from their hands; yet there is not a single star whose place might be altered without mischief to the whole arrangement. Who has studied astronomy who does not know that the size of every planet, its place in the solar system, the density of its matter, the length of its year, and everything connected with it, is arranged upon a scale so accurate that they can be calculated by the mathematician with the utmost ease? Such is the wisdom manifested in the arrangement of those ponderous orbs of heaven. And here on earth is it not one of the clearest arguments for Godhead that design is visible everywhere? Take the meanest animal, or the smallest insect, and you will find in it the most admirable contrivances to suit the habits of the creature and to make it happy in its condition. No, these creatures not only show design, but supply proof that the design is excellent in its working, for every fish that passes through the paths of the sea declares in its easy and graceful motion that the plan of its formation works admirably, and so with every bird and beast. No creature has to go to its Creator and complain, “There is a defect in my structure; I cannot carry out the end for which I was designed.” Our own bodies, too, so curiously

worked, full of nerves and muscles, the matchless needlework of God's patient fingers, and have about them, if we did but observe them, ten thousand proofs of the surpassing foresight and masterly art of the great Maker. Oh that being so wondrously made by God we might feel bound to show forth His praise!

Beloved friends, a second illustration of this truth of God may very easily be drawn from *providence*. The great providential operations of God are all the result of His fore-determined purpose and decree. From the first moment when Hiddekel and Euphrates, with their silvery flood, rolled joyously through the midst of Paradise, rippling over sands of gold, down to the last great day when the mighty angel shall stand upon the sea and upon the earth, and swear by Him that lives forever and ever that time shall be no longer, everything that has moved or shall move in heaven, and, earth, and hell, has been, is, and shall be according to the counsel and foreknowledge of God, fulfilling a purpose holy, just, wise, and unalterable. The whole poem of providence, when it shall be read in the light of eternity, shall be found worthy of the Infinite Mind. Even that part of human history which has been already written, though it may appear unintelligible at first sight, when it comes to be thoroughly studied has an explanation very near at hand. Did not God, age by age, prepare the world for the coming of the Lord Jesus in the flesh, and is He not now preparing it for His second coming in His glory? All the way up till now every lover of the Lord will see that the awful wheels of providence have worked with excellent regularity. Empires have fallen, but the truth of God has risen. Dynasties have perished, but immortal principles have conquered. Slaughter has sown her seed in crimson furrows, but liberty has ultimately reaped the golden harvest. Famine and pestilence have made the earth to quake beneath their terrible footsteps when they came as messengers of the avenging God, but flowers of goodness have sprung up in their awful tracks. The most fearful calamities have hidden us beneath their wings from calamities yet greater. The mischief of a day has begotten for us blessings which have endured for ages. God has shown in providence, even until now, that He is wonderful in design and excellent in working.

But, believer, perhaps you will be more interested if I say that *your own personal experience of that providence* goes to prove this with equal clearness. Oh, how wondrous in design has God been in His dealings with you! You have felt many trials, and you are not able to understand the reason of it all; you have been sitting down by the side of the vast sea of providence, and you have been asking—Why this? And Why that? And trying to fathom the mystery with the shallow line of your own judgment; but depend upon it that the need for all that you have suffered has been most accurately determined by God. You must have seen that He overrules all things for your good. Have you not to thank God today, you gray-headed saints, for the afflictions of your youth? And as to the trials of your riper years, can you not say of them, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Your word"? You lost a friend once, but you never knew how much you gained by that loss, nor how much misery that trial spared you. Some of you might never have been saved at all were it not that, like Manasseh, you were taken among the thorns. You had determined to live and die a worldling, and if the house in which you lived so comfortably had not been consumed with fire you would have dwelt there still; but now you are a stranger and a sojourner, and are looking for "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Happily for you, you did not see the plan of your life when you commenced it; but equally happy for you is it that there was such a plan, that your life has been arranged on the best possible principles, so that if you had been gifted with unerring wisdom, you would have arranged a life for yourselves exactly similar to the one through which you have passed. I know you will say, "Well, to begin with, I would not have been born a child of poverty if I could have helped it; I would have prospered in business if I could have had my own way; I would have been in quite another locality from that in which I now reside if I could have had my own choosing." Yet, be persuaded that in every deviation from your past lot, you would have been rushing into peril, and the happy results of which you will have to sing in heaven might have been prevented had there been an alteration in any degree in God's dealings with you.

Many of you will be more pleased with another illustration. The wondrous planning of the excellent Worker is plainly seen in *the great economy of redemption*. Well may angels desire to look into the scheme by which God ordained that fallen man should rise by his fall, and should rise by a means similar to that by which he fell; while God should be glorified even more than if sin had never entered. Redemption is the most divine of God's thoughts. It is marvelous that He should give His own Son to be incarnate for the sake of His creatures; that God the mighty Maker should appear in human flesh and become a man, so that fallen, sinful, and miserable man might be lifted up, and become the son of God. What a dream was that of Jacob when he saw the ladder, the foot of which rested upon the earth, and the

top reached up to the seventh heaven! That dream is more than realized when I see the foot of the ladder in the humanity of Christ, fixed in Bethlehem's manger, or if you will, at Calvary's cross, and then behold the top of that ladder reaching up to the eternal throne, where He reigns as "God over all, blessed forever," who was also "the Son of Man." When I look at each of the rungs of that ladder, and see the proofs of Divine love in the Savior's sighs and tears, and bloody sweat, and passion, and death, I am lost in wonder! Truly it is a matchless scheme by which justice has its due, and mercy has its sway, by which vengeance is satisfied, holiness is gratified, and yet love and mercy, uncontrolled and unlimited, sway their silver scepter among the sons of men. When I see this great sight, those words of Isaiah's ring with a bell-like music in my ears, "He is wonderful in counsel." But, beloved, when you see redemption worked out, and when you think that God really gave His only Son and that this Son actually did come to Bethlehem, really lived among the sons of men, bowed His neck to the yoke of obedience, and gave His hands to the nails, and His side to the spear—that His death was no fiction, but a grand reality—when you see that redemption completed by the resurrection of the Master, and hear the angelic shouts as He ascends on high, leading captivity captive, and see heaven lit up with a supernal splendor as He mounts to His well-earned throne, you then find that He is as wonderful in the carrying out of redemption as He is in the proposing of it, that He is wonderful in counsel, and that He is also excellent in working.

Then, brothers and sisters, turning from redemption itself, look at the gospel, and see how wonderful in counsel God was in that matter. If we were to hold a parliament of the wise men of England to settle the gospel, I will undertake to declare now what the gospel would be. I am sure as to the result; the majority of the members would decide that the gospel to be preached should be this—That men should be exhorted to do their best to "live righteously, honestly, and soberly in this present evil world," And then, through the merits of Christ, God would accept their lives, and they would be saved. Now, that happens NOT to be the gospel, but the law—or rather it is neither law nor gospel, but a mixture of both, which God despises, for it is neither hot nor cold, and He spits it out of His mouth as an abhorred thing. The apostle Paul peremptorily, over and over again, tells us that salvation is not by works; no, he tells us that it is not by works and divine grace put together, either; he testifies that the two principles neutralize and kill each other, and that a man must either be saved wholly as the result of God's favor, or else he must be saved altogether as the result of his own merit, for the two principles cannot in any way be combined. The gospel which we have to preach is just the reverse of what human wisdom would advise. It is not, "do and live," but "believe and live." Now I will show you in a moment that the gospel, which the world would propose, would be a most absurd gospel, because it would be of no service to the very persons who need it the most. Those who walk righteously, honestly, and soberly, may be put down as those who "have no need of a physician." Why, then, prescribe a medicine for them? Where would the gospel be for the sick? As for the men who feel their guilt before God, and their inability to conquer sin, what am I to say to them if the world's gospel is the true one? I can say nothing at all to them upon this supposition, but must leave them to their destruction! If I find them lying upon the bed dying, or if I meet with them in the hour of extremity, I can have no word of comfort to whisper in their ear at all, but can only remind them that if they had lived righteously, honestly, and soberly, things would have been different with them, which is not good news but a rebuke! But now I can come to all men, whoever they may be, sunken in degradation and steeped in vice, and say to them, "In the name of God trust Christ, and you shall be saved! The past shall be forgiven you, and as you trust Christ there shall come flashing into your soul a new life which shall make you hate the sins which have been your ruin, and make you love the ways of truth and righteousness. You shall be saved as the result of God's free favor, and the proof of it shall be that you shall be saved from the power of sin and purified from your iniquities." This gospel seems to me to be wonderful in its counsel because it is suited to the most abject and the most depraved; and I am a witness, among thousands of others, that it is excellent in its working.

The other system I spoke of would be bad in its working. Many preachers have had to confess the uselessness of mere moral preaching; one of them said he preached up honesty till his parish swarmed with thieves. There is no instance, I believe, on record, where the mere preaching of the law made a man love God, or where the heart ever was, or ever could be, renewed by preaching good works. As well hope to make a dark-skinned person white by pelting him with snowballs. But if it were right to do so, we could point out cases in this house this morning by scores, where the preaching of the Savior's love and the testimony of a free salvation for the undeserving has melted the heart, has changed the morals, has in fact produced such an effect that the drunk loves sobriety, that the harlot has become chaste, and

that the most abandoned are saved. The gospel plan is excellent in its working. The other plan, which looks as if it would repress vice, pulls up the very floodgates of it, for what you command a man not to do, that he will do; but when you come to him, not with a command, but with a sweet invitation of love, and with wooing words of comfort, bidding him look to Jesus and live, then the command which was irksome and impossible before becomes an easy yoke. I must hardly tarry longer to illustrate this great principle, or otherwise I might have spoken upon God's plan and God's work *in inward experience*. The experience of every Christian is, in some respects, different from the experience of every other, but it is still the result of God's plan. Your being led through a certain state of deep depression and of severe mental exercise is down in the book; and as for my brother yonder, his being led through a state of exultation and rapturous delight is down in the plan too; and it is right, that in one case you should have defeat, and that in the other case you should enjoy triumph. My brother shall be made a perfect man in Christ Jesus by his joys—some excellences will be in him which nothing but joy could have fostered; you also shall be brought to spiritual development by your sorrows, and some powers shall be in you which nothing but sorrow could ever have educated in your case. The experiences of God's servants are very like the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness—they were led here, and there, and roundabout, and yet their road was the best way to Canaan. Sometimes a straight line is not the shortest distance between two places; it is in mathematics, but it is not in experience, for there may be something between through which a straight line could not be drawn. There may be something in you which renders it necessary that God should not lead you in a straight line, and it may be best for you, to avoid some obstacles by going round about.

Another illustration will be found in *the use of instrumentality*. It is a wonderful design of God to use one man to be the means of the conversion of another, because the man who does the work is as much benefited as the man upon whom the work is done. It is a great means of divine grace to the minister to be allowed to preach as well as a great means of grace to the hearers to be able to hear. The Sunday school teacher is as much benefited as are his scholars; and all of you who are watering others shall be watered yourselves. It is a wise thing on the part of God to use the Christian for the good of others because it tends to edification. And then how excellent it is in working! I am sure there is nothing more excellent than when a church is all at work. Then you see the excellences of instrumentality—no pettifogging, no bickering, no jealousies, all are active. But let the same Christians have nothing to do, and straightway they meet with that black master who is said always to find work for idle people; they begin snarling, they become cantankerous and full of bitterness, and find fault, first with all the world in general, and then with their brethren in particular, and lastly with themselves. No man is so near to the utmost extremity of misery as that man who has nothing to do. "How died so and so?" asked one. "He died of having nothing to do," was the answer. "Ah," said the other, "that is enough to kill any of us!" And so it is; let us escape from such a calamity. It is wise in God's counsel to use instrumentality, and it is excellent in working when it comes to be carried out.

I must not, however, weary you with these illustrations. I will only say that the best illustration of all will be when, at the last, *God's counsels shall be perfectly fulfilled*. The end is coming. Although the ages may appear to drag their weary length along, yet he who looks upon them after God's fashion considers them to be but as a watch in the night; in a few more days the whole of God's purposes, with regard to the race of men here below, will be fulfilled; the last messenger of mercy will have delivered his message, and the last elect soul will have received it. The time shall come when the last vessel of mercy shall be taken out from among the ruins of the fall, and set in its place where Jesus dwells. Then comes the end, and when that end comes, we shall read, as far as may be, the whole of God's purpose as one grand poem, and there will not be one verse in it that has a syllable too much, or a word too little; there will not be one stanza or canto redundant, much less one that is erased, but from beginning to end we shall see the master pen and the mastermind drawing forth the glorious array of majestic thoughts; and with angels, seraphs, principalities, and powers, we shall burst forth into one mighty song—"Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! The Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" We shall see how from the first even to the last, the King has been sitting upon the floods and ruling all things according to His own will. "From seeming evil still evoking good, and better still, and better still in infinite progression," to the praise of His glory forever and ever.

II. This being the doctrine of the text, I now want, as God shall help me, to give you **SOME OF THE LESSONS FROM IT.**

Believe me, I have not laid down this doctrine in order that it may be a bed for you to stretch yourselves upon, nor even that it may be a blanket for you to wrap yourselves in, but I have done it with a practical purpose in view.

First, I have a word to say *to those unconverted persons who have some desire after salvation*. Dear hearers, I would to God that, seeing His counsel is so wondrous, *you would agree to it*. It is in His counsel that sinners shall be saved by grace through believing in Christ. You have been setting up your own notion. You say that sinners should be saved by getting themselves into a state of gloominess; that sinners should be saved by humbling their minds. At least, that is what I suppose you are saying, for you say you cannot be saved because you do not feel enough, that is to say, your plan is that you should be saved as sinners, prepared to be saved, and God's plan is that you should be saved just as you are. He wills to deal with you just where you now are, in your spiritual blindness, ignorance, hardness of heart, or whatever else may be the form of your spiritual malady; His plan is that you should look to Jesus as you are, and that, looking, you should live. You will find this plan of God's not only wise in counsel, but also excellent in working. I have tried it, and therefore I can speak experimentally. It is a blessed way of salvation, that way of, "Look and live," but the blessedness of it must be felt to be understood. I looked to Him and was lightened, and many, many, many around me have done the same, and could rise up now and sing the hymn—

*"I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad."*

You gave your mental assent to the principle which I laid down, that God is wonderful in His design, and excellent in working out His design; oh that you might give your heart's consent to this truth of God, and say, "Yes, Lord, it is a good way of salvation. I yield myself to it; Lord, work salvation in me; I will from now on have nothing to do with my own merit and strength; I will be dead, Lord, that You may live in me; I will be nothing, that You may be my all in all." Oh, I am happy, I am thrice happy, if a soul is now agreeing to that! O heart! You shall see His face, for when you accept Him it is a clear proof that He has long ago loved you, and when you are agreed with Him it is because He determined that you should be a sheep of His pasture.

Another word and this is not to the sinner, but *to you the people of God*. You believe that God is wise in His counsel, and excellent in His working, and you did not kick against the truth as I laid it down—did you? Now I want you *to agree to this in your own particular case*. I know there are some of you here who, when it comes to the point, believe it as a doctrine, but you do not believe it in your own case. You say, "I cannot understand God's dealings with me." As if it were expected that you should! But you also add, "I cannot believe that God has good designs in it." My dear friend, you must believe it, or else—what? Shall I dare to say it?—Yes, I will say it: John said that if a man did not believe God, he made God a liar, and so you who do not believe in God's wisdom make Him a fool! Do you not shrink from that? I know you must. You do in effect, when you doubt the wisdom of providence, make God out to be a blunderer, or else to be unkind! Would you do either? No, your heart is shocked at the idea. It is all right, then, my sister; it is all right, my brother; there cannot be a doubt of it, can there? If our business is in His hands, it will all come right. *You* cannot get the rudder round; the vessel will go on the wrong tack; but *He* can do it. *He* knows how to get to the point that you are aiming at and that *He* is aiming at, and *He* will get you there even as sailors get their vessels to where they want to go by tacking about. So will it be with you. Your course is all mapped out by your Lord. Nothing will take Him by surprise. There will be no novelties to Him. There will be no occurrences which He did not ordain, and for which, therefore, He has not provided. He has arranged all, and you have but to patiently wait and you shall sing a song of deliverance.

But these are not the lessons I wanted to teach. They are both valuable, but I now *desire to speak to those of my brothers and sisters who are my fellow workers*. The workers and the sufferers are the cream of the church. Workers, here is a lesson for you. I will try to learn it myself. It is this—*when we are going to work for God do not let us be in such a mighty hurry*. I know our slow-going friends will like that advice, but I do not mean what they think I do. Do not let us seem to encourage them in their laziness by making blunders through being hasty, for they will be sure to say, "Ah, you should have been as slow as we are, and you would not have fallen into these errors." just so, but it is better to do good and blunder than to lie and rot in idleness. Brother workers, let us have a well-formed plan, and let

it be God's plan. Very frequently I am afraid that we sketch out our plan ourselves, and if we do that without waiting upon God we are not walking in the path of faith, we are not bringing in Him who is "wonderful in counsel" to our help, and we must not, therefore, expect to have Him who is "excellent in working" for our assistance. We must do God's work in His own way. Sitting with Mary at the Master's feet is the very best preparation for doing the work which Martha did without being "cumbered" by it. Oh, when I know that I am following and not leading, that I am not running before God's cloud, and like a fool, hunting out my own way in the wilderness, but I see that I have His footsteps before me, it is happy and safe walking. Friends may say, "Ah, rash young man, you are risking so much"; and unbelief may cry, "Let me see the pounds, shillings, and pence, and we can go on"; but faith cries, "If it is God's way I know I am no fool; I know I am safe."—

*“Tis safer, Lord, to trust in Thee,
And on Your care depend,
Than trust in men of high degree,
Or even have kings our friend.”*

God never fails the man who, in simple, child-like faith, rests entirely upon Him. Have you never noticed that when you are content to wait for God's plan it opens up to you very wonderfully? You could not have opened it up, you did not understand it, but He cleared the way; instead of laying awake all night, how much better to go to sleep, and wake up in the morning, and find that God has done all for you. Faith goes forward in the name of God and the gates of iron open to her through Divine strength. Let not your wisdom misguide you; your folly will not if your wisdom does not. Let not your strength make you weak, and then your weakness will be no hindrance.

Do not imagine, when you have learned God's plan, that you will understand it—for it was not meant for you to understand. I do not suppose that the most of the bricklayers who are employed by our great builders understand at all what the house which they are building is to be like. Very likely nine out of ten of those who go up the ladder with the troughs of mortar, or stand on the scaffolding with their trowels at work, have no idea as to whether the building is to come out Gothic or Grecian. They have nothing to do with that; they have merely to carry their mortar and to lay the bricks, and do their day's work. This is just what you and I have to do. Whether the Lord may leave me to carry out the work, or whether He may take me off and put others to accomplish His design, should be the same to me; I have but to do my daily work, and to trust the great Architect who is "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working," that though I may not know it, He will most certainly bring out the best results from the accumulated labors of all His servants.

Again, when we do know God's plan, *we must remember to carry it out*, for that same God who is "wonderful in counsel" is also "excellent in working." Do not sit down and be so pleased with the plan that you never try it. I must confess that I like to see a well-thumbed Bible better than more dainty copies, because I see that it has been used. When you see a plan in an architect's office that is very new and very pretty to look at, you say, "Ah, nothing has been done with it." But when you see a plan that is smudgy, and torn, and almost broken through where it has been folded, you know that the man has done something with it. Now, do not fall in love with the plan, and think it is very pretty, but never carry it out. When Dr. Guthrie wanted his Ragged-schools founded, he called on a certain minister, who said, "Well you know, Mr. Guthrie, there is nothing very new in your scheme; I and Mr. So-and-So have been thinking over a plan similar to yours for the last 20 years." "Oh, yes," said Dr. Guthrie, "I dare say; but you have never carried it out." So some people are always thinking over some very fine plan of their own—but while the grass grows the steed starves! Now the God who plans also works; let us believe this. Christian, God has planned to divide the Red Sea, and He says, "Go forward!" And are you going to sit still till the sea is divided for you? No, in God's name, man, go forward, and the sea will be divided when you need it to be divided, but not before. What use would there be in having the Red Sea out of its normal condition, and its bed laid dry for hours before the hosts are to walk through it? You shall have God's help when you need it, and you are not to expect that God will minister to the cravings of your unbelief. No; trust in Him, and you shall see wonders; but if you will not trust in Him, neither shall you see Him. "He could not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

And, brothers and sisters, when you are resolved to carry out God's plan, *I hope you will joyfully expect singular assistance*. I may not often quote my own life as an example except to you who are my friends and fellow workers, and to whom my life is but your own brought out in public. You know how we, as a church, have been led to mysteriously see the hand of God. I remember one night, when we

resolved to build this house of prayer, we knew that we were poor, much too poor to ever be able to raise so large a sum as this house would cost, especially when the vow was registered that it should never be built with borrowed money, but should either be paid for or else not built at all. I remember preaching that evening from the text, “And the iron did swim,” and saying that the building of this house seemed as likely a thing to happen as if the iron should swim; but I said I was glad it was 25,000 pounds which we needed, for if it had been only 5,000 pounds, or 10,000 pounds, we might feel able to raise it, but 25,000 thousand pounds was impossible, only I believed that God could do impossibilities! It was one of the most singular things that ever occurred, when a friend at a distance whom I never saw but once in my life, and who had no connection with us, put down 5,000 pounds himself toward it! We were encouraged; we went to work, and the thing was done, and as it went on, more and more singular helps were sent. When the College of which I am president had been commenced, for a year or so, all my means were spent; my purse was dried up, and I had no other means of carrying it on. In this very house of prayer, one Sunday evening, after I had spent all I had for the support of my young men for the ministry—there is a dear friend, now sitting behind me who knows the truth of what I am saying. I said to him, “There is nothing left whatever.” He said, “You have a good banker, Sir.” “Yes,” I said, “and I should like to draw upon Him now, for I have nothing.” “Well,” he said, “how do you know? Have you prayed about it?” “Yes, I have.” “Well, then, leave it with Him; have you opened your letters?” “No, I do not open my letters on Sundays.” “Well,” he said, “open them for once.” I did so, and in the first one I opened there was a banker’s letter to this effect—“Dear Sir, We beg to inform you that a lady, totally unknown to us, has left with us 200 pounds for you to use in the education of young men.” Such a sum has never come since, and it never came before; and I have no more idea than the dead in their graves how it came then, nor who it came from, but to me it seemed that it came directly from God! We have gone on successfully ever since with that work, and are resolved to launch out into others; and I believe that we only need as a church, and your pastor only needs as your pastor, to have faith in God, and we shall find Him “wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.” Wherever there is the hand of a true man there is the wing of an angel! Wherever there is the working of the sword of Joshua and the prayer of Moses, the almighty arm of the God of Israel is present! You have but to believe, and to go forward, leaning upon Him who made heaven and earth, and all will be well.

Let us pluck up courage, and from this very morning let us feel that we are not to be guided by the dogmas of carnal prudence but by the dictates of FAITH IN THE INVISIBLE GOD. Let us no longer measure means, and calculate possibilities, but let us go to Him who cannot be measured or limited. Let us trust Him where we cannot trace Him. Let us serve Him with might and main, and, to use the words of Gerhardt—

*“Let us in life and death
His steadfast truths declare,
And publish with our latest breath,
His love and guardian care!”*

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 28:9-29.

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

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