

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IN COMING TO GOD?

NO. 2740

A SERMON

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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“Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”

Hebrews 11:6.

THE apostle had put Enoch down among the heroes of faith and, to prove that Enoch was a man of faith, he says, “Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” “Then,” argues Paul, “if he pleased God, he must have been a believing man, for the very lowest form of approach to God needs faith—‘He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.’ So, if the very lowest grade of approach to God needs faith, much more does that highest form of it in which a man walks with God so as to obtain the testimony that he pleases God.” The argument of the apostle is clear and convincing. If any man shall be pleasing to God, as Enoch was, it must be the result of faith, since, even to come to God at all, in the very first steps that we take, we must have a measure of faith in Him, we must at least believe that God is; and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

I. I am not going into the argument so far as it relates to Enoch, but I want you to join with me in examining Paul’s statement concerning what is essential in coming to God. That will be my first division, THE ESSENTIALS OF FAITH IN OUR COMING TO GOD.

The first essential is that *we must believe “that He is,”* we must believe that there is a God—that these things, which we see, do not spring of themselves, or come by chance, or in any way whatever except that there is a personal God who created all things and by whom all things consist. If you do not believe that, you certainly will never come to God. How is it possible for a man to come to One whose very existence he doubts? That matter must be settled or there cannot be any real coming to God.

More than that, he that would come to God must believe that there is but one God—that the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is the only living and true God. If we are to come to God—to the God of the Old and the New Testament—we must accept Him as He is there pleased to reveal Himself. We must not try to fashion a god such as we would like to have, for that would be idolatry—but we must accept God as He is made known in the Scriptures—and especially as He has manifested Himself in Christ Jesus, for it is in Him that God has revealed Himself to us for the practical purpose of our reconciliation. If we really wish to come to God it must be by the way in which He has come to us—that is, through His Son, Jesus Christ. Neither, let me add, shall we ever come to God aright unless we ask for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the blessed Trinity in Unity.

To believe that God is, means, however, much more than this. It means that when I pray, I believe that He is where I am. I do not know whether any of us have yet been able to really get a grip of this first thought, that God is, for there is something wonderful about that truth of God, for, if God is, then God is everywhere! So, with what awe and reverence ought we to spend every moment of our lives! There is no place to sin in, for God is there. There is no place in which to trifle, for God is there. There is no place for blasphemy, for God is there—will you blaspheme Him to His face? There is no place for rebellion, for God is there—will you rebel against the King in His own courts? This makes all space most solemn, and all time truly sacred. Of every spot of ground whereon we stand, we may say, with Jacob, “How dreadful is this place!” Though it was a place abounding in stones, which served for his pillows, he said, when he awoke, “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

I passed a church, the other day, and I saw on one of its doors the words, “The house of God.” I thought, “Is it?” On the next door, I saw the words, “The gate of heaven.” And I said to myself, “It is not so, any more than any other door is.” Is this Tabernacle God’s house? While we worship Him here, it is—but it is not any more holy than our own house is. One place is as sacred as another, for God’s presence has consecrated it all. “The Most High dwells not in temples made with hands.” Every part of my garden, as I meditate upon God in it, is as holy as the aisles of the most venerable cathedral. Your bed-chamber, as you kneel in prayer before you lie down to sleep, is as sacred as the temple of Solomon. Every spot where there is a devout worshipper, is the abode of Deity—it is no more and no less so in one place than in another.

If you begin to fancy that one place is sacred above others, you will tread there with superstitious reverence. You will scarcely dare to put your feet upon the chancel pavement, and you will bow to the East, as I have seen some do, as if there were something more holy in that direction than at other points of the compass. Ugh! This is idolatry and nothing more! The right thing is to look upon the street pavements as too sacred for you to sin there, and to turn to the East or West, to the North or South, and to say concerning every place, “God is before my eyes there, so that is a sacred spot. God is everywhere, and therefore, I must not dare to offend Him anywhere.”

They who would come to God must believe that He is everywhere and that He is especially where they are praying to Him. When we pray aright, we speak into God’s ear—into His very heart, for He is wherever there is a praying soul. And when you truly praise Him, you are not singing to the wind, for God is there and He hears you. How solemn would our praise be and how intense would our prayers be if we always realized God’s presence! Yet, perhaps, when you go to bed, you drop down on your knees and wearily repeat a few sentences—but you have not really prayed unless you have been conscious that God was there and you have communed with Him. Then, in the morning, if you are late in rising, you hurry over what you call your devotions, but there is no devotion in them unless you believe that God is there, and you really draw near to Him in prayer. We should pray, dear friends, in the same spirit as that in which the angels worship before the throne of God—with covered faces and in lowly adoration—and thus we would pray if we did really believe in God’s presence with us. But for anyone to say, “Yes, I know that there is a God, but I do not realize that He is here—when I am at my work, or at my recreation, I do not feel that He is especially with me,” is a sort of atheism from which may God, in His great mercy, deliver all of us! If there is a place where God is not, you may go there and sin—but there is no such spot in the whole universe! Remember what David says—“Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, You are there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Your hand lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.”

The belief that God is, moreover, seems to me to involve not only that He exists and is everywhere present, but that He knows what we are doing—that He perceives the wishes of our heart—that He is aware of all that we say and all that we think. The Epicureans held the theory that God had a great many things to do of far more importance than listening to the prayers of men and women, yet that is not the teaching of the Scriptures. He counts the hairs on our head and notices the falling of a sparrow to the ground—and He is as truly great in looking upon the lilies of the field as in ordering the revolutions of the ponderous orbs of heaven.

It is not believing that God is when you say, “Oh, yes, there is a God, and God is everywhere, but, still, He does not concern Himself about us and no practical end will be served by prayer, for He will not interfere in our affairs.” Ah, no! You will never come to Him in that way and I do not see any inducement for you to try. I do not want to approach a dead god—there are sufficient dead things in the world to sorrow over without a dead Deity! I do not care for the Pantheist’s god. What is he? An insensible, impalpable, something or nothing? I need a personal God, a living Person, a sympathetic Person, a Divine Person and I find Him in that blessed One who is the Son of God, and who, with the Father and the Spirit, is the one living and true God! I hope, dear friends, that you have come as far as this even if you have not yet actually come to God. I hope you know, in the senses that I have mentioned, that, “He is.”

But, according to our text, there is a second thing to be believed before we can come to God—that is, “*that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*” By which I understand the apostle to mean that we must believe that God hears prayer and answers it, too. You will not pray unless you believe that. At least you will be very foolish if you do. I suppose there are persons who think that the mere repetition of a certain form of words may do them good, but their intellect must be on a level with that of

those who used to think that the word, “*abracadabra*,” could cure diseases or keep ghosts and witches away. I am afraid there is a kind of religion which is only on a level with witchcraft when people think a particular place is sacred and that a man is holy because he has certain clothes on and reads out of a holy book, on a holy day, and performs with holy water and a holy cup to hold it in and holy this, and holy that—I know not what—it is all a mass of silly superstition! Let us stay clear of all that nonsense and feel that when we speak with God, there is reality in it and that God hears us just as surely as we hear one another—and that He is prepared to answer our petitions—I mean, literally to do so, not in some mysterious, unreal fashion, but actually and truly to give us that which is fitting for Him to bestow and right for us to ask. We cannot pray as we ought unless we believe that.

If we are to come to God, we must also believe that He will bless those who endeavor thus to come to Him, and further, that it is a good thing to know God, to love God, to be reconciled to God, to be under the operations of God’s Spirit, to be saved by God’s Son. If we do not really believe all this—if we fancy that it is a mere matter of form, and has no vitality in it, we shall not care to come to God, for sensible men do not wish to deal in counterfeits and shams—they need realities.

To put the matter very plainly, he who would truly come to God must believe that a life of godliness will pay—that it will answer his purpose to come to God, because, “He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” A man with any sense will not follow after that which he conceives has no advantage in it. But when a man can honestly say, “The best interests of my highest nature depend upon my getting to God, becoming His servant and having Him as my Father and my friend,” then it is that he diligently seeks Him. Dear friends, I believe that if you would have the best of life, the highest bliss, the most supreme, noble, divine joys of which our mortal nature is capable, you cannot find all this anywhere but in coming to God through Jesus Christ, His Son, and yielding yourselves up entirely to Him and becoming His faithful followers forever! We must believe that diligently to seek Him is the most profitable thing possible to us, or we shall never rightly come to God. Some will say, “To be moderately religious is a good thing, no doubt, but to be too righteous would be a very bad thing.” Ah, you will never come to God if that is what you think, for, depend upon this, of all the miserable things in the world, a little religion is about the worst of all! I know some men who have just about enough religion not to be able to comfortably sin, but they have no comfort in Christ. The joys of the world—and it has its delusions which worldlings call joys—they dare not go after! And for want of faith they dare not claim the joys of the Spirit of God—so they are wretched. They are like bats which fly by night, or which, in the twilight, come out and get a little exercise. They are between-ites—if there is such a word—neither servants of God, nor yet out-and-out servants of Satan—a miserable crew! Let none of us belong to them. That man gets the most out of godliness who gives himself most to it. He whom the world calls a fanatic is often just the one who is thorough, sincere and earnest. And he it is who finds that God is his rewarder because he diligently seeks Him—not only seeks Him, but seeks Him with all his heart, mind, soul and strength!

II. This brings me to my second division, which is this—COMING TO GOD SHOULD BE THE RESULT OF ANY MAN’S HAVING THESE ESSENTIALS. I thought, as I looked upon this great assembly, that there might be a few here who doubted whether there was a God, or whether God was “a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” But I know that almost everyone here says, “I believe there is a God, I never doubted it. And I believe that it is a good thing, a blessed thing, to serve Him.”

Very well, then, *as you believe that there is a God, seek Him*. If I am addressing any who have been delivered from infidelity in the head, I want you also to be delivered from practical infidelity of the heart. Reason itself says to you, “If there is a God, and God is all around you, how can you continue to be His enemy?” Now, friend, if you believe that there is a God, can you sit easily on your seat so long as the Omnipotent One is angry with you? Bow your head and confess your transgression to Him—pray to Him to forgive you for Christ’s sake, to be reconciled to you, and to reconcile you to Himself, for He has promised that He will forgive those who confess their transgressions to Him, and who come unto Him through Christ Jesus, His Son. If there is a God, O you burdened ones, you weary ones, you feeble ones—ask Him to help you! You have no helper, perhaps, on earth—then cast yourself at His feet, and see what He can do for you. If you do, indeed, believe that God is—that the Ever-merciful lives, and hears, and pities those who trust Him, rely upon His care, and come to Him with your heartbreaking grief!

As there is a God, and I am sure I do but reason rightly when I say that, *then let us serve Him*. Is it not right that He should be our Master, seeing that He made us and that His service is so glorious that He

makes into kings all those who enter it? Come, my soul, enlist afresh in the army of Emmanuel! And you who have not yet served Him, yield yourselves up to Him this very hour! As there is a God, we cannot be happy apart from Him and there is no happiness like that of having Him for our friend and Helper. Come, then, dear hearts, can you refuse this invitation? If you say, "There is no God," I am not speaking to you, just now, but if you say, "Oh, yes! I know that God is, and that He is here, and I believe in Father, Son, and Spirit—prove that you really believe in God by yielding to Him, by being reconciled to Him, by obeying Him, by trusting His Son, and so finding eternal life! God grant you may!

Further, *if you believe that God is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," come to Him.* You say, "Oh, yes! I know that a Christian life is a happy life. I believe that the service of God is one that pays, that it is full of rewards and full of happiness." Very well, then, will you not enter at once upon that service which has such gracious rewards attached to it? Will you not run away from your old master? You need not give him any notice—the prodigal did not. He was sent into the fields to feed swine, but he never gave his master a day's notice! If he had waited to do that, he would never have left. He slipped right off, and left the swine to eat all the husks. I advise you to act in the same fashion. "Steal away to Jesus," without any delays, or hesitation, or questioning! I do not think that any man gets saved by thinking about it, and saying that it shall be, by-and-by. No—*now* is the all-important moment! Strike while the iron is hot, and, by God's grace, that one blow shall break the chains, and set the captive free!

As there is a God, and He is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," it behooves us, who do seek Him, to seek Him with the utmost diligence. David said, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous." And though it is not of debt, but of grace, yet there is a reward, and we find it to be so even now. Let us, therefore, give ourselves more than ever to prayer, and to Christian service—and more than ever let us devote ourselves to His glory whose we are, and whom we serve.

Let me pull you by the sleeve, my brothers and sisters—you who say, "I am a Christian." You believe that God is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Do you seek Him diligently? How much of the Scriptures have you read during the last week? How many hours have you spent in prayer? "Hours?" you ask! "Say minutes." How much have you lived for God during the past month? What have you done with a distinct view to His glory? What souls have you tried to win? What truths of God have you tried to teach? What virtues have you tried to set forth? You say that He is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"—do you despise the reward? Are you content with having made a profession of religion? Some professors remind me of the reply of the child who was asked at the Sunday school about her father, who never went to any place of worship. "Is your father a Christian, Jane?" "Yes," she replied, "but he has not worked much at it lately." There are many professors of that sort! They are like certain tradesmen who have a notice on their door to say that they have gone out for a fortnight. They will not make a fortune in that way, I am persuaded—such a method of doing business generally ends in bankruptcy. What can I say of some professedly Christian people? They have no stock, they are doing no business for their Master, and their chief employment is that of asking—

"Do I love the Lord, or no?"

Just so, brother—that is what I was thinking about you—

"Am I His, or am I not?"

Just so, sister—it is quite right of you to ask that question, and there are a good many more who are asking it concerning you! But why should you and I live in such a way that we are obliged to ask these questions? He who is, by God's grace, bringing forth fruit to God's glory does not need to sing that sorrowful tune! So may God grant to all His professing people grace to be thorough and to give themselves up to the utmost diligence in His holy service, for it can only be by His grace that we shall do this!

III. Now I close by bearing testimony to the fact that THE RESULT OF COMING TO GOD WILL JUSTIFY THE ACT OF COMING—AND THE FAITH WHICH WAS ESSENTIAL TO THE COMING.

First, *many have come to God*, so they must have had faith in Him, for no man can come to God without believing "that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." There have been men who have believed this, who have not come to God, but there have been others who have come to God because they believed in Him. In the olden time, Abraham rose up early in the morning and went to a certain place where He prayed and where God met with Him and spoke with Him in words which Abraham could hear. God does not now utter words which our ears can hear, yet there are men—and they are honest, upright, truthful men—who will tell you solemnly that they have often met with God and have been as certain of His special presence as of their own existence. There have been times

when our fellowship with the Father and with the Son has been as real to us as the atmosphere which we cannot see, but which we breathe! We cannot see God—yet “in Him we live, and move, and have our being.” And we have been conscious of it. There is a mystic touch that comes not from any angelic hand. There is a sacred breathing upon the heart which comes not from mere wind. There is a whisper within the soul—a movement, a stirring, a brooding, an overshadowing—I cannot describe it, but I have often felt it, and so have many of you. And you have been sure that God has come to you and that you have come to God. I am bearing witness to what is as sure a fact to me as that I am speaking to you now—and it is not a fact to me, alone, but to hundreds and thousands of living men and women to whom this life is made happy because they dwell with God and abide in Christ Jesus!

Beside that, having come to God, *we have found that God is*. It has not been a dream, but a blessed reality! We have struggled to get to God. We have prayed to Him. We have cried to Him. We have longed for Him and we deliberately declare that God has come to us. When He has come to us, has there been any reality about it? Reality? Why, He has sometimes lifted us up out of the horrible pit of despair into unutterable ecstasies of joy! At times, when we have cried out to Him in our distress, He has walked over the waters and they have been like marble beneath His feet—and very soon all has been calm and peaceful within our spirit. Tell us that God is not real, when we have been almost on the verge of sin—one more step and we would have been over the precipice—but we have seen Him and we have started back, or, on the other hand, we were shirking a duty which seemed too hard for us, but we realized His presence and then we shouldered the load—and though it seemed as heavy as the world, we became like Atlas, by God’s strength, and so we were able to bear the burden! Do you think I talk too boldly? Perhaps you are a bigger man than I am. If so, talk according to your size, but, to me, it has been enough to have been helped of God in my little world. And it has been the same with many a poor widow with half-a-dozen children about her. You may say, “Her case is a very small affair.” It is not small to her! And when she has gone before the living God with that heavy load which to her is like a world, God has helped her, and has been the Advocate of the widow, and the Father of the fatherless—and it has not been in a dream, or in sentimental fiction, but in sober reality! I could find you many who would bear witness to such deliverances as this—and they would all declare that God is!

They have also found that *God rewards them*. Does He? I will answer in the name of them all—Yes, He does. How does He reward them? Well, sometimes, in a measure, in this life. He gives to His children, as He did to Abraham and to Isaac, happiness and prosperity, so that even in this life they feel that His ways are ways of pleasantness and all His paths are peace. But this is not the greatest reward He gives. He gives *Himself* to His children—He becomes their portion. They are poor, sick and heavy of heart, but He comes to them as He did to Abraham, and says, “Fear not. I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward.” He Himself is their reward, and possessing Him as their God, they are happier without the riches of this world than the wealthiest man can be without God. Ask the Lord’s servants how they get on with their Master. There are so many of them that if He were not faithful, some one or other would tell the story. It is a thing that ought to be noticed, that, out of the millions of Christians who have died—and death-beds are places where people usually speak the truth—there has never been an instance of one person sitting up in his bed, and saying, “I am sorry I ever served the Lord. I regret that I was so diligent in seeking Him, for I found no reward in it. My life would have been a great deal happier if I had served myself, or lived for the world—but I made a mistake—I lived for God.”

Now, surely, if this were the fact, there would have been one or two *somewhere* who would have said it! But the universal testimony—there is no exception—of all dying children of God has been this, “We wish we had sought Him earlier and loved Him more and served Him better. We wish we had been more consecrated to Him and had practiced more self-denial, and given more generously to His cause, for, after all, the reality of our life lies in what He did for us, and in what He enabled us to do for Him! All the rest was but the chaff of life. The best of our life is what we lived by faith upon the Son of God who loved us, and gave Himself for us.” They all say so and, therefore, we must accept their testimony. If a mistress has a large number of maids, somebody might ask them, “What kind of mistress have you?” And they might all say, “Oh, she is a most delightful person,” and so on, because they were afraid to speak the truth. But if there should be a dozen of them, by-and-by; one would be found in the street who would say, “You heard what those maids said, but it was not true, for she is a quarrelsome woman.” The truth would ooze out somehow! And if our God were not faithful, one or other of His servants would be sure to say it! But we have, none of us, anything to complain of.

“But,” you say, “there are many of God’s people who serve Him faithfully, and they do not get any reward—they are very poor and needy.” Yet they will tell you that they are more than satisfied with the way their Lord has treated them! And, moreover, they will tell you that they are strangers and pilgrims, here, and that their chief reward is yet to come! They are looking, by faith, for the everlasting remunerations that will follow the life of holiness when this poor world, and all its joys shall have melted like the morning mist, and gone forever. Eternity, eternity, eternity—we shall soon know, brothers and sisters, what it will be to be in eternity! There is not one of us who can live here forever. When a very few years have gone, we shall all have departed. Imagine yourselves in the future state—if you have not lived for God, but have lived for the world, for yourself—what is your portion? Endless darkness! Infinite despair! Unutterable woe! But if you have lived for God—if, by His grace, you have put your trust in Jesus Christ, what is your portion? On yonder glittering hills you stand, in the midst of the white-robed host, and Christ is with you, and you are looking back upon what you suffered for His sake on earth, and you say, “Oh, it was nothing at all! I wish I had suffered far more for Him who suffered so much for me!” As for what you did for Him, you will say, “That is not worth mentioning! Oh, that I had lived more intensely for Him!” As for what you gave for Him, “Oh!” you will say, “I never gave a thousandth part of what I would give now if I had it! I reckon that I wasted what was not spent upon His kingdom. I reckon that I lost the time that I did not use for glorifying Him, and only did I live as I ought to live, and as in heaven I now wish I had lived, when I lived entirely to Him.” Then will you see, from before the throne of God, that “He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”

So may it be with every one of us, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITIONS OF C. H. SPURGEON: *HEBREWS 11.*

These men, of whom we are now briefly to read, are a company of God’s witnesses. And the apostle calls them, in the next chapter, “a cloud of witnesses,” who, from their lofty seats above, are watching us who are now running the Christian race.

Verses 1, 2. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.*

Those of the olden time, who were men of noble character, won that character by their faith.

3. *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

Things that we see were not made out of things that we see. They were brought out of the unseen by the word of God, so that, really, the word of God is the foundation of everything that has been formed by Him, and after all, things material—created and seen—are not truly substantial. They are but shadows! The real substance is that which never can be seen, even the ever-blessed God, whose voice—whose word—created the heavens and the earth.

4. *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it, he being dead yet speaks.*

All down the ages, the faith of Abel has continued bearing witness to God. Oh, that we might have Abel’s faith, and offer to God *the Lamb*—even Christ Jesus—that we also may be accepted for His sake!

5, 6. *By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*

Mark that this holiest of men, whose walk with God was so close and unbroken that he was permitted to escape the pangs of death, nevertheless did not attain to this high position by his own works, but by faith.

7. *By faith Noah, being warned by God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

See how faith within a man masters all his emotions? Noah, in preparing the ark, was “moved with fear,” but that fear, instead of hampering him, was yoked with his faith, and so was turned to practical account. Oh, for an overcoming faith which shall hold our entire nature in check, or which shall employ every part of our being for its own high and noble purposes!

8. By faith Abraham.

To whom Paul devotes a long passage, because he is the father of the faithful, the greatest exponent of faith that we have ever met with. “By faith Abraham”—

8, 9. *When he was called to go out into a place which he should afar receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing where he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles.*

That is, in tents—

9, 10. *With Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

And he was content to be a pilgrim and wanderer till he should reach that city. He was quite willing to dispense with all present comfort for the sake of that glorious future which God set before the eyes of his faith!

11-13. *Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang from one man, and he as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

What a sweet word that is, “embraced them!” First, they were sure the promises were true—they “were persuaded of them.” But, next, they laid hold of them, pressed them to their hearts; they, “embraced them.” And then, further, they practically showed the fruit of their faith by confessing that “they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

14-15. *For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from which they came out of, they might have had opportunity to have returned.*

But, now, faith has no thought of going back—her face is set like a flint to go towards the heavenly city, forsaking every earthly joy for the sake of the eternal future.

16. *But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He has prepared for them a city.*

For they are not ashamed to look forward to the future for their chief joy, and God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared that chief joy for them!

17-19. *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall your seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

See how Abraham spied out the great doctrine of the resurrection? Though almost driven to desperation, he would not give up his faith in God. He was bidden to believe two apparently opposite things—first, that in Isaac should his seed be called, and secondly, that he must offer up Isaac—but he bridged the two by believing another grand truth of God—that God was able to raise up Isaac, “even from the dead.” Whenever there are two things revealed to you in Scripture which you cannot quite reconcile, you may always believe that, between them, there lies something still more glorious which your dim eyes as yet are scarcely able to perceive!

20. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

It was blundering faith, for Jacob deceived his father, and Isaac made mistakes in giving his blessing—yet even his mistakes were all right in God’s sight. It was by faith that he blessed both his sons, and therefore, I gather that a faith which blunders, if it is faith in God, is an acceptable faith.

21. *By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*

Grasping that memorable staff with which he “passed over this Jordan”—that staff on which he leaned so heavily when the wrestling angel made him go limping over Peniel—that staff which was a memorial of the breaking down which he had suffered when he gained the name of Israel by prevailing with his God—on that staff he leaned as he “blessed both the sons of Joseph.”

22. *By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.*

A sure proof that he believed they would come out of Egypt, for he would not be buried among the Pharaohs, though a prominent place would have been assigned to him there! But he would have his bones lie with those of his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

23-33. *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months by his parents because they saw he was a proper child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest He that destroyed the first-born should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians essaying to do were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; also of David, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness.*

Which is quite as great a thing as subduing kingdoms.

33. *Obtained promises.*

Which, by being put in this connection, seems to be as blessed a thing as working righteousness.

33-35. *Stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured.*

Is this also a feat of faith? Yes. Instead of showing their faith by putting their enemies to flight, they prove it by enduring all manner of tortures without shrinking!

35-39. *Not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mocking and scourging, yes, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, and were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented, (of whom the world was not worthy). They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.*

Christ did not come in their day—the hour for the fulfillment of the great promise had not then struck.

40. *God having provided some better thing for us, that they.*

Even they, great as they are—

40. *Without us should not be made perfect.*

There is a something for us, whose lot is cast in these latter days, to bring, which shall complete the circle and choir of the Church of Christ, for they without us could not be made perfect. The Lord grant us grace to be ready for our share in that glorious consummation, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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