

THE BLIND BEGGAR

NO. 266

**DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, AUGUST 4, 1859,
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AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.**

“And they came to Jericho: and as He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, You son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, You son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. And they called the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise. He calls you. And he, casting away his garment, rose and came to Jesus, And Jesus answered and said unto him, What will you that I should do unto you? The blind man said unto Him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go your way. Your faith has made you whole, And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way.”
Mark 10:46-52.

THIS poor man was beset with two great evils—blindness and poverty. It is sad enough to be blind, but if a man that is blind is in possession of riches, there are ten thousand comforts which may help to cheer the darkness of his eyes and alleviate the sadness of his heart. But to be both blind and poor, these were a combination of the sternest evils. One thinks it scarcely possible to resist the cry of a beggar whom we meet in the street if he is blind. We pity the blind man when he is surrounded with luxury, but when we see a blind man in want and following the beggar’s trade in the frequented streets, we can hardly forbear stopping to assist him. This case of Bartimaeus, however, is but a picture of our own. We are all by nature blind and poor. It is true we account ourselves able enough to see—but this is but one phase of our blindness.

Our blindness is of such a kind that it makes us think our vision perfect—whereas, when we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we discover our previous sight to have been blindness indeed. Spiritually, we are blind—we are unable to discern our lost estate—unable to behold the blackness of sin, or the terrors of the wrath to come. The unrenewed mind is so blind that it perceives not the all-attractive beauty of Christ. The Sun of Righteousness may arise with healing beneath His wings, but it were all in vain for those who cannot see His shining. Christ may do many mighty works in their presence, but they do not recognize His glory. We are blind until He has opened our eyes.

But besides being blind we are also by nature poor. Our father Adam spent our birthright, lost our estates. Paradise, the homestead of our race, has become dilapidated and we are left in the depths of beggary without anything with which we may buy bread for our hungry mouths, or raiment for our naked spirits. Blindness and beggary are the lot of all men after a spiritual fashion, till Jesus visits them in love. Look around then, children of God—look around this morning and you shall see in this hall many a counterpart of poor blind Bartimaeus sitting by the wayside begging.

I hope there are many such come here, who though they are blind and naked and poor, nevertheless are begging—longing to get something more than they have—not content with their position. With just enough spiritual life and sensitiveness to know their misery, they have come up to this place begging. Oh that while Jesus passes by this day they may have faith to cry aloud to Him for mercy! Oh may His gracious heart be moved by their thrilling cry, “Jesus You Son of David have mercy on me!” Oh may He turn and give sight unto such, that they may follow Him and go on their way rejoicing!

This morning I shall address myself most particularly to the poor and blind souls here today. The poor blind man's faith described in this passage of Scripture is a fit picture of the faith which I pray God you may be enabled to exert to the saving of your souls. We shall notice the origin of his faith, how his faith perceived its opportunity when Jesus passed by. We shall listen to his faith while it cries and begs. We shall look upon his faith while it leaps in joyous obedience to the Divine call. And then we shall hear his faith describing his case—"Lord, that I might receive my sight." And I trust we shall be enabled to rejoice together with this poor believing man, when his sight is restored, as we see him in the beauty of thankfulness and gratitude follow Jesus in the way.

I. First, then, we shall note THE ORIGIN OF THIS POOR BLIND MAN'S FAITH. He had faith, for it was his faith which obtained for him his sight. Now, where did he get it? We are not told in this passage how Bartimaeus came to believe Jesus to be the Messiah. But I think we may very fairly risk a conjecture. It is quite certain that Bartimaeus did not come to believe in Christ from what he saw. Jesus had worked many miracles—many eyes had seen and many hearts had believed because of what they saw. Bartimaeus also believed, but certainly not as the result of his eyesight, for he was stone-blind. No ray of light had ever burst into his soul. He was shut up in thick darkness and could see nothing. How then was it that he came to believe?

It certainly could not have been because he had traveled much through the country, for blind men stay at home. They care not to journey far. There is nothing they can see. However fair the landscape, they cannot drink it in with their eyes. Whatever lovely spots others may behold, there are no attractions for their blank survey. They therefore stay at home. And especially a mendicant like this, how should he travel? He would be perhaps unknown out of the city in which his father Timaeus had lived—even Jericho. He could not move the heart of strangers to charity, nor would he be likely to find a guide to conduct him throughout the dreary miles of that land. He would be almost necessarily a poor blind stay-at-home.

Then how did he acquire his faith? Methinks it might be in this fashion. On the nearest bank he could find outside Jericho, he sat begging in the sunlight. For blind men always love to bask in the sun. Though they see nothing, there is a kind of glimmering that penetrates the visual organ and they rejoice in it. At least they feel the heat of the great orb of day if they see not his light. Well, as he sat there, he would hear the passers by talking of Jesus of Nazareth and as blind men are usually inquisitive, he would ask them to stay and tell him the story—some tale of what Jesus had done. And they would tell him how He raised the dead and healed the leper. And he would say, "I wonder if He can give sight to the blind." And one day it came to pass, that he was told Jesus had restored to sight a man who had been born blind. This indeed was the great master-story that the world has to tell, for it had never been so known before in Israel—that a man who had been born blind should have his eyes opened. I think I see the poor man as he hears the story. He drinks it in, claps his hands and cries, "Then there is yet hope for me. Perhaps the Prophet will pass this way and if He does, oh I will cry to Him, I will beg Him to open my eyes, too. For if the worst case has been cured, then surely mine may be."

Many and many a day as he sat there, he would call to the passerby again and would say, "Come tell me the story of the man that was born blind and of Jesus of Nazareth that opened his eyes," and perhaps he would even get tiresome, as blind men are desirous. He must hear the story told him a hundred times over and always would there be a smile on the poor fellow's face when he heard the refreshing narrative. It never could be told too often, for he loved to hear it. To him it was like a cool refreshing breeze in the heat of a burning sun. "Tell it to me, tell it to me, tell it to me again," says he—"the sweet story of the man that opened the eyes of the blind." And methinks as he sat all alone and unable to divert his mind with many things, he would always keep his heart fixed on that one narrative and turn it over and over and over again, till in his daydreams he would half think he could see and sometimes almost imagine that his own eyes were going to be opened, too.

Perhaps on one of those occasions, as he was turning this over in his mind, some text of Scripture he had heard in the synagogue, occurred to him—he heard that Messiah should come to open the eyes of the blind—and quick in thought, having better eyes within than he had without, he came at once to the conclusion that the man who could open the eyes of the blind was none other than the Messiah, And from that day he was a secret disciple of Jesus. He might have heard him scoffed at, but he did not scoff. How could he scoff at one who had opened the eyes of the blind? He might have heard many a passerby reviling Christ and calling Him an impostor, but he could not join in the reviling. How could he be a deceiver who gave sight to poor blind men? I fancy this would be the cherished dream of his life. And perhaps for the two

or three years of the Savior's ministry, the one thought of the poor blind man would be, "Jesus of Nazareth opened the eyes of one that was blind." That story which he had heard led him to believe Jesus must be the predicted Messiah.

Now, O you spiritually blind, you spiritually poor, how is it you have not believed in Christ? You have heard the wondrous deeds which He has done—"Faith comes by hearing." You have understood how one after another has been pardoned and forgiven. You have stood in the House of God and listened to the confession of the penitent and the joyous shout of the Believer and yet you believe not. You have journeyed up year after year to the sanctuary of God and you have heard many stories—many a glorious narrative of the pardoning power of Christ. And how is it, O you spiritually blind, that you have never thought on Him? Why is it you have not turned this over and over in your minds? "This man receives sinners and will He not receive me?" How is it that you have not recollected that He who put away the sin of Paul and Magdalene can put away yours also? Surely, if but one story told into the ear of the poor blind man could give him faith, if his faith came but by one hearing, how is it that though you have heard many times that there was no salvation without faith in Christ and listened to many an earnest appeal, yet you have not believed?

Yet, it may be I have among these poor blind men some here today that are simply believing. You have never yet laid hold of faith, but still in the depths of your soul there is a something which says, "Yes, He is able to save me. I know He has power to forgive," and sometimes the voice speaks a little louder and it cheers your heart with a thought like this, "Go to Him, He will not cast you away, He has never cast out one yet who did venture upon His power and goodness." Well, my dear Hearer, if you are in this plight, you are happy and I am a happy man to have the privilege of addressing you—it shall not be long before the faith within you, which has been born by hearing, shall acquire strength enough to exercise itself to gain the blessing. That is the first thing—the origin of the faith of poor blind Bartimaeus, it doubtless came by hearing.

II. Now, in the next place, we shall notice his faith in ITS QUICKNESS AT GRASPING THE GRACIOUS OPPORTUNITY.

Jesus had been through Jericho and as He went into the city there was a blind man standing by the way and Jesus healed him. Bartimaeus, however, seems to have resided at the other side of Jericho, therefore he did not get a blessing till Christ was about to leave it. He is sitting down upon his customary spot by the wayside where some friend has left him, that he might remain there all day and beg and he hears a great noise and trampling of feet. He wonders what it is and he asks a passerby what is that noise? "Why all this tumult?" And the answer is, "Jesus of Nazareth passes by." That is but small encouragement, yet his faith had now arrived at such a strength that this was quite enough for him, that Jesus of Nazareth passes by.

Unbelief would have said, "He passes by, there is no hearing for you. He passes by, there is no hope of mercy. He is about to leave and He takes no notice of you." Why, if you and I needed encouragement, we should want Christ to stand still. We should need that someone should say, "Jesus of Nazareth is standing still and looking for you." Yes, but this poor man's faith was of such a character that it could feed on any dry crust on which our puny little faith would have starved. He was like that poor woman, who when she was repulsed, said, "Truth, Lord, I am but a dog, yet the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from the master's table."

He only heard "Jesus of Nazareth passes by." But that was enough for him. It was a slender opportunity. He might have reasoned thus with himself, "Jesus is passing by, He is just going out of Jericho. Surely he cannot stay now He is on a journey." No, rather did he argue thus with himself, "if He is going out of Jericho, so much the more reason that I should stop Him, for this may be my last chance." And, therefore, what unbelief would argue as a reason for stopping his mouth did but open it the wider. Unbelief might have said, "He is surrounded by a great multitude of people, He cannot get at you. His disciples are round about Him, too. He will be so busy in addressing them that He will never regard your feeble cry." "Yes," said he, "so much the greater reason then that I should cry with all my might." And he makes the very multitude of people become a fresh argument why he should shout aloud, "Jesus of Nazareth have mercy upon me." So, however slender the opportunity, yet it encouraged him.

And now my dear Hearers, we turn to you, again. Faith has been in your heart perhaps for many a day, but how foolish have you been. You have not availed yourself of encouraging opportunities as you might have done. How many times has Christ not only passed by, but stopped and knocked at your door and stood in your house? He has wooed and invited you and yet you would not come, still trembling and wavering, you dare not exercise the faith you have and risk

the results and come boldly to Him. He has stood in your streets—"Lo these many years," till the poor blind man's hair would have turned gray with age. He is standing in the street today—today He addresses you and says, "Sinner come to Me and live." Today is mercy freely presented to you. Today is the declaration made—"Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."

Poor unbelieving Heart, will you not, dare you not, take advantage of the encouragement to come to Him? Your encouragements are infinitely greater than those of this poor blind man, let them not be lost upon you. Come now, this very moment, cry aloud to Him now, ask Him to have mercy upon you, for now He not only passes by, but He presents Himself with outstretched arms and cries, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest and life and salvation." Such was the encouragement of this man's faith and I would that something in the service of this morning, might give encouragement to some poor Bartimaeus, who is sitting or standing here.

III. In the third place, having noticed how the faith of the blind man discovered and seized upon this opportunity, the passing by of the gracious Savior, we have TO LISTEN TO THE CRY OF FAITH.

The poor blind man sitting there is informed that it is Jesus of Nazareth. Without a moment's pause or ado, he is up and begins to cry—"You Son of David, have mercy upon me—You Son of David, have mercy on me." But he is in the middle of a fair discourse and his hearers like not that he should be interrupted—"Hold your tongue, blind man. Begone! He cannot attend to you." Yet what does the narrative say about him? "He cried the more a great deal. Not only cried he more, but he cries a great deal more. "You Son of David, have mercy on me." "Oh," says Peter, "do not interrupt the Master, what are you so noisy for?" "You Son of David, have mercy on Me," he repeats it again. "Remove him," says one, "he interrupts the whole service, take him away," and so they tried to move him. Yet he cries the more vigorously and vehemently, "You Son of David, have mercy on me—You Son of David, have mercy on me." Methinks we hear his shout. It is not to be imitated—no artist could throw into an utterance such vehemence or such emotion as this man would cast into it.—"You Son of David, have mercy on me."

Every word would tell—every syllable would suggest an argument—there would be the very strength and might and blood and sinew of that man's life cast into it. He would be like Jacob wrestling with the angel and every word would be a hand to grasp him that he might not go. "You Son of David, have mercy on me." We have here a picture of the power of faith. In every case, Sinner, if you would be saved, your faith must exercise itself in crying. The gate of Heaven is to be opened only in one way, by the very earnest use of the knocker of prayer. You cannot have your eyes opened until your mouth is opened. Open your mouth in prayer and He shall open your eyes to see. So shall you find joy and gladness. Mark, when a man has faith in the soul and earnestness combined with it, he will pray, indeed. Call you not those things prayers that you hear read in the Churches. Imagine not that those orations are prayers that you hear in our Prayer Meetings.

Prayer is something nobler than all these. That is prayer, when the poor soul in some weighty trouble, fainting and thirsty, lifts up its streaming eyes and wrings its hands and beats its bosom and then cries, "You Son of David, have mercy on me." Your cold orations will never reach the Throne of God. It is the burning lava of the soul that has a furnace within—a very volcano of grief and sorrow—it is that burning lava of prayer that finds its way to God. No prayer ever reaches God's heart which does not come from our hearts. Nine out of ten of the prayers which you listen to in our public services have so little zeal in them, that if they obtained a blessing it would be a miracle of miracles, indeed.

My dear Hearers, are you now seeking Christ in earnest prayer? Be not afraid of being too earnest or too persevering. Go to Christ this day, agonize and wrestle with Him. Beg Him to have mercy on you and if He hears you not, go to Him again and again and again. Seven times a day call upon Him and resolve in your heart that you will never cease from prayer till the Holy Spirit has revealed to your soul the pardon of your sin. When once the Lord brings a man to this resolve, "I will be saved. If I perish, I will still go to the Throne of Grace and perish only there," that man cannot perish. He is a saved man and shall see God's face with joy! The best of us pray with a little spasmodic earnestness and then we cease. We begin again and then once more the fervor ceases and we leave off our prayers.

If we would get Heaven, we must carry it not by one desperate assault, but by a continuous blockade. We must take it with the red hot shot of fervent prayer. But this must be fired day and night, until at last the city of Heaven yields to us. The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent must take it by force. Behold the courage of this man. He is hin-

dered by many, but he will not cease to pray. So if the flesh, the devil and your own hearts should bid you cease your supplication, never do so, but so much the more a great deal cry aloud—

“You Son of David have mercy on me.”

Observe here the simplicity of this man’s prayer. He did not want a liturgy or a prayer book on this occasion. There was something he needed and he asked for that. When we have our needs at hand they will usually suggest the proper language.

I remember a remark of quaint old Bunyan, speaking of those who make prayers for others, “The Apostle Paul said he knew not what to pray for and yet,” says he “there are many infinitely inferior to the Apostle Paul, who can write prayers—who not only know what to pray for and how to pray, but who know how other people should pray and not only that, but who know how they ought to pray from the first day of January to the last of December.” We cannot dispense with the fresh influence of the Holy Spirit suggesting words in which our needs may be couched. And as to the idea that any form of prayer will ever suit an awakened and enlightened Believer, or will ever be fit and proper for the lip of a penitent sinner—I cannot imagine it. This man cried from his heart, the words that came first—the simplest which could possibly express his desire—“You Son of David, have mercy on me.” Go and do you likewise, you poor blind sinner and the Lord will hear you, as He did Bartimaeus.

High over the buzz and noise of the multitude and the sound of the trampling of feet is heard a sweet voice, which tells of mercy and of love and of grace. But louder than that voice is heard a piercing cry—a cry repeated many and many a time—which gathers strength in repetition. And though the throat that utters it is hoarse, yet does the cry wax louder and louder and stronger still—“Jesus, You Son of David, have mercy on me.” The Master stops. The sound of misery in earnest to be relieved can never be neglected by Him. He looks around—there sits Bartimaeus. The Savior can see him, though he cannot see the Savior—“Bring him here to Me,” said He. “Let him come to Me, that I may have mercy on him.” And now, they who had bid him hold his clamor change their note and gathering around him they say, “Be of good cheer. Rise, He calls you.”

Ah, poor comforters! They would not soothe him when he needed it. What cared he now for all they had to say? The Master had spoken. That was enough, without their officious assistance. Nevertheless they cry, “Arise, He calls you.” And they lead him, or are about to lead him, to Christ, but he needs no leading. Pushing them aside he hurls back the garment in which he wrapped himself by night—no doubt, a ragged one—and casting that away, the blind man seems as if he really saw at once. The sound guides

him and with a leap, leaving his cloak behind him, waving his hands for very gladness, there he stands in the presence of Him who shall give him sight!

IV. We pause here to observe HOW EAGERLY HE OBEYED THE CALL. The Master had but to speak, but to stand still and command him to be called and he comes. No pressure is needed. Peter need not pull him by one arm and John by the other. No. He leaps forward and is glad to come. “He calls me and shall I stand back?”

And now, my dear Hearers, how many of you have been called under the sound of the ministry and yet you have not come? Why is it? Did you think that Christ did not mean it when He said—“Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest?” Why is it that you still keep on at your labors and are still heavy laden? Why do you not come? Oh, come! Leap to Him that calls you! I pray you cast away the raiment of your worldliness, the garment of your sin. Cast away the robe of your self-righteousness and come, come NOW! Why is it that I bid you? Surely if you will not come at the Savior’s bidding, you will not come at mine! If your own stern necessities do not make you attend to His gracious call, surely nothing I can say can ever move you. O my poor blind Brothers and Sisters! You, who cannot see Christ to be your Savior, you that are full of guilt and fear, He calls you—

*“Come you weary, heavy laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall.”*

Come you that have no hope, no righteousness. You outcast, you desponding, you distressed, you lost, you ruined, come! come today! Whoever will, in your ears today does mercy cry, “Arise, He calls you!” O, Savior! Call them effectually. Call now—let the Spirit speak.

O Spirit of the living God, bid the poor prisoner come and let him leap to loose his chains. I know that which kept me a long time from the Savior was the idea that He had never called me—and yet when I came to Him, I discovered that

long before that He had invited me but I had closed my ear. I thought surely He had invited everyone else to Him, but I must be left out, the poorest and the vilest of them all. O Sinner! If such is your consciousness, then you are one to whom the invitation is specially addressed. Trust Him now, just as you are, with all your sins about you—come to Him and ask Him to forgive you. Plead His blood and merits and you cannot, shall not, plead in vain.

V. We proceed towards the conclusion. The man has come to Christ, let US LISTEN TO HIS SUIT. Jesus, with loving condescension takes him by the hand and in order to test him and that all the crowd might see that he really knew what he wanted, Jesus said to him—“What will you that I should do unto you?” How plain the man’s confession, not one word too many—he could not have said it in a word less—“Lord that I might receive my sight.” There was no stammering here, no stuttering and saying, “Lord I hardly know what to say.” He just told it at once—“Lord that I might receive my sight.”

Now if there is a hearer in this house who has a secret faith in Christ and who has heard the invitation this morning, let me beseech you go home to your chamber and there, kneeling by your bedside, by faith picture the Savior saying to you—“What will you that I should do unto you?” Fall on your knees and without hesitation tell Him all, tell Him you are guilty and you desire that He would pardon you. Confess your sins. Keep none of them back. Say, “Lord, I implore You pardon my drunkenness, my profanity, or whatever it may be that I have been guilty of.” And then still imagine you hear Him saying—“What will you that I should do unto you?” Tell Him, “Lord I would be kept from all these sins in the future. I shall not be content with being pardoned, I want to be renewed.”

Tell Him you have a hard heart, ask Him to soften it. Tell Him you have a blind eye and you cannot see your interest in Christ. Ask Him to open it. Confess before Him you are full of iniquity and prone to wander. Ask Him to take your heart and wash it and then to set it upon things above and suffer it no longer to be fond of the things of earth. Tell Him plainly—make a frank and full confession in His presence. And what if it should happen, my dear hearer, that this very day, while you are in your chamber, Christ should give you the touch of Grace, put your sins away, save your soul and give you the joy to know that you are now a child of God and now a heir of Heaven? Imitate the blind man in the explicitness and straight-forwardness of his confession and his request—“Lord, that I might receive my sight.”

Once again, how cheering the fact, the blind man had no sooner stated his desire than immediately he received his sight. Oh, how he must have leaped in that moment! What joys must have rushed in upon his spirit! He saw not the men as trees walking, but he received his sight at once. Not a glimmer, but a bright full burst of sunlight fell upon his benighted eyeballs. Some persons do not believe in instantaneous conversions, nevertheless they are facts. A man has come into this hall with all his sins about him and before he has left it has felt his sins forgiven. He has come here a hardened reprobate, but he has gone away from that day forth to lead a new life and walk in the fear of God. The fact is, there are many conversions that are gradual. But regeneration after all, at least in the part of it called “quickenings,” must be instantaneous and justification is given to a man as swiftly as the flash of lightning. We are full of sin one hour, but it is forgiven in an instant. And sins, past, present and to come, are cast to the four winds of Heaven in less time than the clock takes to beat the death of a second. The blind man saw immediately.

And now what would you imagine this man would do as soon as his eyes were opened. Has he a father? Will he not go to see him? Has he a sister, or a brother—will he not long to get to his household? Above all has he a partner of his poor blind existence, will he not seek her out to go and tell her that now he can behold the face of one who has so long loved and wept over him? Will he not now want to go and see the temple and the glories of it? Does he not now desire to look upon the hills and all their beauties and behold the sea and its storms and all its wonders? No—there is but one thing that poor blind man now longs for—it is that he may always see the man who has opened his eyes. “He followed Jesus in the way.”

What a beautiful picture this is of a true convert. The moment his sins are forgiven, the one thing he wants to do is to serve Christ. His tongue begins to itch to tell somebody else of the mercy he has found. He longs to go off to the next shop and tell some work-fellow that his sins are all pardoned. He cannot be content. He thinks he could *preach* now. Put him in the pulpit and though there were ten thousand before him, he would not blush to say, “He has taken me out of the miry clay and out of the horrible pit and set my feet upon a Rock and put a new song into my mouth and established my goings.” All he now asks is, “Lord, I would follow You where ever You go. Let me never lose Your company. Make my

communion with You everlasting. Cause my love to increase. May my service be continual and in this life may I walk with Jesus and in the world to come all I ask is that I may live with Him.”

You see the crowd going along now. Who is that man in the midst with face so joyous? Who is that man who has lost his upper garment? See, he wears the dress of a beggar. Who is he? You would not think there is any beggary about him. For his step is firm and his eye glisten and sparkles. And listen to him—as he goes along, sometimes he is uttering a little hymn or song! At other times when others are singing, listen to his notes, the loudest of them all! Who is this man, always so happy and so full of thankfulness.? It is the poor blind Bartimaeus, who once sat by the wayside begging. And do you see yonder man, his brother and his prototype? The one who sings so heartily in the House of God and who when he is sitting in that house, or walking by the way is continually humming to himself, some strain of praise? Oh, it is that drunkard who has had his sins forgiven! It is that swearer who has had his profanity cleansed out! It is she who was once a harlot, but is now one of the daughters of Jerusalem—‘tis she who once led others to Hell, who now washes her Redeemer’s feet and wipes them with the hairs of her head!

Oh, may God grant that this story of Bartimaeus may be written over again in your experience and may you all at last meet where the eternal light of God shall have chased away all blindness and where the inhabitants shall never say, “I am sick.”

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307