

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

NO. 982

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 26, 1871,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Unto every one of us is given Grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Therefore He says, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it, but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things). And He gave some, Apostles. And some, Prophets. And some, Evangelists. And some, pastors and teachers. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”
Ephesians 4:7-12

OUR blessed Lord and Master has gone from us. From the Mount of Olives, the place where in dread conflict His garments were rolled in blood, He has mounted in triumph to His Throne. After having shown Himself for forty days among His beloved disciples, giving them abundant evidence that He had really risen from the dead, and enriching them by His Divine counsels, He was taken up. Slowly rising before them all, He gave them His blessing as He disappeared. Like good old Jacob, whose departing act was to bestow a benediction on his twelve sons and their descendants, so before the cloud received our Lord out of their sight, He poured a blessing upon the Apostles, who were looking upward, and who were the representatives of His Church.

He is gone! His voice of wisdom is silent for us, His seat at the table is empty, the congregation on the mountain hears Him no more. It would be very easy to have found reasons why He should *not* have gone. Had it been a matter of choice to us, we should have entreated Him to tarry with us till the dispensation closed. Unless, perhaps, Divine Grace had enabled us to say—“Not as we will! But as You will,” we should have constrained Him, saying, “Abide with us.”

What a comfort to disciples to have their own beloved Teacher visibly with them! What a consolation to a persecuted band to see their Leader at their head—difficulties would disappear, problems would be solved, perplexities removed, trials made easy, temptations averted! Let Jesus Himself, their own dear Shepherd be near, and the sheep will lie down in security. Had He been here we could have gone to Him in every affliction, like those of whom it is said, “they went and told Jesus.”

It seemed expedient for Him to stay, to accomplish the conversion of the world. Would not His Presence have had an influence to win by eloquence of gracious words and argument of loving miracles? If He put forth His power the battle would soon be over, and His rule over all hearts would be forever established. “Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies, whereby the people fall under You.” Go not from the conflict, You mighty Bowman, but still cast Your all-subduing darts abroad.

In the days of our Lord’s flesh, before He had risen from the dead, He did but speak, and those who came to take Him fell to the ground! Might we but have Him near us, no persecuting hand could seize us. At His bidding the fiercest enemy would retire. His voice called the dead out of their graves—could we but have Him still in the Church His voice would awaken the spiritually dead! His Presence would be better to us than ten thousand Apostles, at least, so we dream. And we imagine that with Him visibly among us, the progress of the Church would be like the march of a triumphant army!

Thus might flesh and blood have argued—but all such reasoning is hushed by our Lord’s declaration, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.” He might have told us that His majestic Presence was expected by the saints in Heaven to complete their felicity. He might have said that for Himself it was fitting that after so long an exile and the performance of such stupendous labors He should rise to His reward. He might also have added that it was due to His Father that He should return into the bosom of His Love.

But, as if He knew that their trembling at His departure was mainly occasioned by fear for their own personal interests, He puts the consoling word into this form—“It is expedient *for you* that I go away.” He has gone, then, and whether our weak understandings are able to perceive it or not, it is better for us that Jesus should be at the right hand of God than here corporeally in our assemblies below. Gladly would a hundred Bethanies entertain Him, a thousand synagogues would rejoice to see Him open the Scriptures.

There are women among us who would kiss His feet, and men who would glory to unloose the latches of His shoes. But He has gone away to the mountains of myrrh and the hills of frankincense. He no more sits at our tables, or walks with us on our highways. He is leading another flock to living fountains of waters, and let not His sheep below imagine that He has hurt them by His absence—unerring Wisdom has declared that it is expedient for us that He is gone.

This morning, instead of standing here gazing up into Heaven like the men of Galilee, deploring that we have lost our Lord, let us sit down in quiet contemplation and see if we cannot gather profit from this great thing which has come to pass. Let our meditations ascend the yet glowing trackway of our Lord's ascension—

*“Beyond, beyond this lower sky,
Up where eternal ages roll.”*

We shall, by the Holy Spirit's aid, first consider, with a view to practical good, *the fact of His Ascension*. Secondly, *the triumph of that Ascension*. Thirdly, *the gifts of that Ascension*. And then we shall conclude by noticing *the bearings of that Ascension upon the unconverted*.

I. First, then, let our earnest thoughts gaze upward, viewing THE FACT OF THE ASCENSION. We lay aside all controversy or attempt at mere doctrinal definition and desire to meditate upon the Ascension with a view to comfort, edification, and soul profit. *It should afford us supreme joy* to remember that He who descended into the lower parts of the earth has now, “ascended up far above all heavens.”

The descent was a subject of joy to angels and men, but it involved Him in much humiliation and sorrow, especially when, after having received a body, which, according to the Psalmist, was “curiously worked in the lowest parts of the earth,” He further descended into the heart of the earth, and slept as a prisoner in the tomb.

His descent on earth, though to us the source of abounding joy, was full of pain, shame, and humiliation to Him. In proportion, then, ought to be our joy that the shame is swallowed up in Glory—the pain is lost in bliss, the death in immortality. Did shepherds sing at His descent? Let all men sing at His rising! Well deserves the Warrior to receive Glory, for He has dearly won it! Our love of justice and of Him compels us to rejoice in His rejoicing. Whatever makes the Lord Jesus glad makes His people glad. Our sympathy with Him is most intense.

We esteem His reproach above all wealth, and we set equal store by His honor. As we have died with Him and were buried with Him in Baptism—we have also risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God who raised Him from the dead. So also have we been made to sit together in the heavenly places, and have obtained an inheritance. If angels poured forth their sweetest minstrelsy when the Christ of God returned to His royal seat, much more should we! Those celestial beings had but slight share in the triumphs of that day compared with us.

For it was a Man who led captivity captive, it was One born of woman who returned victoriously from Bozrah! We may well say with the Psalmist, in the sixty-eighth Psalm, to which our text refers, “Let the righteous be glad. Let them rejoice before God: yes, let them exceedingly rejoice. Sing unto God, sing praises to His name: extol Him that rides upon the heavens by His name YAH, and rejoice before Him.”

It was none other than Christ, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. It was the second Adam who mounted to His Glory. Rejoice, O Believers! As those who shout because of victory, divide the spoil with the strong—

*“Bruised is the serpent's head,
Hell is vanquished, death is dead,
And to Christ gone up on high,
Captive is captivity.
All His work and warfare done,
He into His Heaven is gone,
And beside His Father's Throne,
Now is pleading for His own—
Sing, O heavens!
O earth, rejoice!
Angel harp and human voice,
Round Him, in His Glory, raise
Your ascended Savior's praise.”*

Reflect yet again that from the hour when our Lord left it, *this world has lost all charms to us*. If He were in it, there were no spot in the universe which would hold us with stronger ties. But since He has gone up He draws us upward from it. The flower is gone from the garden, the first ripe fruit is gathered. Earth's crown has lost its brightest jewel, the star is gone from the night, the dew is exhaled from the morning, the sun is eclipsed at noon. We have heard of some who, when they lost a friend or favorite child, never smiled again—for nothing could supply the dreary vacuum.

To us it could not be that any affliction should bring us such grief, for we have learned to be resigned to our Father's will. But the fact that, "Jesus, our All, to Heaven is gone," has caused something of the same feeling in our souls. This world can never be our rest now—its power to content us is gone. Joseph is no more in Egypt, and it is time for Israel to be gone. No, Earth, my treasure is not here with you, neither shall my heart be detained by you. You are, O Christ, the rich treasure of Your people, and since You are gone, Your people's hearts have climbed to Heaven with You.

Flowing out of this is the great Truth that "*our conversation is in Heaven*, from where, also, we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Brethren, inasmuch as Christ is gone, our life is hid with Him in God. To Heaven our Head is gone, and the life of the members is there. Since the Head is occupied with things celestial, let not the members of the body be groveling as slaves to terrestrial things.

"If you, then, are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Our Bridegroom has gone into the ivory palaces. He dwells in the midst of His Brethren. Do we not hear Him calling us to commune with Him? Do you not hear His voice, "Rise up My love, My fair one, and come away"? Though awhile our bodies linger here, let our spirits even now walk the golden streets, and behold the King in His beauty.

Begin, O faithful Souls, today, the occupation of the blessed—praising God even while you linger below, and honoring Him—if not by the same modes of service as the perfect ones above, yet with the same obedient delight. "Our conversation is in Heaven." May you and I know what that means to the fullest. May we take up our celestial homestead rights, exercise our privileges and avocations as heavenly citizens, and live as those that are alive from the dead, who are raised up together and made partakers of His resurrection life.

Since the Head of the family is in Glory, let us, by faith, perceive how near we are to it, and, by anticipation, live upon its joys and in its power! Thus the Ascension of our Lord will remind us of Heaven and teach us the holiness which is our preparation for it. Our Lord Jesus Christ has gone from us. We return again to the thought. We cannot speak into His ears and hear His voice reply in those dear accents with which He spoke to Thomas and to Philip. He no longer sits at feasts of love with favored friends, such as Mary and Martha and Lazarus. He has departed out of this world unto the Father, and what then?

Why He has taught us by this the more distinctly, that *we must henceforth walk by faith and not by sight*. The Presence of Jesus Christ on earth would have been, to a great extent, a perpetual embargo upon the life of faith. We should all have desired to see the Redeemer. But since, as Man, He could not have been Omnipresent, but could only have been in one spot at one time, we should have made it the business of our lives to provide the means for journey to the place where He might be seen. Or if He Himself condescended to journey through all lands, we should have fought our way into the throng to feast our eyes upon Him, and we should have envied each other when the turn came for any to speak familiarly with Him.

Thank God we have no cause for clamor or strife or struggle about the mere sight of Jesus after the flesh! For though once He was seen corporeally by His disciples, yet now, after the flesh, we know Him no more. Jesus is no more seen of human eyes. And it is well, for faith's sight is saving, instructing, transforming—and mere natural sight is not so. Had He been here, we should have regarded much more the things which are visible. But now our hearts are taken up with the things which are not seen, but which are eternal.

This day we have no priest for eyes to gaze upon, no material altar, no temple made with hands, no solemn rites to satisfy the senses. We have done with the outward and are rejoicing in the inward. Neither in this mountain nor in that do we worship the Father, but we worship God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. We now endure as seeing Him who is invisible—Whom, having not seen, we love. In Whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

In the same fashion, as we walk towards our Lord, so walk we towards all that He reveals. We walk by faith, not by sight. Israel, in the wilderness, instructed by types and shadows, was ever prone to idolatry. The more there is of the visible in religion, the more difficulty there is in the attainment of spirituality. Even Baptism and the Lord's Supper—were they not ordained by the Lord Himself—might be well given up, since the flesh makes a snare of them, and superstition engrafts on them baptismal regeneration and sacramental efficacy.

Our Lord's Presence might thus have become a difficulty to our faith, though a pleasure to sense. His going away leaves a clear field for faith. It throws us necessarily upon a *spiritual* life, since He who is the Head, the Soul, the Center of our faith, hope, and love is no more within the range of our bodily organs. It is poor believing which needs to put its finger into the nail prints. But blessed is he that has not seen and yet has believed! In an unseen Savior we fix our trust.

From an unseen Savior we derive our joy. Our faith is now the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Let us learn this lesson well, and let it never be asked of us, “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?” Let us never attempt to live by feeling and evidence. Let us banish from our souls all dreams of finding perfection in the flesh, and equally let us discard all cravings for signs and wonders. Let us not be like the children of Israel who only believed while they saw the works of the Lord. If our Beloved has hidden Himself from our sight, let Him even hide everything else, if it so pleases Him.

If He only reveals Himself to our faith, the eye which is good enough to see Him is good enough to see everything else, and we will be content to see His Covenant blessings, and all else with that one eye of faith, and no other, till the time shall come when He shall change our faith to sight. Beloved, let us further reflect *how secure is our eternal inheritance* now that Jesus has entered into the heavenly places.

Our Heaven is secured to us, for it is in the actual possession of our legal Representative, who can never be dispossessed of it. Possession is nine tenths of the law, but it absolutely secures completely our tenure under the Gospel. He who possesses a Covenant blessing shall never lose it, for the Covenant cannot be changed, nor its gifts withdrawn. We are heritors of the heavenly Canaan by actual hold and sure title—for our legal Representative, appointed by the highest court of judicature—has entered into possession and actual occupancy of the many mansions of the great Father’s house.

He has not merely taken possession, but He is making all ready for our reception and eternal inhabitation. A man who enters a house and claims it, if he has any question about his rights, will not think of preparing it for the inhabitants—He will leave any expenditure of that kind till all doubts are cleared up! But our good Lord has taken such possession of the city of the new Jerusalem for us that He is daily preparing it for us, that where He is, we may be also.

If I could send to Heaven some mere human being like myself to hold my place for me till my arrival, I should fear that my friend might lose it—but since my Lord, the King of Heaven and the Master of angels, has gone there to represent all His saints, and claim their places for them, I know that my portion is secure! Rest content, Beloved, and sing for joy as the Apostle’s heart did when he wrote, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance.”

Further, if Jesus has gone into Glory, how successful must our prayers be! You send a petition to court, and you hope for its success—it is drawn up in proper style—and it has been countersigned by an influential person. But when the person who has backed your plea for you is himself at court, to take the petition and present it there, you feel safer still. Today our prayers do not only receive our Savior’s imprimatur, but they are presented by His own hand, as His own requests.

“Seeing, then, that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God,” “let us come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find Grace to help in time of need.” No prayer which Jesus urges can ever be dismissed unheard—that case is safe for which He is Advocate—

*“Look up, my Soul, with cheerful eye
See where the great Redeemer stands.
The glorious Advocate on high,
With precious incense in His hands.
He sweetens every humble groan,
He recommends each broken prayer!
Recline your hope on Him alone,
Whose power and love forbid despair.”*

Once more, though I feel this theme might detain us long, we must leave it, and remark further, that, as we consider Christ ascended, our hearts burn within us at the thought that *He is the type of all His people*. As He was, so are we, also, in this world. And as He is, so shall we, also, be. To us, also, there remains both a resurrection and an ascension. Unless the Lord comes very speedily, we shall die as He did, and the sepulcher shall receive our bodies for awhile. There is for us a tomb in a garden, or a rest in the Machpelah of our fathers.

For us there are winding sheets and grave clothes. Yet, like our Lord, we shall burst the bonds of death, for we cannot be held by them. There is a resurrection morning for us because there was a rising again for Him. Death could as soon have held the Head as the members. The prison doors once taken away, post and bar and all, the captives are set free. Then, when we have risen from the dead at the blast of the archangel’s trumpet, we shall ascend also, for is it not written that we shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air, and so shall be forever with the Lord?

Have courage, Brothers and Sisters! That glittering road up to the highest heavens, which Christ has trod, you, too, must tread. The triumph which He enjoyed shall be yours in your measure. You, too, shall lead your captivity captive,

and amidst the acclamations of angels you shall receive the, “well done,” of the ever-blessed Father, and shall sit with Jesus on His Throne, even as He has overcome and sits with the Father upon His.

I have rather given you suggestions for meditation than the meditations themselves. May the Holy Spirit bless them to you. And as you, in imagination, sit down on Olivet and gaze into the pure azure, may the heavens open to you, and, like Stephen, may you see the Son of Man at the right hand of God.

II. Let us advance to the second point, and dwell upon it very briefly—THE TRIUMPH OF THE ASCENSION. Psalmists and Apostles have delighted to speak upon our Lord’s triumphal Ascension to the hill of the Lord. I shall not attempt to do more than refer to what they have said. Call to your minds how the Psalmist in vision saw the Savior’s Ascension, and, in the twenty-fourth Psalm, represented the angels as saying—“Lift up your heads, O you gates. And be you lift up, you everlasting doors. And the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.”

The scene is described in rich poetic imagery of the most sublime kind, and it evidently teaches us that when our Savior left the sight of mortals, He was joined by bands of spirits who welcomed Him with acclamations and attended Him in solemn state as He entered the metropolis of the universe. The illustration which has usually been given is, I think, so good that we cannot better it. When generals and kings returned from war, in the old Roman ages, they were accustomed to celebrate a triumph.

They rode in state through the streets of the capital, trophies of their wars were carried with them. The inhabitants crowded to the windows, filled the streets, thronged the housetops and showered down acclamations and garlands of flowers upon the conquering hero as he rode along. Without being grossly literal, we may conceive some such a scene as that attending our Lord’s return to the celestial seats. The sixty-eighth Psalm is to the same effect—“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the Holy Place. You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive: You have received gifts for men; yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.”

So also in Psalm forty-seven—“God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.” Angels and glorified spirits saluted our returning Champion! And, leading captivity captive, He assumed the mediatorial Throne amidst universal acclamations. “Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly triumphing over them in it.”

Our Lord’s Ascension was a triumph over *the world*. He had passed through it unscathed by its temptations. He had been solicited on all hands to sin, but His garments were without spot or blemish. There was no temptation which had not been tried upon Him—the quivers of the earth had been emptied against Him—but the arrows had glanced harmlessly from His armor of the Truths of God. They had persecuted Him relentlessly. He had been made to suffer all that cruel scorn could invent, but He came forth from the furnace with not the smell of fire upon Him.

He had endured death itself with love unquenched and courage invincible. He had conquered by enduring all. As He rose He was infinitely beyond their reach. Though they hated Him no less than before, He had been forty days among them and yet no hand was outstretched to arrest Him. He had shown Himself openly in various places, and yet not a dog dare moved his tongue. In the clear air, from far above the hills of Salem, He who was once tempted in the desert looked down upon the kingdoms of the earth, which had been shown Him by Satan as the price of sin, and reserved them all as His own by right of merit.

He rises above all, for He is superior to all. As the world could not injure His Character by its temptations, so no longer could it touch His Person by its malice. He has defeated altogether this present evil world. There, too, He led captive *sin*. Evil had assailed Him furiously, but it could not defile Him. Sin had been laid upon Him, the weight of human guilt was borne upon His shoulders, it crushed Him down—but He rose from the dead, He ascended into Heaven, and proved that He had shaken off the load and left it buried in His sepulcher. He has abolished the sins of His people! His Atonement has been so efficacious that no sin is upon Him, the Surety—and certainly none remains upon those for whom He stood as Substitute!

Though once the Redeemer stood in the place of the condemned, He has so suffered the penalty that He is justified now, and His atoning work is finished forever. Sin, my Brothers and Sisters, was led captive at our Immanuel’s chariot wheels when He ascended. *Death* also was led in triumph. Death had bound Him, but He snapped each fetter, and bound death with his own cords—

***“Vain the stone, the water, the seal,
Christ has burst the gates of Hell.
Death in vain forbids His rise,
Christ has opened Paradise.*”**

*Lives again our glorious King!
 'Where, O death, is now your sting?'
 Once He died our souls to save—
 'Where's your victory, boasting grave?'"*

Our Savior's Ascension in that same body which descended into the lower parts of the earth is so complete a victory over death that every dying saint may be sure of immortality, and may leave his body behind without fear that it shall forever abide in the vaults of the grave. So, too, *Satan*, was utterly defeated! He had thought that he should overcome the Seed of the woman when he had bruised his heel, but lo, as the Conqueror mounts aloft, He breaks the dragon's head beneath His feet!

See you not the celestial coursers as they drag the war chariot of the Prince of the house of David up the everlasting hills? He comes who has fought the Prince of Darkness! Lo, He has bound him in iron fetters. See how He drags him at His chariot wheels amidst the derision of all those pure spirits who retained their loyalty to the almighty King! Oh, *Satan*! You were worsted, then! You did fall like lightning from Heaven when Christ ascended to His Throne.

Brethren in Christ, *everything that makes up our captivity Christ has led captive*. Moral evil He has defeated. The difficulties and trials of this mortal life He has virtually overcome. There is nothing in Heaven, or earth, or Hell, that can be thought to be against us which now remains—He has taken all away. He has fulfilled the Law—its curse He has removed. The handwriting against us—He has nailed to His Cross. All foes of ours He has made a show of openly. What joy there is to us in this triumph! What bliss to be interested in it by the *gift* of faith in Him!

III. We may now turn to consider THE GIFTS OF THE ASCENSION. Our Lord ascended on high, and gave gifts to men. What were these gifts which He both received from God and gave to men? Our text says that He ascended that He might fill all things. I do not think this alludes to His Omnipresence—in that respect He does fill all things. But allow me to explain, as I receive it, the meaning of the passage by a very simple figure.

Christ descended into the lowest parts of the earth and thereby He laid the foundations of the great temple of God's praise—He continued in His life laboring, and thereby He built the walls of His temple—He ascended to His Throne, and there He laid the topstone amidst shouting. What remained, then? It remained to *furnish* it with inhabitants, and the inhabitants with all things necessary for their comfort and perfection.

Christ ascended on high that He might do that. In that sense the gift of the Spirit fills all things, bringing in the chosen, and furnishing all that is necessary for their complete salvation. The blessings which come to us through the Ascension, are "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Observe next, that these filling blessings of the ascension are *given to all the saints*. Does not the first verse of our text say—"Unto *every one* of us is given Grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ"? The Holy Spirit is the particular benediction of the Ascension, and the Holy Spirit is in measure given to all truly regenerated persons. You have all, my Brothers and Sisters, some measure of the Holy Spirit. Some more. Some less. But whatever you have of the Holy Spirit comes to you because Christ, when He ascended up on high, received gifts for men, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

Every Christian having the gift of Christ in his measure is bound to use it for the general good. For in a body no joint or member exists for itself, but for the good of the whole. You, Brothers and Sisters, whether you have much Grace or little, must, according to the effectual working in you, supply your part to the increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. See that you regard your gifts in this light—trace them to Christ—and then *use them* for the object for which He designed them.

But to some persons the Holy Spirit is given more largely. As the result of the Ascension of Christ into Heaven the Church received Apostles—men who were selected as witnesses because they had personally seen the Savior—an office which necessarily dies out, and properly so, because the miraculous power also is withdrawn. They were needed temporarily, and they were given by the ascended Lord as a choice legacy. Prophets, too, were in the early Church. They were needed as a link between the glories of the Old and New Covenant.

But each Prophetic gift came from the Spirit through the Redeemer's ascent to Glory. There remain rich gifts among us, still, which I fear we do not sufficiently prize. Among men, God's richest gifts are men of high vocation, separated for the ministry of the Gospel. From our ascended Lord come all true Evangelists. These are they who preach the Gospel in various places, and find it the power of God unto salvation. They are founders of Churches, breakers of new soil, men of a missionary spirit who build not on other men's foundations, but dig out for themselves.

We need many such deliverers of the Good News where as yet the message has not been heard. I scarcely know of any greater blessing to the Church than the sending forth of earnest, indefatigable, anointed men of God—taught of the Lord to be winners of souls. Who among us can estimate the value of George Whitfield to the age in which he lived? Who shall ever calculate the price of a John Williams or a William Knibb? Whitfield was, under God, the salvation of our *country*, which was going down straight to pandemonium.

Williams reclaimed the islands of the sea from cannibalism, and Knibb broke the Negro's chains. Such Evangelists as these are gifts beyond all price. Then come the *pastors and teachers*, doing one work in different forms. These are sent to feed the flock. They abide in one place, and instruct converts which have been gathered—these also are invaluable gifts of the Ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not given unto all men to be pastors, nor is it needed. For if all were shepherds, where were the flock? Those to whom this Divine Grace is especially given are fitted to lead and instruct the people of God, and this leading is much required.

What would the Church be without her pastors? Let those who have tried to do without them be a warning to you. Wherever you have pastors or Evangelists they exist for the good of the Church of God. They ought to labor for that end, and never for their own personal advantage. Their power is their Lord's gift, and it must be used in His way. The point I want to come at is this—Dear Friends, since we all, as Believers, have some measure of the Spirit, let us USE it! Stir up the gift that is in you! Be not like he in the parable who had but one talent and hid it in a napkin.

Brother, Sister, if you are in the body the least known joint, rob not the body by indolence or selfishness, but *use* the gift you have in order that the body of Christ may come to its perfection! And if you do not have great personal gifts, serve the Church by praying to the Lord who has ascended to give us more Evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He, alone, can give them! Any that come without Him are imposters.

There are some prayers you must *not* pray—there are others you *may* pray—but there are a few you *must* pray. There is a petition which Christ has commanded us to offer, and yet I very seldom hear it. It is this one—“Pray you, therefore, the Lord of the Harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.” We greatly lack Evangelists and pastors. I do not mean that we lack muffs who occupy the pulpits and empty the pews. I believe the market has for many years been sufficiently supplied with those! But we lack men who can stir the heart, arouse the conscience, and build up the Church.

The scatterers of flocks may be found everywhere. The *gatherers* of them—how many have we of such? Such a man at this day is more precious than the gold of Ophir. The Queen can make a bishop of the Established Church, but only the ascended Lord can send a bishop to the *true* Church. Prelates, popes, cardinals, vicars, prebends, canons, deans—the Lord has nothing to do with these! I see not even the *name* of them in His Word—but the very poorest pastor whom the Lord ordains is a gift of His ascending Glory.

At this moment we are deploring that in the mission field our good men are gray. Duff, Moffat and the like are passing from the stage of action. Where are their successors? I was almost about to say, Echo answers, Where? We want Evangelists for India, for China, for all the nations of the earth. And though we have many godly fathers among us who are instructors in the faith, yet have we in all our pastorates few of eminence who could be mentioned in the same day as the great Puritanical Divines.

If the ministry should become weak and feeble among us, the Church richly deserves it, for this, the most important part of her whole organization, has been more neglected than anything else. I thank God this Church has not only prayed for ministers, but has proved the sincerity of her prayer by helping such as God has called—by affording them leisure and assistance for understanding the way of God more perfectly. We have thought that Christ's gifts were valuable enough for us to treasure up and improve them.

Our College has now received and sent forth, in the name of Jesus Christ, more than two hundred ministers of the Word of God. Look around you and see how few churches care to receive the ascension gifts of Christ, and how few pastors encourage young men to preach. I read the other day, with unutterable horror, the complaint that our churches were likely to have too many ministers! That is an almost blasphemous complaint—impugning the value of Christ's Ascension gifts! O that God would give us ten times the number of men after His own heart, and surely there would be then a great lack of more!

But there are too many, say they, for the present pulpits. Oh, miserable Soul, is it come to this—that a minister of Christ must have a pulpit ready at hand? Are we all to be builders on other men's foundations? Have we none among us who can gather their own flocks? In a city of three million like this, can any man say that laborers for Christ are too many? *Loiterers* are too many, doubtless! And when the Church drives out the drones, who shall pity them? While there

remain hundreds of towns and villages without a Baptist Church, and whole districts of other lands without the Gospel, it is idle to dream that of Evangelists and pastors we can have too many!

No man is so happy in his work as he who presides over a flock of his own gathering, and no pastor is more beloved than he who raised from ruin a destitute Church and made it to become a joy and praise in the earth! Pray the Lord to send true pastors and true Evangelists. Christ procured them by His Ascension. Let us not forget this. What? Shall it be thought that the blessings of the Crucifixion are worth the having, and the blessings of the Resurrection worth receiving, but the blessings of the Ascension are to be regarded with indifference or even with suspicion?

No! Let us prize the gifts which God gives by His Son, and when He sends us Evangelists and pastors, let us treat them with loving respect. Honor Christ in every true minister—see not so much the man as his Master in him. Trace all Gospel success to the ascended Savior. Look to Christ for more successful workers. As they come, receive them from His hands. When they come, treat them kindly as His gifts, and daily pray that the Lord will send to Zion mighty champions of the faith.

IV. We shall conclude by noticing THE BEARING OF OUR LORD'S ASCENSION UPON SINNERS. We will utter few words, but full of comfort. Did you notice in the sixty-eighth Psalm the words—"He received gifts for men; *yes, for the rebellious also*"? When the Lord went back to His Throne He still had thoughts of love towards rebels. The spiritual gifts of the Church are for the good of the rebels as well as for the building up of those who are reconciled.

Sinner, every true minister exists for your good, and all the workers of the Church have an eye to you! There are one or two promises connected with our Lord's Ascension which show His kindness to you—"I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." An ascended Savior draws you—run after Him! Here is another word of His—"He is exalted on high." To curse? No! "To give repentance and remission of sins." Look up to the Glory into which He has entered—ask for repentance and remission. Do you doubt His power to save you? Here is another text—"He is able, also, to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them."

Surely He has gone to Heaven for you as well as for the saints! You ought to take good heart, and put your trust in Him at this happy hour. How dangerous it will be to despise Him! They who despised Him in His shame perished. Jerusalem became a field of blood because it rejected the despised Nazarene. What will it be to reject the King, now that He has taken to Himself His great power?

Remember that this same Jesus who is gone up to Heaven will so come in like manner as He was seen to go up into Heaven. His return is certain, and *your* summons to His bar equally certain. But what account can you give if you reject Him? O come and trust Him this day! Be reconciled to Him lest He be angry, and you perish from the way while His wrath is kindled but a little. The Lord bless you, and grant you a share in His Ascension. Amen, and Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE Sermon —Psalm 68. 1-19; Ephesians 4:1-16.

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