

Dearly beloved,

It has pleased the Lord by a painful illness to interrupt for a little while my usual labors. As I was unable to preach last Lord's Day, accept this week the issue of an old sermon. Though it has been buried in my publisher's warehouse for two years, I pray it may bud afresh and bring forth fruit, even as old corn having been entombed in Egyptian sepulchers for centuries will often germinate again, and yield an abundant crop. You have prayed for me. The Lord has visited me in the chamber of affliction. I am recovering; and God knows, "I long to see you, and impart to you some spiritual gift," and that before long "through your prayers I shall be given unto you." Yours in much affection. C. H. S.

## AN APPEAL TO SINNERS

NO. 219

A SERMON

DELIVERED ON SABBATH EVENING, SEPTEMBER 14, 1856,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

*"This man receives sinners."*

*Luke 15:2.*

IT was a singular group which had gathered around our Savior when these words were uttered, for we are told by the evangelist—"Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." The publicans—the very lowest grade—the public oppressors scorned and hated by the Jew! These, together with the worst of characters—the scum of the streets and the very riff-raff of the society of Jerusalem—came around this mighty Preacher, Jesus Christ, in order to listen to His words! On the outside of the throng there stood a few respectable people who in those days were called Pharisees and Scribes—men who were highly esteemed in the synagogues as rulers and governors and teachers. These looked with scorn upon the Preacher. They watched Him with malicious eyes to find some fault. If they could find none in Him personally, yet they could easily find it in His congregation. His deportment towards them shocked their false notion of propriety and when they observed that He was affable with the very worst of characters—that He spoke loving words to the most fallen of mankind, they said of Him what they intended for a disgrace, albeit it was highly to His honor—"This man receives sinners." I believe that our Savior could not have wished to have had a sentence uttered concerning Him more evidently true or more thoroughly consistent with His sacred commission! It is the exact portrait of His character—He *is* the man who "receives sinners." Many a true word has been spoken in jest and many a true word has been spoken in slander. Men have said sometimes in jest, "There goes a saint." But it has been true. They have said, "There goes one of your chosen ones, one of your elect." They meant it as a slander but the doctrine they scandalized was to the person who received it a comfort! It was his glory and his honor. Now the Scribes and Pharisees wished to slander Christ. But in so doing they outstripped their intentions and bestowed upon Him a title of renown. "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

This evening, I shall divide my observations to you into three parts. First, *the doctrine that Christ receives sinners, which is a doctrine of Holy Writ*; secondly, *the encouragement it affords the sinner*; and thirdly, *the exhortation naturally springing from it, to the same character*.

**I.** First, then THE DOCTRINE. The doctrine is not that Christ receives everybody, but that He "receives sinners." By that term, *sinners*, we in common parlance understand everybody. It is in the present day quite fashionable for everybody to lie against what he believes and to say he is a sinner—even when he believes himself to be a very respectable, well-to-do person and does not conceive that he ever did anything very amiss in his life. It is a sort of orthodox confession for men to make when they say that they are sinners. And they might just as well use one formula as another, or repeat words in a foreign tongue—for they mean no deep and heartfelt contrition—they have no true apprehension that they are sinners at all! These Scribes and Pharisees did virtually assert that they were *not* sinners. They marked

out the publicans and the harlots and the worthless and they said, “These are sinners—we are not.” “Very well,” said Christ, “I endorse the distinction you have made. In your own opinion, you are not sinners. Well, you shall stand exempt for the time from being called sinners—I endorse your distinction. But I beg to inform you that I came to save those very persons who, in their own estimation and in yours, are reckoned to be sinners.” It is my belief that the doctrine of the text is this—that Christ receives not the self-righteous, not the good, not the whole-hearted, not those who dream that they do not need a Savior, but He receives the broken in spirit, the contrite in heart—those who are ready to confess that they have broken God’s laws and have merited His displeasure. These and these, alone, Christ came to save! And I reassert the subject of last Sabbath evening—that Jesus has died for such and for none other! He has shed His blood for those who are ready to confess their sins and who seek mercy through the open veins of His wounded body—but for none other did He designedly offer up Himself upon the cross!

Now, let us remark, beloved, that there is a very wise distinction on the part of God that He has been pleased thus to choose and call *sinners* to repentance and not others. For this reason, none but these ever come to Him! There has never been such a miracle as a self-righteous man coming to Christ for mercy—none but those who need a Savior have ever come. It stands to reason, that when men do not consider themselves in need of a Savior, they never will approach His Throne. And surely it is satisfactory enough for all purposes that Christ should say He receives sinners, seeing that sinners are the only persons who will ever come to Him for mercy and, therefore, it would be useless for Him to say that He would receive any but those who most assuredly will come!

And mark, again, none but those *can* come! No man can come to Christ until he truly knows himself to be a sinner. The self-righteous man cannot come to Christ—for what is implied in coming to Christ? *Repentance*, trust in His mercy and the denial of all confidence in one’s self. Now, a self-righteous man cannot repent and yet be self-righteous. He conceives that he has no sin—why, then, should he repent? Tell him to come to Christ with humble penitence and he exclaims—“You insult my dignity! Why should I approach God? Wherein have I sinned? My knees shall not bend to seek pardon, wherein I have not offended. These lips shall not seek forgiveness when I do not believe myself to have transgressed against God. I shall not ask for mercy.” The self-righteous man cannot come to God, for his coming to God implies that he ceases to be self-righteous! Nor can a self-righteous man put his trust in Christ—why should he? Shall I trust in a Christ whom I do not require? If I am self-righteous, I need no Christ to save me in my own opinion! How, then, can I come with such a confession as this?—

*“Nothing in my hands I bring,”*

when I have got my hands full! How can I say, “Wash me,” when I believe myself clean? How can I say “Heal me,” when I think that I never was sick? How can I cry, “Give me freedom, give me liberty,” when I believe I never was a slave and “never in bondage to any man”? It is only the man who knows his slavery by reason of the bondage of sin and the man who knows himself to be sick even unto death by reason of the sense of guilt—it is only the man who feels he cannot save himself—who can with faith rely upon the Savior! Nor can the self-righteous man renounce himself and lay hold of Christ—because in the renunciation of himself he would at once become the very character whom Christ says He will receive! He would then put himself in the place of the sinner when he casts away his own righteousness. Why sirs, coming to Christ implies the taking off the polluted robe of our own righteousness and putting on Christ’s! How can I do that if I wittingly wrap my own garment about me? And if in order to come to Christ I must forsake my own refuge and all my own hope, how can I do it if I believe my hope to be good and my refuge to be secure and if I suppose that I am already clothed sufficiently to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb? No, beloved, it is the *sinner* and the sinner, only, who can come to Christ! The self-righteous man cannot do it. It is quite out of his way—he would not do it if he could! His very self-righteousness fetters his feet so that he cannot come—palsies his arms so that he cannot take hold of Christ—and blinds his eyes so that he cannot even see the Savior!

Yet another reason—if these people who are not sinners would come to Christ, Christ would get no glory from them. When the physician opens his door for those who are sick and I go there full of health, he can win no honor from me because he cannot exert his skill upon me! The benevolent man may dis-

tribute all his wealth to the poor, but let someone go to him who has abundance and he shall win no esteem from him for feeding the hungry, or for clothing the naked, since the applicant is neither hungry nor naked! If Jesus Christ proclaims that He gives His grace unto all who come for it, surely it is sufficient, seeing that none will or can come for it, but those whose pressing necessities prompt them. A great sinner brings great glory to Christ when he is saved. A man who is no sinner, if he could attain to heaven would glorify *himself*—he would not glorify Christ! The man who has no stains may plunge into the fountain. But he cannot magnify its cleansing power for he has no stains to wash away. He who has no guilt can never magnify the word, “forgiveness.” It is the *sinner*, then, and only the sinner who can glorify Christ. And hence, “This man receives sinners.” But it is not said that He receives any else? “He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” This is the doctrine of the text.

But allow us to amplify that phrase—“This man receives sinners.” Now, by that we understand that He receives sinners to all the benefits which He has purchased for them. If there is a fountain, He receives sinners to wash them in it. If there is medicine for the soul, He receives sinners to heal their diseases. If there is a house for the sick, a hospital, a home for the dying, He receives such into that retreat of mercy. All that He has of love; all that He has of mercy; all that He has of atonement; all that He has of sanctification, all that He has of righteousness—to all these He receives the sinner! And more—not content with taking him to His house, He receives him to His heart—He takes the black and filthy sinner and having washed him, He says, “There, you are My beloved. My desire is towards you.” And to consummate the whole, at last He receives the saints to heaven. Saints, I said, but I meant those who *were sinners*, for none can truly be saints but those who once were sinners and have been washed in the blood of Christ and made white through the sacrifice of the Lamb!

Observe it then, beloved, that in receiving sinners we mean the whole of salvation! And this word in my text, “Christ *receives* sinners,” grasps in the whole of the covenant. He receives them to the joys of Paradise, to the bliss of the beatified, to the songs of the glorified, to an eternity of happiness forever! “This man receives sinners.” And I dwell with special emphasis on this point—He receives no one else! He will have no one else to be saved but those who know themselves to be sinners! Full, free salvation is preached to every sinner in the universe, but I have no salvation to preach to those who will not acknowledge themselves to be sinners! To them I must preach the law, telling them that their righteousness is but as filthy rags; that their goodness shall pass away as the spider’s web and shall be broken in pieces, even as the egg of the ostrich is broken by the hoof of the horse. “This man receives sinners,” and receives none else!

**II.** Now, then, THE ENCOURAGEMENT. If Jesus Christ receives sinners, poor sick sinner, what a sweet word this is for you! Surely, then, He will not reject you! Come, let me encourage you this night to come to my Master, to receive His great atonement and to be clothed with all His righteousness. Mark—those whom I address, are the *bona fide*, real, actual sinners—not the complimentary sinners—not those who say they are sinners by way of pacifying, as they suppose, the religionists of the day. I speak to those who feel their lost, ruined, hopeless condition! All these are now frankly and freely invited to come to Jesus Christ and to be saved by Him. Come, poor sinner, come!

Come, because He has said He will receive you. I know your fears—we all felt them once when we were coming to Christ. I know you say in your heart, “He will reject me. If I present my prayer, He will not hear me; if I cry unto Him, yet perhaps the heavens will be as brass. I have been so great a sinner that He will never take me into His house to dwell with Him.” Poor sinner! Don’t say that! He has published the decree. It is enough between man and man usually, if we count our fellow creatures honest, to obtain a promise. Sinner! Is this not enough between yourself and the Son of God? He has said, “He who comes I will in nowise cast out.” Dare you not venture on that promise? Will you not go to sea in a ship as staunch as this—*He* has said it! It has been often and again the only comfort of the saints—on this they have lived, on this they have died—Jesus Christ has said it! What? Do you think Christ will lie? Would He tell you He will receive you and yet not do so? Would He say, “My fatlings are killed, come to the supper,” and yet shut the door in your face? No, if He has said He will cast out none who come to Him, rest assured He cannot, He will not cast you out! Come, then, try His love on this ground—that He has said it.

Come and fear not because, remember, if you feel yourself to be a sinner, that feeling is God's *gift* and therefore you may very safely come to One who has already done so much to draw you. A stranger calls at my house. He asks for alms and he tells me at first, very plainly, that he never saw me before; that he has no claim upon my generosity, but he throws himself entirely upon any benevolent feeling that I may chance to have in my breast. But if I had done anything for him before, he might say, supposing I were a rich man, "Sir, you have done so much for me, I think you will not give me up at last. I believe you will not let me starve after so much love." Poor sinner! If you feel your need of a Savior, Christ made you feel it! If you have a wish to come after Christ, Christ gave you that wish! If you have any desire after God, God gave you that desire! If you can sigh after Christ, Christ made you sigh! If you can weep after Christ, Christ made you weep! No, if you can only *wish* for Him with the strong wish of one who fears he never can find, yet hopes he may—if you can but *hope* for Him—He has given you that hope! And oh, will not you come to Him? You have some of the king's bounties about you now—come and plead what He has done—there is no suit that can ever fail with God when you plead this! Tell Him His past mercies urge you to try Him in the future. Down on your knees, sinner, down on your knees! Tell Him this—"Lord, I thank You that I know myself to be a sinner. You have taught me that. I bless You that I do not wrap up my sin; that I know it, that I feel it—that it is always before me. Lord, would You make me see my sin and not let me see my Savior? What? Will You open the wound and put in the knife and yet not heal me? What? Lord! Have you said, 'I kill,' and have You not said in the same breath, 'I make alive'? Have you killed me and will you not make me alive?" Plead that, poor sinner and you will find it true that, "This man receives sinners."

Does this not suffice you? Then here is another reason. I am sure "this man receives sinners" because He has received many, many, before you! See, there is Mercy's door—mark how many have been to it. You can almost hear the knocks upon the door now, like echoes of the past. You may remember how many way-worn travelers have called there for rest, how many famished souls have applied there for bread. Go, knock at Mercy's door and ask the porter this question, "Was there ever one applied to the door that was refused?" I can assure you of the answer—"No, not one."

*"No sinner was ever empty sent back,  
Who came seeking mercy for Jesus' sake."*

And shall you be the first? Do you think God will forfeit His good name by turning you away? Mercy's gate has been open night and day ever since man sinned—do you think it will be shut for the first time in *your* face? No, brothers and sisters go and try it! And if you find it is, come back and say, "You have not read the Bible as you ought to have done," or else say you have found one promise there, which has not been fulfilled—for He said, "He who comes I will in nowise cast out." I do not believe there ever was in this world one who was allowed by God to say that he sincerely sought mercy of Him and did not find it. No, more—I believe that such a being *shall never exist*, but whoever comes to Christ shall most assuredly find mercy! What greater encouragement do you want? Do you want a salvation for those who will not come to be saved? Do you want blood sprinkled on those who will not come to Christ? You must want it, then—I will not preach it to you—I find it not in God's Word and therefore I dare not.

And now, sinner, I have yet another plea to urge with you why you should believe that Christ will receive all sinners who come to Him. It is this: that He calls all such. Now if Christ calls us and bids us come, we may be sure He will not turn us away when we do come! Once a blind man sat by the wayside begging. He *heard*—for he could not see—he heard the trampling of the many feet that were passing by him. He asked what all this meant—they said that Jesus of Nazareth passed by. Loudly did he cry, "Jesus, You son of David, have mercy on me!" The ears of mercy were apparently deaf, and the Savior walked on and heeded not the prayer. The poor man sat still, then, but cried aloud, though he did not move. Yet when the Savior said, "Come here," ah, *and then* he did not delay an instant! They said, "Arise, He calls you." And pushing them all aside, he made his way through the crowd and offered the prayer, "Lord, let me receive my sight." Well, then, you who feel yourself to be lost and ruined, arise and speak! He calls for you. Convicted sinner, Christ says, "Come!" And that you may be sure He says it, let us quote that Scripture again, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." You are called, man—then come! If her Majesty were riding by, you might scarcely presume to speak to her. But



if your name was called, and by her own lips, would you not go to her carriage and would not you listen to what she had to say to you? Now, the King of heaven says, "Come." Yes, the same lips that will one day say, "Come, you blessed," says this night, "Come, you poor distressed sinners, come to Me and I will save you." There is not a distressed soul in this hall, if his distress is the work of God's Holy Spirit, that shall not find salvation in the wounds of Christ! Believe then, sinner, believe in Jesus! Believe that He is able to save even you unto the very uttermost!

And now, just one point more to commend this encouragement to you. Indeed, poor souls, I know when you are under a sense of sin it is very hard to believe. We sometimes say, "Only believe." But believing is just the hardest thing in the world when sin lies heavy on your shoulders! We say, "Sinner, only trust in Christ." Ah, you do not know what a great "only" that is. It is a work so great that no man can do it unaided by God, for faith is the *gift of God* and He gives it only to His children. But if anything can call faith into exercise, it is this last thing I shall mention. sinner, remember that Christ is willing to receive you, for He came all the way from heaven to seek you and find you out in your wanderings and to save you and rescue you from your miseries! He has given proof of His hearty interest in your welfare in that He has shed His very heart's blood to redeem your soul from death and hell! If He had needed the companionship of saints He might have stayed in heaven, for there were many there. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were with Him there in glory. But He wanted sinners! He had a thirst after perishing sinners! He wanted to make them trophies of His grace! He wanted sin-black souls, to wash them white! He wanted dead souls, to make them alive! His benevolence wanted objects on which to exert itself. And therefore—

*"Down from the shining seats above,  
With joyful haste He fled—  
Entered the grave in mortal flesh,  
And dwelt among the dead."*

Oh, sinner, look there and see that cross. Mark yonder man upon it—

*"See from His head, His hands, His feet  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did ever such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"*

Do you note those eyes? Can you see languid pity for your soul floating in them? Do you mark that side? It is opened that you may hide your sins in it! See those drops of crimson blood—every drop is trickling down for you. Hear you that death-shriek, "Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabacthani"? That shriek in all its deep-toned solemnity is for you—yes, for *you*, if you are a sinner! If you do this night say unto God, "Lord, I know I have offended You. Have mercy upon me for Jesus' sake." If now, taught by the Spirit, you are led to abhor yourself in dust and ashes because you have sinned, verily, before God—I tell you in His sight, as His servant—you shall be saved, for Jesus would not die for you and yet let you perish!

**III.** Now, the last point is IN EXHORTATION. If it is true that Christ came only to save sinners, my beloved hearers, labor, strive, agonize to get a sense in your souls of your own sinnership. One of the most distressing things in the world is to feel yourself a sinner. But that is no reason why I should not exhort you to seek it, for while distressing, it is only the distress of the bitter medicine which will effectually work the cure! Do not seek to get high ideas of yourself—seek to get a low opinion of yourself. Do not try to deck yourself with ornaments—let it not be your endeavor to array yourself in gold and silver. Do not seek to be made good in yourself, but seek to strip yourself. Seek to humble yourself. Do not soar high, but sink low. Do not go up, but go down. Ask God to let you see that you are nothing at all. Ask Him to bring you to this, that you may have nothing to say but—

*"I the chief of sinners am"*

and if God hears your prayer, very likely Satan will tell you that you cannot be saved because you are a sinner. But as Martin Luther said, "Once when I was racked with pain and sin, Satan said, 'Luther, you cannot be saved, for you are a sinner.' 'No,' said Martin Luther, 'I will cut your head off with your own sword. You say I am a sinner—I thank you for it. You are a holy Satan,' (he says it, no doubt, in mockery) 'when you say I am a sinner. Well, then, Satan, Christ died for sinners, therefore He died for me. Ah,' said Luther, 'if you can but prove that to me, Satan, I will thank you for it. And so far from groan-

ing, I will begin to sing, for all we need is to know and feel that we are sinners!” Let us feel that. Let us know that and we may receive this as an undoubted fact of revelation that we have a right to come to Christ and to believe on Him and receive Him as all our salvation and all our desire! No doubt Conscience will come and stop you. But do not try to stop the mouth of Conscience—tell Conscience you are much obliged to him for all that he says. “Oh, you have been a desperate fellow” he says, “You sinned when you were young. You have sinned even until now. How many sermons have been wasted on you? How many Sabbaths have you broken? How many warnings have you despised? Oh, you are a desperate sinner.” Tell Conscience that you thank him, for the more you can prove yourself to be a sinner—not by outward acts, but in your inmost heart—the more you know yourself to be really guilty, the more reason you have to come to Christ and say, “Lord, I believe You have died for the guilty. I believe you intended to save the worthless. I cast myself on You. Lord, save me!” That does not suit some of you, does it? It is not the kind of doctrine that flatters man much. No—you would like to be good people and help Christ a little. You like that theory which some ministers are always proclaiming, “God has done a great deal for you. You do the rest and then you will be saved.” That is a very popular kind of doctrine. You do one part and God will do the other part—but that is not God’s truth—it is only a delirious dream. God says, “I will do the whole. Come and prostrate yourself at My feet. Give up your doings. Let me undertake for you. Afterwards, I will make you live to My glory. Only in order that you may be holy, I desire you to confess that you are unholy. In order that you may be sanctified, you must confess that you are as yet unsanctified.” Oh, do that, my hearers. Fall down before the Lord; cast yourselves down! Do not stand up with pride, but fall down before God in humility—tell Him you are undone without His sovereign grace—tell Him you have nothing, you *are* nothing, you never will be anything more than nothing! Tell Him that you know Christ does not need anything of you, for He will take you just as you are. Do not seek to come to Christ with anything besides your sin! Do not seek to come to Christ with your prayers for a recommendation. Do not come to Him even with professions of your faith. Come to Him with your sin and He will *give you faith*. If you think that you will have faith apart from Him, you have made an error! It is Christ who saves us. We must come to Christ for all we need—

***“You O Christ, are all I want;  
All in All in You I find:  
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,  
Heal the sick and lead the blind!”***

Jesus will do so and more, also, but you must come as blind; you must come as sick; you must come as lost—or else you cannot and must not come at all!

Come then, to Jesus, I beseech you, whatever may up to this time have kept you away! Your doubts could keep you away, but say, “Stand back, Unbelief—Christ says He died for sinners—and I know I am a sinner”—

***“My faith will on that promise live,  
Will on that promise die.”***

And there is one thing I need to say before I have done. Do not stay away from Christ when you know yourself to be a sinner because you think you do not understand every point of theology. Very often I get young converts with me and they say, “I do not understand this or that doctrine.” Well, I am very glad, as far as I am able, to explain it to them. But sometimes I get not young converts, but young *convicts*—those who are under conviction of sin. And when I am trying to bring them to this, that if they are but sinners, they may believe in Christ—they begin with this knotty point and that knotty point—and they seem to imagine that they cannot be saved till they are thorough theologians. Now, if you expect to understand all theology before you put your faith in Christ, I can only tell you, you never will! Live as long as ever you may, there will be some depths you cannot explore! There are certain unquestionable facts which you must hold. There will always be some difficulties through which you will not be able to see. The most favored saint on earth does not understand everything. But you think you need to understand all things before you come to Christ. One man asks me how sin came into the world and he will not come unto Christ till he knows that. Why, he will be lost beyond hope of recovery if he waits till he knows that! For nobody will ever know it. I have no reason to believe that it is even revealed to those who are in heaven! Another wants to know how it is that men are bid to come—and yet we are taught in

Scripture that no man can come—and he must have that cleared up—just as if the poor man who had a withered arm, when Christ said, “Stretch out your arm,” had replied, “Lord, I have got a difficulty in my mind. I need to know how You can tell me to stretch out my arm when it is withered.” Suppose when Christ had said to Lazarus, “Come forth,” Lazarus had said, “I have a difficulty in my mind—how can a dead man come forth?” Why, know this, vain man! When Christ says, “Stretch out your arm,” He gives you power to stretch out your arm with the command and the difficulty is solved in practice—though I believe it never will be solved in theory! If men need to have theology mapped out for them, as they would have a map of England—if they need to have every little village and every hedgerow in the gospel kingdom mapped out for them—they will not find it anywhere but in the Bible! And they will find it so mapped out there, that the years of a Methuselah would not suffice to find out every little thing in it! We must come to Christ and learn, not learn and *then* come to Christ! “Ah, but,” says another, “that is not the ground of my misgivings. I do not perplex myself much about theological points. I have got a worse anxiety than that—I feel I am too bad to be saved.” Well, I believe you are wrong, then, and that is all I can say in reply to you, for I will believe Christ before I will believe you. You say you are too bad to be saved? Christ says, “He who comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.” Now, which shall be right? Christ says He will receive the very worst. You say He will not. What then? “Let God be true and every man a liar.”

But there is one matter of counsel I wish you would accept—I desire of God that He may bring you to come and try the Lord Jesus Christ and see whether He will turn you away. What concern is it to me that I am so often reproached for making my appeals to the worst of sinners? It is said that I direct my ministry to drunks, harlots, blasphemers and sinners of the grosser sort. And what if the finger of scorn is pointed at me, or if I shall be accounted as a fool before the public; do you think I shall be deterred by their irony? Do you think I shall stand abashed at their ungenerous ridicule? Oh, no—like David, when he danced before the Ark of the Lord and Michal, Saul’s daughter, jeered at him and taunted him as a shameless fellow, I shall only reply—“if this is vile, I purpose to be more vile yet.” While I see the footprints of my Master before me and while I see still more His gracious sanctions following my labors. While I behold His name magnified, His glory increased and perishing souls saved, (as thanks be to God we have witness ever day)—while this gospel warrants me; while the Spirit of God moves me and while signs following do multiply the seals of my commission—who am I that I should stay myself for man, or resist the Holy Spirit for any flesh that breathes? Oh then, you chief of sinners, you vilest of the vile, you who are the scum of the city, the refuse of the earth, the dregs of creation whom no man seeks after—you whose characters are destroyed and whose inmost souls are polluted so black that no fuller on earth can whiten you; so debased that you have sunk beyond the hope of any moralist to reclaim you—Come! Come to Christ! Come at His invitation! Come and you shall be surely received with a hearty welcome!

My Master said that He received sinners. His enemies said it of Him, “This man receives sinners.” In deed and in truth we know of a surety that He *does* receive sinners, the enemies themselves being witnesses! Come now and yield the fullest credit to His work, His invitation, His promise. Do you object that it was only during a few days’ grace in the time of His sojourn on earth that He received sinners? No, not so. It is confirmed by all subsequent experience. The Apostles of Jesus echoed it after He had ascended into heaven, in terms as unqualified as He Himself expressed it when on earth! Will you not believe this—“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”? You despisers, go away and laugh at this. Go away and scorn the preached gospel if you will. But one day we shall meet each other, face to face, before our Maker and it may, perhaps, go hard, then, with all those who have despised Christ and laughed at His gracious words! If there is an infidel here who says he shall be well enough off if he shall die the death of annihilation and shall not live in a future world? Well, my friend, suppose all men die like dogs—I shall be as well off as you are and I think a little better off, even as to happiness and peace in *this* world. But if—(and mark you I do not put it so because I doubt it)—if it is true that there is a world to come, I would not like to stand in your place in the next world! If it is so that there is a judgment seat and a hell—I put it hypothetically, not because I have a doubt about it, but because you tell me *you* doubt it,

though I do not think you really do)—if there is such a place, what will you do then? Why, even now you shake if a leaf falls in the night! You are terrified if the cholera is in the streets! You are alarmed if you are a little sick and you rush to the physician and anyone can impose upon you with his medicines because you are afraid of death! What will you do in the swellings of Jordan when death gets hold on you? If a little pain frightens you now, what will you do when your body shall shake and your knees shall knock together before your Maker? What will you do, my hearer, when His burning eyes shall eat into your very soul? What will you do when amid ten thousand thunders, He shall say, “Depart, depart”?

I cannot tell you what you will do. But I will tell you one thing that you dare *not* do. That is, you dare not say that I have not, as simply as ever I could, tried to preach the gospel to the very chief of sinners. Hear it again— “He that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved.” To believe is to trust in Christ—to drop into those blessed arms that can catch the heaviest laden sinner that ever breathed! To believe is to fall flat on the promise—to let Him do all for you until He has quickened you and enabled you to work out what He has before worked in you—“your own salvation.” And even this must be “with fear and trembling.” God Almighty grant that some poor soul may be blessed tonight! You who are safe on shore, I do not expect to do you any good. If I have a rope to send abroad into the sea, it is only the stranded vessel, the shipwrecked mariner who will rejoice at the rope. You who think yourselves safe, I have no necessity to preach to you. You are all so perilously good in your own sight, it is no use trying to make you better! You are all so awfully righteous, you can go on your way well enough, without warning from me. You must excuse me, therefore, if I have nothing to say to you except this, “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

But allow me to turn myself to another class of people—the vilest of the vile. I would not care if I gained the nickname of the preacher to the basest and the vilest. I would not blush to be reviled, like Rowland Hill as the preacher to the lowest orders. For they need the gospel as much as any creatures under heaven and if nobody will preach it to them, God helping me, I will endeavor to preach it to them in words that they can understand! And if genteel people do not like preaching in that style, they have the option of leaving. If they want to hear men preach in intellectual strains, above the capacity of common sinners, let them go and hear them. I must content myself with following my Lord, who “made Himself of no reputation”—to go after out-of-the-way sinners in an out-of-the-way fashion. I would sooner do violence to pulpit decorum and break through pulpit decency, than not break through hard hearts! I count that sort of preaching to be the right sort, that reaches the heart somehow or other and I am not particular how I do it. I confess if I could not preach in one way, I would in another. If nobody would come to hear me in a black coat, they would be attracted by my wearing a red one. Somehow or other, I would make them hear the gospel if I could. And I would labor so to preach, that the mean understanding should be able to get hold of this one fact—“This man receives sinners.” God bless you all, for Christ’s sake!

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