

GOD'S OWN GOSPEL CALL

NO. 2092

A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, JUNE 30, 1889,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Incline your ear and come unto Me: hear and your soul shall live. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”
Isaiah 55:3.

THIS very memorable chapter may be called God's own gospel sermon. In reading it we forget Isaiah and only remember Jehovah. He speaks not here by the prophet but in the first person. God Himself says, “Incline your ear and come unto Me.” Now, we value every single word of Holy Writ, but especially those words which come directly from the mouth of God Himself—not so much spoken for Him as *by* Him. Take heed that you turn not away from Him that speaks from heaven. These are not my words but the words of the living God—it is not I that invite your attention to myself. It is your Maker, your God, saying to you, “Incline your ear and come unto Me: hear and your soul shall live. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” From the very beginning, this chapter is a loving pleading with sinners—it is a lifting of stumbling blocks and a clearing away of objections. Perhaps someone laments thus—“Who am I that I should come to God? I am a poor, penniless sinner.” The Lord forestalls the lament, by saying, “He that has no money. Come you, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” If you have no merit, if you have no claims, still come. Free grace sounds its golden harp and mercy sings to it these words—“Without money and without price.” If you stand back because you look upon your past life with sorrow and you say, “Alas, my God, I have wasted much time in another service,” He tells you that He knows your past folly and He calls you to cease from it, saying, “Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? And you labor for that which satisfies not?” He bids you now receive the substantial gifts of His grace. For these will satisfy the soul.

If anyone cries, “My needs are exceedingly great. I want the largest and richest mercies, or else I am lost.” The Lord God admits that necessity but meets it with a full supply, saying, “listen diligently unto Me and eat you that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” He knows that nothing but great mercy will serve your turn. But great mercy is ready for you. He has not brought you anything lean or mean but “fat things full of marrow,” a fullness of delight. If there are any who feel timorous in the presence of such astounding grace and are ready to cry, “Lord, we cannot think that You would give so great a salvation to us, for we deserve destruction and wrath,” see how He meets that doubt by the fourth verse. The highest proof of God's love to men is this, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” He points to His dear Son and says, “Behold, I have given Him! In the manger, behold, I have given Him. On the cross, in the sepulcher, in His resurrection, in His enthronement, behold, I have given Him!” What further proof of divine love do you require? What surer proof can you imagine? Come without distrust and believe that since God spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all, He will also, with Him, freely give us all things.

Furthermore, lest anyone should say, “I am a poor Gentile but the Old Testament was written for the chosen people, the Jews.” The Father speaks to His dear Son, and cries, “Behold, You shall call a nation that You know not, and nations that knew not You shall run unto You because of the Lord Your God and for the Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified You.” To whatever race or nation you may belong, Christ calls you to run to Him and the likes of you shall run to Him. May that promise be fulfilled this very day in all the unconverted who hear these words!

Beloved, I have no need to preach this morning. I have only to follow the line of God's own Word. I do so with much confidence in the power of that Word. Gladly will I simply enlarge on what the Lord says and give you none of my own suggestions. *My word*; ah, it is weakness itself! But the Lord's Word is potent as when it said, "Let there be light," and light flamed forth and scattered primeval night. It is as potent as when He made this dead, dull earth to teem with grass and afterwards with cattle and placed man over all. Speak, Lord, Your fiat. Where Your Word is, there is power.

Still, there may be some who say, "We feel ourselves to be with no strength and incapable." The gracious Lord meets you there by laying upon you no heavy yoke—the precepts which He puts before you are simple and easy. He has given you ears and He bids you use them, saying, "Incline your ear and come unto Me. hear and your soul shall live." At this time we will look to the saving precepts laid down in the text. And then we will consider the saving promises which go with the precepts—"Your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you." Lastly, as God shall help us, we will listen to saving pleadings, such as abound in the rest of the chapter. Oh, to speak only in the power of the Holy Spirit! Oh, for salvation—salvation for ALL my hearers!

I. Here are TWO SAVING PRECEPTS, which are pressed upon you at this time. For the Holy Spirit says in all His commands, "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." These precepts are of simple character.

The first is, "Incline your ear." This is placed in another form, "listen diligently unto Me. hear and your soul shall live." You have ears to hear with, therefore hear. Some of you would hear fast enough if the faintest jingle of a guinea should invite you to gain it. Oh that you would now hear the voice of God! What does it mean—this "Incline your ear"? It means, consider and think upon eternal things. It is the fault and folly of worldlings that they reckon eternal things to be second-rate and unworthy of their immediate thought. Even from the cross our Lord complains, "Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord has afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger." The greatest event that ever happened in time or in eternity was the death of Jesus to save men from eternal woe. And yet this prodigy of love is disregarded. The soul-winner has to think of all sorts of ways by which to draw men's attention to that which is their chief blessing. They are taken up with their farm and their merchandise—any petty piece of news in the daily paper will win their thought and excite their talk. But this event which most nearly concerns them is forgotten, for passing pleasure they have ears enough. But when we speak of heaven and hell they will not hear—charm we ever so wisely. May the God of all grace this morning arrest the careless one and constrain him to incline his ear!

O thoughtless man, be like the wedding guest who was spell-bound by the ancient mariner and kept from the joyous company while he heard the strange story of the sea. We have something of greater weight to tell than any romance of the salt sea. Do not deny yourself the benefit of hearing the truth of God. Rob not your soul of salvation. Your God invites you to give earnest heed to your soul, your immortal soul, and the place where it will spend eternity—and the way in which alone that eternity can become one of blessedness. Since you are not dogs or horses, think! And give most thought to that which is of most importance, namely, your eternal state. I should have hope for you if you would think. O souls, why will you trifle where everything is of such infinite weight? Why need I plead for that which is so much for your own good? But when you read, "Incline your ear," it means, think about divine matters as God sets them before you. In these days those who judge themselves to be wise disdain to be taught by the revelation of God but they elect to follow the conjectures of their own minds. They will not follow the Bible but their own brains, such as they are. They endeavor to make for themselves a chart of a sea they have never sailed over. The way of happiness they picture as they would wish it to be. Surely the voice of wisdom advises us to incline our ear to One who knows more than we do. God has spoken—we are to learn from His Words rather than from our own thoughts. Science is well enough but omniscience is better. God has spoken, we need not conjecture—God has revealed it. Would you be wise? This book is inspired by Him—bend your powers towards this infallible record. Am I asking too much? Does the Lord require an unreasonable thing? If He speaks, shall we not listen? Especially when He speaks only for our good.

Furthermore, remark that this attention to eternal things, this listening to what God, the Lord, will speak, must be hearty, honest, continual, earnest and believing. "Incline your ear," as men do when they reach forward to catch every syllable, fearful lest they shall miss the meaning. "Listen diligently." Not as a man does who hears and forgets. Listen as they did who were pent up and besieged and longed for deliverance. How the Scotch woman rejoiced when she heard, or thought she heard, the sound of the Highlanders' bagpipes in the distance! Ah me, the bare hope of rescue from ferocious foes made them very quick of hearing. Beloved, give the gospel your best hearing. Listen diligently—be attentive and intent. When your mind has been attentive during the discourse, let it be retentive afterwards. Try to catch God's meaning in His Word, and see what Christ would show to you. I say again, I am asking here, in God's name, of you nothing more than is due to Him. I would come round these galleries and down these aisles and put it to every unconverted person; is it not reasonable that you should consider your ways and listen to your God? I pray you, my friends, do not deny yourselves this favor—give attention, now, to your souls' best concerns.

The second precept grows out of the first—"Incline your ear and come unto Me." This is to be the outcome of your inclining your ear. Come unto God. "How can I come to God?" says one.

Come to Him at least by thinking much of Him. At present God is not in all your thoughts. Some of you are busy just now with sightseeing but you seek not a sight of God—should it be so? Others of you are busy in making money. You go out to business early and come home late and all those hours you are as little mindful of heaven as if there were no God at all. We have not much doctrinal atheism abroad but we are drenched with practical atheism. The nations forget God. The Lord bids you turn your face Godward and seek after Him. Consider eternity and how you will spend it, and what it must be for you if you pass into it without God.

When you have come to Him in thought, and then come by your desires. The son in the far-off country began to return to his father's house, where there was bread enough and to spare, before he had put a foot on the ground to go there. His heart was on the road before his feet. If you feel as if you could not come to God any other way, come by desire, at least—desire to be reconciled to God—longing to become His child, hungering to taste of His love. This is a true coming.

Come to God by confession of sin. You have lived up to now without Him. Confess that neglect. You have thought that repentance and faith might safely be put off to a more convenient season and thus you have given your God a contemptuous putting-off. Confess the wrong you have done in this. You have violated the law, for you have not loved the Lord, "with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with your entire mind." Beside this, you have broken every commandment. Thus have you insulted your Maker; yet come to Him with filial sorrow and say, "Father, I have sinned."

Come to God in humble, believing prayer. Ask Him to save you and believe that He that asks receives. What? Will you not do that? He that will not ask when the blessing is to be had for the asking, how can I excuse him, how can I pity him, if he shall perish of want? Come to the Lord by prayer and let it not be said, "You have not, because you ask not." Oh, how I pray that you may come with your prayers while I am pleading with you by my preaching! Come and lay your burdens down at the feet of the great Burden Bearer! Come with all your sins and leave the load at the cross. Quit your evil ways and your wicked thoughts and turn to the Lord, who will abundantly pardon.

These are the two precepts—HEAR and COME. They are neither exacting nor unreasonable. How earnestly would I urge them upon you! I feel ashamed of myself that I do not preach with greater emotion. But let not my fault be the ruin of any of you. Be even more in earnest than I am, since it is your own soul that is in jeopardy. Gladly would I save you if I could; I am eager to win you for my Lord; be persuaded to listen diligently to your God and Savior even now.

II. To encourage you in this, I come to my second head, which deals with SAVING PROMISES. Here are two promises corresponding to the two precepts.

You are bid, in the first precept, to listen and incline your ear, and the promise given is this—"Your soul shall live." What? Live through *hearing*? Yes, live as the result of hearing, for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." If any man would give himself diligently to the study of the revelation of God, to the searching of the Word of God, and to the hearing of loving, earnest, truthful,

spiritual preaching—he would not fail to find life for his soul. If with heart's resolve to find Christ in the Word a man hears it diligently, he has this promise, “hear and your soul shall live.” Some sit down and say, “I cannot believe.” Of course you cannot believe until you know what you have to believe. But while you are hearing what it is, the inspired Word acts upon you with a self-evidencing power, and your conscience and mind and heart are affected thereby. The Holy Spirit quickens through the Word and fulfils the promise, “hear and your soul shall live.”

There is such a power about the Word of God, that when it comes into contact with the heart which is seeking eternal life, it breathes eternal life into it. I will try to sketch the manner of its operation. The man is an earnest hearer and he says to himself, “How I wish I could meet with the salvation of God!” While listening he feels a tenderness stealing over him; perhaps a tear trickles down his cheek. He gets absorbed in the truth of God to which he listens and becomes serious, anxious, and impressible. The Word of God is like a fire which melts; attended by the Holy Spirit, the influence of the Word upon the soul acts for the removing of the stony heart, and the creation of a heart of flesh. Be much in the hearing of God's Word and in thinking upon it, and a better feeling will steal over you. There will follow upon this feeling a measure of hope in the Lord. At first it will be as a mere spark. You will whisper to yourself, “I think, after all, I may be forgiven and accepted.” This little hope will be like the first drop of a shower. This trembling hope will be the egg of a great joy, or the mustard seed of the tree of holy confidence. Hope that comes by hearing the Word attentively is a living and growing thing and will increase to a blessed rest. By-and-by hope will arouse the soul to pleading. You, who first of all heard the Word carelessly, and then heard it attentively, feelingly, and hopefully—will commence to pray that it may be fulfilled to you. I think I hear you crying, “O God, bless your Word to me. I am come to a turning point, Lord lead me in the right way. Oh, that You would quicken me to run therein!” This prayer will continue to rise within the heart and will never cease till it is heard and the soul is made to live unto God.

Having come thus far, the heart will soon possess a measure of trustfulness in the Lord Jesus, who is the Revelation of the grace of God. Before you know it, you will find yourself trusting in the great Sacrifice for sin. I do not know the manner in which faith is created by the Spirit in the human mind. In many it comes very gradually. Who can tell when the first light of the morning broke over this city? They that were wearily watching by the sick saw a gray light glide over the sky. But the sun was not yet risen. Then the light became clearer and yet more clear. But if there were clouds in the east, even the watchers could not tell exactly when the sun was above the horizon and the day had really dawned. The light came by degrees but it came in truth. O my hearers, I want you, while hearing the Word, to be praying—

*“While I see You wounded, bleeding,
Dying on the accursed tree,
Gladly I'd feel my heart believing
That you suffered thus for me.”*

Thus, by the light of the Word, the man becomes a believer before he knows it. Is it not so in other matters? We feel that a thing is true and we believe it without effort.

With that little faith will come gleams of joy! Or if the faith is stronger, a full day will burst in upon the soul, lighting up the whole nature with heavenly brightness, Oh, that the Lord would give you joy and peace through believing at this very moment! I pray it may be so! I am glad that you are hearing the Word. “Hear and your soul shall live.”

I remember when I sought the Lord; I said to myself, “If the Lord is to be found by hearing, I will always be hearing.” Three times on the Sabbath you might have found me, as a lad, in some place of worship or other; and I never lost a word. I gave earnest heed to all that was spoken. As Gideon's fleece drank in the dew, so did I receive the Word. The divine life came to me at last, though not at the first. So will it be with you, for there is the promise—the promise of God, Who cannot lie—“hear and your soul shall live.” May you understand that first promise by having it fulfilled within yourself!

Now consider the second promise, which is something very wonderful—“I will make an everlasting covenant with you.” This joins on to the second precept—“Come unto Me.” The soul cries, “Lord, if I were to come, would You receive me?” “Receive you?” says the Lord, “I would enter into a covenant with you.” If you come to God, simple as that coming seems, it shall involve infinite results, for the

Lord will do for you exceedingly abundantly above what you ask or even think. Listen to this promise, you that are willing to hear God's Word, and pray the Lord to fulfill it to you at once.

First, observe how He promises condescending intercourse—"I will make a covenant with you." It is in the Hebrew, "I will *cut* a covenant." Covenants were made by cutting a victim in two, and they who made a covenant passed between the two halves of the sacrifice to make the covenant sure. The Lord in effect says, "Poor, wretched sinner, you that have not a penny to buy water with; if you will come to Me, I will enter into a sacred agreement and covenant with you!" "Covenant with me?" says one, "What? God and I become contracting parties?" Yes. He will make a covenant with you! O my heart, how can you stay away? This means life! This means sure mercies! This means eternal blessedness! "I will make a covenant with you"; with you, an obscure nobody, who can only look on yourself as a heap of dirt and filth. "I will make an everlasting covenant with you."

God is ready to enter into a binding contract with you. He will bind you to Himself and Himself to you. "I will make a covenant with you." If once you come to Him, He will put His fear in your heart so that you shall not depart from Him. He will cast about you the bands of His love and will betroth you unto Himself in a marriage union which shall never be dissolved. Do you inquire into the tenor of that contract? Well, I cannot tell you all about it this morning, for time would fail me. But it runs somewhat in this fashion—"I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more forever. A new heart also will I give you and a right spirit will I put within you. I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed. But My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, says the Lord, that has mercy on you." This is a covenant of mercy. Yes, of "mercies" in the plural, as the text has it. God will enter into a contract with you to supply you with all manner of mercies between here and heaven, and to land you safely at His right hand. Oh, what a promise this!

God will thus enter into an unending alliance with you. "I will make an everlasting covenant with you." I do remember how this attracted me to Christ. When I saw that His grace was everlasting, I longed to enjoy it. If I once got to the Lord Jesus, He would never let me go away from Him. This created in me a vehement desire after Him—

***"Once in Christ, in Christ forever;
Nothing from His love can sever."***

The *eternity* of the mercy is an essential ingredient in the preciousness of it. I should not care to preach to you a trumpery, temporary gospel, which would only yield hope for a short season. But I delight to proclaim my Lord's everlasting covenant! Come, poor sinner, come to Jesus and you shall have life eternal. We do not offer you a ticket halfway from here to heaven, but a ticket all the way through, with no return to it. If you get into this covenant train, it is running all the way and will never break down. Yield yourself to the Lord, to be His forever and He will make with you an everlasting covenant.

"Oh," you say, "but suppose I go to God and trust Him and yet these things should fail?" They cannot fail, for He calls them "the sure mercies of David." If you believe in Jesus, you are now forgiven. As sure as God is God, if you come to Him through Christ Jesus you are saved, not for time only, but for eternity. The covenant is ordered in all things and sure. God has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Oh, the mercy of God in this!

You see we liken what He gives to the sinner to what He did to David. The aged David lies dying. His strength is gone, he is a worn-out man; he will soon be in eternity. It is interesting to watch him. Tears are in his eyes as he thinks of Absalom and the rest of his wayward family, and he exclaims, "Although my house is not so with God. Yet"—blessed "yet"—"yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." That is the kind of covenant which God will make with *you!* I am not talking of the man in the moon but of you who are around me, you guilty ones, who incline your ear to Him. The Lord says to you, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." When you come to die, I hope you may not have the faults of David to confess. But I trust you may have his covenant to fall back upon. I am thankful that David was not a perfect man by a long way, because I can now take comfort from his confidence. He was full of infirmities and sins and yet he could rejoice in the covenant of grace. And I, also, with all my faults, may venture to do the same. I, too,

can say, "Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant." What a mass of gospel comfort lies in these words! Would God that all of you would so come to God that He would make with you an everlasting covenant!

The covenant is all in Christ Jesus, Immanuel, God with Us. With Him this covenant is made. Great David's greater Son is given to us to be our leader. The covenant is with Him. He stood for us in that dread day when the Judge of all the earth executed justice upon our Surety. The storm was made to burst upon His head. The sword of justice found its sheath in His heart. And now He stands the covenant head of all believers. And God has made with us in Christ, "an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David." Thus have I put before you the precept and the promise.

III. Our third work is to urge the Lord's own SAVING PLEAS. These are not to be mine but the Lord's. I keep to the chapter.

The first plea for which I would beg a hearing is—God Himself speaks to you. It is He that says, "Incline your ear and come unto Me." Can you realize for a moment the presence of God? Oh that He would make Himself apparent to you! I do not ask for thunder or lightning to make you feel the terror of His majesty. But may you know of a surety that the Lord is here! Suppose you were to hear a strange, mysterious voice from yonder dome, saying, "Incline your ear and come unto Me. hear and your soul shall live." I am afraid the sole result would be that you would be startled rather than savingly impressed. But, indeed, it is the Lord God Almighty that says, "Incline your ear and come unto Me." I beseech you; refuse not Him that speaks from heaven! By the long-suffering that has kept you in being until now; by the love that has borne with your ill manners and provocations, I beseech you, now, lend a willing ear to the Lord of mercy. You would hear your mother. Ah, how you wish that she were on earth to plead with you, though you despised her admonitions when she was yet alive! Soul, will you not hear your God, your benefactor? Turn, I pray you, at His entreaty. Accept His tender invitation! Come now, without delay. Say, at once—

*"Lord, you have won, at length I yield;
My heart, by mighty grace compelled,
Surrenders all to Thee.
Against Your terrors long I strove,
But who can stand against Your love?
Love conquers even me."*

Furthermore, the Lord pleads with you by the fact that your day of mercy is not ended. Read the sixth verse—"Seek you the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near." God may be found. What a blessed fact! Have you been a drunkard? Yet God may be found. Were you last night in evil company? Yet you are not yet shut up in hell and the Lord of Love may yet be found. Are you very old and have you long despised your Savior? He has not yet closed the gate of mercy—He may be found. Seek Him at once, while the search can be successful. "Call you upon Him while He is near." God is still within call. He is not far from any of you. Even though you speak not, He will hear the pulsing of your heart. O men and women, call upon your God while His ear is inclined toward you. Death is on his way and may overtake you before this day concludes. Between the gathering of one congregation and another, someone among you will fall by death's javelin. Seek Him, my hearers, while seeking time holds out; before the death sweat stands upon your brow, and your soul hovers upon the edge of a dark eternity, seek after the Lord with all your might! While He is near to you, call upon Him—while He may be found, seek Him. Does not the voice of wisdom plead with you to do this?

The Lord very graciously mentions yet another fact which should lead you to come to Him, namely, that He is ready and willing to forgive the whole of your past offenses. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him. And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." I do not know what you think of those last words, "abundantly pardon." But to me they are so sweet that I would set the whole orchestra of the Handel Festival to the singing of them. "Abundantly pardon! Abundantly pardon!" You have abundant sin—fatally abundant! But here is abundant *pardon!* You mourn your abundant hardness of heart! Yes, but abundant *pardon* will dissolve the stone. How abundant that pardon is the Lord does not tell. But cer-

tainly it is superabundant. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Note the word—divine grace not only abounded but it did "*much more* abound." What a God is this who calls us to Himself! Come, you blackened sinner—Jesus is both willing and able to make you clean! Come, you chief of sinners, for He is the chief of all benefactors, and He can so bless you that your foulest stains shall be removed and every virtue and grace shall adorn your character. Such a gracious assurance should lead us to come to Him, should it not? What more sweet sounding bell can ring us unto God's table than these silver notes—"abundantly pardon"?

Then comes in the great persuasive of the magnanimity of God; hear the words—"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." No man here knows what great things God designs for him. You poor sinners who will incline your ears and come to your God—little do you know what great blessings and honors the Lord has decreed for you—nor what is His mind concerning you! Shall I tell you a secret? Before you were born and before this round world was made, the Lord thought of *you*. Your name was in His book; your person was on His heart. The Lord loved you and chose you unto Himself from of old. Do you hear that? You are His elect—He ordained you to eternal life and that life He freely gives. Shall I tell you more of that secret? He gave you to His Son, to be His portion, His reward, His Bride. And that divine Son undertook to redeem you, to save you and to bring you safely to His eternal glory. At this moment God ordains for you His service here below and His presence in the world to come. If you indeed listen to His voice, He will make you His child. And, as a child, you shall be an heir of God, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. You think yourself to be the meanest of the mean, and least deserving of men, and so you may be. But the infinite grace of God will put you among the royal seed, for He takes the beggar from the dunghill and sets him among princes, even the princes of His people. Hear his gracious word—"Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable and I have loved you." "Honorable? Why, I have lost my character!" Be it so, He is able to ennoble the fallen and it is He that says, "Since you were precious in My sight you have been honorable." The Lord determines to do nothing less for you than to set you on His throne, in the image of Christ, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Is it not true that His thoughts are high and His ways heavenly?—

***"You shall see My glory soon,
When the work of divine grace is done.
Partner of my throne shall be.
Say, poor sinner, do you love Me?"***

Your answer must be, "O Lord, I must come to You, for You do draw me with such soft but mighty bonds." Oh, the glory of divine grace! Oh that you would come and learn how deep the mines of Jehovah's love, how high the blessings of His favor!

Did I hear one cry, "I feel so dull and stupid; I cannot come as I could wish"? Very well, come back to that first precept—"hear and your soul shall live." "I have long been a hearer," says one. Have you been an earnest, attentive hearer? Have you heard the Word of God as sure and infallible truth? Then be a more believing hearer. Expect the Word to bless you! Hear how the Lord pleads the power of His gospel—"My Word shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in that thing whereunto I sent it." Listen to God's voice, and let it enter your heart. Then it will quicken and save you as surely as the snow and the rain water the earth. Snow does not melt at once but it turns to water before long and is then doubly effectual in watering the soil.

The devil tempts you to give up hearing the gospel. Do not listen to him. Hear with double diligence, for if he does want you to listen, it is because he is afraid of losing you. Listen diligently and believe steadfastly, and before long you shall be as much saturated with the power of divine grace as the earth is moistened with the snow and the rain which fall from heaven but return not there. Remember, it is *God's Word*, and in that fact lies your hope of getting life by it.

Lastly, the Lord persuades men to come to Him by telling them of the joy they will obtain in coming. I know that I am addressing seeking souls who feel miserable and even despairing. "Alas," cries one, "I shall soon go out of the reach of hope." "No," says the Lord, "you shall go out with joy." "Alas,"

you sigh, "I shall be led forth to execution." "No," says the Lord, "you shall be led forth with peace." These are not *my* words. These are the very words of *the living God*. Listen to them—"you shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." It is a long time since you clapped your hands. But you shall do it with rapture and all the trees shall join with you in your exultation. Up to now the world has seemed to be as dull as you are. But it shall brighten up. You walked, the other day, in the fields but you found little repose among the lambs and sheep, for you felt more like a wolf. The very birds on the bough seemed to taunt you with being silent and ungrateful towards God. At times the flowing river, with all its sparkle of joy, half tempted you to plunge into its depths and find a watery grave. Earth is but the vestibule of hell to an unquiet conscience. But if you listen to your God, He can make it the porch of heaven. Listen to this promise. Believe it and you shall find it true. You shall enter upon a new life and the world shall be a new world to you.

"Ah," says one, "God will never make much of *me*. Even if I had a little joy and gladness, I should never be really an honor to Him." He calls you to Him by the effectual nature of His work. True, you are a thorny bit of ground, covered with briars and thorns and thistles. If you were left to barrenness it would be your righteous due. But His thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are His ways your ways. This is what He is going to do with you—"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." That thorny temper of yours shall become gentle and generous. That briery malice shall give place to forgiveness and compassion. Blasphemy shall yield to devotion, vice to holiness, falsehood to truth and pride to lowliness. That sin of drunkenness—which has been such a thicket of thorns to you and your wife and family—shall give place to sobriety, industry, thrift, godliness, and love to God and joy in the Holy Spirit. If you hear and live and come to God so as to be in covenant with Him, the day will come when you will not know yourself, so great will be the change. Mercy, in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," laughed when she saw what the Lord was going to do for her, and if some of you could see what the Lord is about to make of you, you would laugh, too. You would not laugh like Sarah, who could not believe what was told her. But like Abraham, who felt the joy of the coming blessing by the realizations of faith. Beloved, at this moment I rejoice that I, an unworthy sinner, shall dwell with the Lord God in glory—

*"I shall behold His face,
I shall His love adore;
And sing the wonders of His grace
Forevermore."*

Yes, I shall do it, by His grace. And so shall all of you who now believe the promise of our faithful God. May His sweet Spirit gently lead you to Himself! And if it is so, "it shall be to the Lord for a name." He will get a great reputation out of His great grace. Even as a doctor wins a name by curing grievous diseases, they will tell it in heaven that you are saved and throughout eternity angels and principalities in the heavenly places shall see in you a monument of divine grace, a trophy of all-conquering love.

So may it be. And to the name of Jehovah, whose mercy endures forever, shall be glory and honor, world without end. Amen.

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