

UNKNOWN DEPTHS AND HEIGHTS

NO. 3068

A SERMON

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

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ON A LORD'S-DAY EVENING IN THE YEAR 1861

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Luke 23:34

[Other sermons by Mr. Spurgeon upon Christ's cries from the cross (in addition to those mentioned later) are as follows: #2562, Cries from The cross; #2803, The Saddest Cry from The cross; #2344, Christ's Dying Words for His church; #2311, Our Lord's Last Cry from The cross and #2644, The Last Words of Christ on The cross]

IT needs a tongue as eloquent as that which uttered these words to fitly describe the scene before us. Christ, the King of kings, and yet the sorrowful Substitute for sinners, has been stripped naked. The mocking soldiers have unconsciously fulfilled the Scripture which said, “They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots.”

He has been thrown roughly to the ground. His legs and arms have been stretched out upon the transverse wood. Rough hands have grasped the cruel nails. Stern blows have been dealt with the heavy hammer. He now begins to know the physical sufferings of crucifixion. He looks down to the faces of the men who have been putting him to exquisite torture and to bitter shame, and utters not a single word of complaint, much less of accusation or of vengeance, and He breathes a prayer, “Father, forgive them”—My murderers, the rough men who have stripped Me, the cruel men who have nailed My hands and pierced My feet—“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Brethren, the sayings of Christ upon the cross [Other sermons by Mr. Spurgeon upon Christ's cries from the cross (in addition to those mentioned later) are as follows: #2562, Cries from the Cross; #2803, The Saddest Cry from the Cross; #2344, Christ's Dying Word for His Church; #2311, Our Lord's Last Cry from the Cross, and #2644, The Last Words of Christ on the Cross] have a deeper meaning than that which appears upon the surface. They were texts of which His eternal life should be the sermon—they were no common words.

As no word of Scripture is of private interpretation, no word of the Savior upon the cross loses its force and significance in after times. What He said then, He is saying now. What He said then was but the utterance of a sentence which shall roll through the ages and which shall prevail with God through time and throughout eternity. “Father, forgive them,” was the prayer of a dying man, but it was not a dying prayer. “They know not what they do,” was the plea of lips that were about to be closed, but it was no plea which was doomed to silence—it is heard in heaven today, as much as when Jesus first offered it on Calvary from His cross.

The text seems to me to be of great depth. I shall not attempt to fathom it tonight, but reserve it for some future sermons, [Mr. Spurgeon carried out this intention with sermons #897, The First Cry from The Cross and #2263, Christ's Plea for Ignorant Sinners] only tonight exploring two of its parts, rather flitting like a swallow across its surface, than like the leviathan stirring its depths.

There are two things in the text, *the unknown depths of sin*—“They know not what they do.” And *the unknown heights of mercy*, as manifested in Christ's dying plea—“Father, forgive them.” May God grant His blessing while I shall endeavor to set forth both, according as the Spirit of God shall enable me to do so!

I. And first, my friends, it appears from the text that THERE ARE UNKNOWN DEPTHS IN HUMAN INIQUITY. “They know not what they do.”

You will tell me, perhaps, that Christ applied this remark to His murderers, who did not know that He was the Son of God, for if they had known Him to be the Messiah, “they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” And it might have been said to them, “Ye did it ignorantly in unbelief.” I grant you that this was the immediate meaning of Christ’s words, but I think, to return to what I have already affirmed, this saying is true of the entire human family—whenever any of us sin, we know not what we do.

Do not misunderstand me. There is no man in the world who has not enough perception left to teach him the difference between right and wrong. Even upon the natural conscience of man there is engraven so much of the law of God that his conscience either accuses or excuses him. And I can scarcely think that there is any race of bush men, or that there is a single tribe of aboriginal savages, who have altogether lost that “candle of the LORD, which searcheth all the inward parts of the belly.”

They know enough to leave them without excuse, so that if they perish, they perish through willful sin. Yet I must admit, at the outset, that it is possible for the conscience to become so blind through prevailing customs, so seared through lengthened habit, and so preserved through absolute ignorance, that men may sin and yet know not what they do.

There may be some in whom the judgment has left its seat—they have become maniacs so far as any moral judgment is concerned. They sin with both their hands and perhaps write down that very sin as being righteousness, and their obscenity as being a sacrifice acceptable to God. There are none such, however, here. I think in a land like this, with an open Bible, with a preached Gospel, with the presence of the Spirit of God, I need not address such an assembly as this as not knowing what they do in that sense.

If you sin, my hearers, you sin against light and knowledge. You sin knowing that you do wrong. You put out your hand to touch the accursed thing, knowing that it is accursed. You sin willingly and many shall be your stripes, seeing that you know your Master’s will and do it not. But still, of the whole human race it is nevertheless true that when they sin, “they know not what they do.” Let me show you, as briefly and forcibly as I can, how this is the fact.

Who among us knows, to the full, the real meaning and nature of sin? I can give some description to you of what sin is, but I question, brethren, whether even the most enlightened of us know the whole of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Sinner, I address myself pointedly to you. Do you know that when you sin, you call God a fool? You say that His law is not the best thing for you, that He has made a mistake, and has asked you to do that which would not conduce to your happiness. You call God a fool—is that nothing?

Do you know that when you sin, you call God a liar? He tells you that sin is a bitter and an evil thing. You say, “No, it is sweet. It is pleasant. At any rate, I will taste it.” You give the lie to the Eternal God. Is that nothing? Whenever you sin, you call God a tyrant. You do, in fact, avow that He has given laws which are hard and arbitrary, which He ought not to have given and which you are determined to break, because you feel that they are not for your happiness—they do not promote your comfort. And is this nothing? Is this nothing—to call the all-wise God a fool, the truthful God a liar, and the good and generous God a tyrant?

But there is more than this in your sin. Every time a man sins, he aims a blow at the crown of God. He refuses to let God be the King, but puts his hand, his wicked hand, upon the diadem of Deity and would dash the crown from God’s head if he could. Nay, more. He aims a blow at God’s very existence. The language of sin is, “No God!” And every time a sinner sins, he tries to get rid of God—and his aim and drift is to stop the Eternal One and to put the King of kings out of His own universe. Is this nothing? Is this nothing?

Does not even this, feeble though the explanation be, make sin to be exceedingly sinful? Verily, when we sin, we know not what we do. I can hardly believe that there is a man or woman in this assembly who would, in cold blood, stand up and say, “I defy God. I will do my best to drive Him from His throne. Yes, and to drive Him from existence.”

And yet, sinner, every time you curse, or lie, or swear, or break God's law in any way whatever, you do, in fact, do all these things and I think I may say you know not what you do.

Let us now shift the kaleidoscope again and get another view of this great and solemn truth. *None of us know what we do, if we judge of sin by its loathsomeness in God's sight.* There is no man living who knows how much God hates and abhors sin. You may detest the loathsome toad. You may give way to a wicked disposition and hate some enemy till you cannot live till that enemy is slain. But you cannot loathe the toad, you cannot hate your foe so thoroughly as God abhors and hates sin.

Wherever sin is, there is God's utmost hate, and anger, and ire. He cannot endure it. His eyes cannot light upon it without burning it up and His hand is ever longing to smite it to the death. Why, look ye, sirs, God had a choice archangel—a glorious being, whose wings were like the beams of the rising sun, whose stature was like a great snow-clad mountain, and whose beauty was as a fair field girl with flowers.

He sinned and God spared neither him nor the angels that followed him in his rebellion, but cast them down to hell and reserved them "in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Angelhood could not save an angel—angelic stature, a seraphic voice, and a cherubic flight, could not save Satan and his hosts when the stain of sin had fallen on them. How much, then, must God hate sin!

When God had made the world, He smiled and said, "It is good." The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy, for the world was very good, and God's own heart was glad at the sight of the new-made world. But when Adam sinned, God did not spare Eden, with all its perfections of beauty. And later, when the iniquity of man was fully ripe, He did not spare the round world itself, but bade the floods leap up from their cavernous darkness, and bade the clouds burst their swaddling bands, and the earth was covered with a flood, for "it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart."

Nay, if we want to see more clearly still how God hates sin, let us see how sin came upon His own Son, His only-begotten, His well-beloved Son. It came there, not by any deed of His own, but because He took our iniquities upon Himself and therefore was numbered with the transgressors. And did His Father spare Him?

Far from it. He smote Him with the rod, He scourged Him with the lash, He pierced Him to the heart with His sword. He gave up His darling to the power of the dog, and "Lama Sabachthani?" was a sorrowful proof that God hates and loathes sin, let it be wherever it may. [See sermon #2133, "Lama Sabachthani?"]

Now, sirs, would you go and press to your bosom, and dandle, and pamper, and pet that thing which God loathes and hates? I think not. If we had ever before our eyes God's hatred of sin, and this were revealed to our heart by the Holy Ghost, we should long to be rid of it, and therefore I say that when we take hold of it and embrace it, we know not what we do.

Again, *what man among us knows sin in its awful consequences?* Is there a mother here who would go home tonight and ask herself the quickest way to damn her child's soul? Is there a father here who would take counsel with his own wickedness as to the readiest method of sending his son to hell? I think not.

And yet, when the father is a drunkard or a swearer, what does he do but do his worst to ruin his child? And when the mother is prayerless, Godless, Christless, does she not do her utmost to murder her child's soul? Verily, *we* in our relationships, when we go into sin, know not what we do. What master could sit down wantonly to undermine the spiritual health of his workmen? What citizen would wish to become the deadly upas tree, dropping poison from all its branches? What man of influence would wish to be the basilisk whose eyes should tempt men to their destruction?

Not one. And yet when you commit iniquity—and especially those of you who occupy the responsible position of parents, or masters, or ministers, or employers in any way—you do your best to destroy the souls of others. So I can truly say, "Surely you know not what you do."

Do you know, sinner, that every time you sin, your sin affects the whole world? Let me not stagger you. It is only our finite vision which prevents us seeing the effect of even one thought upon the entire universe. The word I am speaking, just now, sets in motion a wave in the air which reaches your ear. It will abide in your memory, to a certain degree, throughout eternity.

In limiting the sphere of my voice to your ears, I have set eternity pulsating—you shall think these things over either in the waves of fiery hell or in the fields of glorious heaven. Eternity has been affected by the speech of a man. And so it is with what you do—there is an effect produced on earth, on heaven, on hell, by whispered blasphemy or by an unseen lust—you cannot sin alone.

You are part of a universe—you cannot disentangle yourself from the meshes of the net of society. You are in the ship of the universe and you cannot get out of it. You cannot even be thrown out of it, as Jonah was cast out of the ship into the sea. Your sin is dragging other men down to hell, or else the grace that is in you is helping to uplift others towards God and heaven. Mind that when you sin, for from this day, I think that you will hardly be able to say as, perhaps, you may have done before that you know not what you do.

But sinner, let me speak to you solemnly—to you—about something in which no imagination is needed. Do you see that man yonder? What is he doing? I see a pearly gate within which I mark the splendors of unutterable bliss and hear the hymns of the paradise of God. What is that man doing? He is putting bolts and bars upon that gate to shut himself out. Do you call him a madman? Sinner, that madman is yourself. Your sins are shutting you out of heaven.

Do you see yonder man? He is carrying wood on his weary shoulders and stooping to the very ground as he bears his burden. For what purpose is he carrying that fuel? It is to make a bed of fire on which he shall lie and swelter in flames forever. Do you call him a madman? Sinner, that madman is yourself.

What is hell but the laying on upon your back of a whip whose knots you have yourself tied? What is it but the drinking of a cup of gall, every drop of which was distilled from your own sin? These are awful things to say, but I feel that when I look at what hell is, in all its horrors, and what the loss of heaven is, with all its dreadful darkness, I must say to you, when you sin, surely you know not what you do.

The man who puts himself to death with the halter, or drives the knife into his heart, or throws himself into his watery grave, may have some present griefs which may, to him, though not to us, seem to be an excuse for fleeing from them. But you, when you sin, are a suicide without excuse, because you flee from good that stands before you to an evil that has no admixture of benefit or mercy.

You leap into the fire yourself—a fire which you have yourself kindled and which your own blasphemous breath has fanned. Oh, may God teach us, when we sin, what we have really done, that we may not do it again, and that, by His grace, we may be led to the precious blood of Christ to have the guilt of it washed away!

*“There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”*

Only once more upon this point and then I will leave it. “They know not what they do.” *Sinner, do you know that when you sin, eternity is involved in every act?* Faith binds me to eternal bliss—sin and unbelief fetter me to everlasting woe. I think I hear the voice of a spirit which has been these last ten years in Hades.

Listen! Listen! There is a cry, a groan, but now the words are audible—“Fool that I was to come here. Here am I tortured in indescribable agony that is to go on forever—and for what? For a few hours of giddy mirth, for a few silly jokes that I might indulge my pride rather than submit to the free grace of

God. Why am I here? Because I would serve Satan—and God knows that it was a bitter service and what little sweet it had is all forgotten now.”

Do you hear this man as he speaks to himself? “Oh, if I could ever escape from this dreadful dungeon, it would be a heaven to me. If these awful fires could be quenched, if this gnawing worm would but die, then I would be content. If, after ten thousand, thousand, thousand years, I could hope to make my escape from this pit of woe, I would set all the bells of my heart a-ringing for very joy at the bare possibility that, at last, I might escape. But what is it that I see written before me? Forever! Forever, on my chains. Forever, branded on my limbs of pain. Forever, on yon waves of fire. Forever, in the angry gaze of an incensed Deity. Forever, in those hungry depths, which seem to yawn to suck me into deeper woe. Forever, forever, forever, forever!”

O drunkard, swearer, whoremonger—when you sin the next time, recollect that the deed you do entails everlasting consequences which will run on forever, forever, forever! Surely, when you have sinned in the past, you must have been ignorant of this overwhelming truth—you could not have known what you were doing.

But have I some here who say that they do know what they are doing? They have been so faithfully warned, so affectionately dealt with, so earnestly prayed for, that when they sinned, they sinned willfully, knowing what they did. O my dear hearers, that is true of some of you. I have often felt, when I have come out of the pulpit, that you would be without excuse in the day of judgment.

God knows that I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God—divine sovereignty in all its absoluteness and the sinner’s responsibility in all its fullness. I have preached to you the doctrines of grace, but I have not, therefore, kept back the demands of God upon you. And I know that, should you perish, it will neither be for want of preaching, nor of weeping. Well, sirs, if you do perish with the Gospel preached in your ears, you perish fearfully indeed.

Room there—room—make way, you priests of Moloch! Stand back, you followers of Ashtaroth, you worshippers of Baal, stand back! Give up your choice seats, the highest places in the synagogue of hell. Make room, for here comes a man who read his Bible and heard the Word faithfully preached. Give him the choicest place.

Now cannibals, pirates, and all you poor beings who sinned, but knew not what you did, make room, for here comes a man who sinned with God before his very eyes and blindly rushed upon the spear of the Almighty when the light of heaven was shining upon his eyeballs. Make room for him, I say. Get up, you who have been guilty of murder and of the shedding of blood in lands where Christ was never preached. Get up and give your place to this man!

“What?” say they, “have you become like one of us?” Yes, say we, not only like one of you, but deeper than your depth, more fiery than your flames, more horrible than your horrors, shall be the dread, the doom, the destruction of this man of whom it could not be said, “He knew not what he did.” God have mercy upon you, my hearers.

May His sovereign grace be extended toward you. May the lines of His election embrace you, the blood of Christ’s redemption wash you, the voice of His effectual calling awaken you, and the power of His grace preserve you. Or alas! woe unto you, Newington! Woe unto you, Southwark! If the Gospel preached unto you had been preached in Sodom, it had continued unto this day. And if in Tyre and Sidon—they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

I have thus tried, in all simplicity, as God’s servant, to expound Christ’s plea—“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

II. Now, very briefly—but oh, may God grant that it may be with the unction of the Holy One!—let me speak upon THE UNKNOWN HEIGHTS OF GRACE.

If there were any men in all the world who, under the covenant of works, or under that mingle-mangle covenant which some preach, which is half law and half works, and neither law nor works—if there were any men who should have been excluded from the election of grace, it was those men who nailed the Savior to the tree.

And yet, mark this, while Christ did not mention by name the best of the Pharisees, He did mention, before God, particularly and personally, those degraded men who, with many an addition of cruel mockery, nailed Him to the cross. “Father, forgive *them*.” He did not say, “Father, forgive Pontius Pilate, for he sinned unwillingly.” He did not say, “Father, forgive Judas, for he repented and cast down his ill-gotten gain in the temple.” But He said, “Father, forgive *them*.”

There they are—the mark of the nails has not yet gone out of their hands—there is the print of the head of the nails in the center of their palm even now. Look, the blood of Jesus is on their skirts—the very blood which spurted forth from the Redeemer’s hands when they drove the nails through them. Yet He prays, “Father, forgive *them*.”

There they stand—they are grinning at their ghastly work and saying, “Aha! Aha!” and joining with the ribald crew and thrusting their tongues into their cheeks, saying, “He saved others, himself he could not save.” And yet there is heard, above the clamor of their iniquity which appeals to God for justice, the cry of the Savior, “Father, forgive them.”

There is no consciousness of need of forgiveness in them. Their hearts are hard as nether millstones. They laugh at the prayer itself. “Forgive!” say they, “we have done many a worse piece of work than this. We need not be forgiven.” They are as cold as ice and stern as steel—and unmelting as the granite rock. And yet Jesus prays, “Father, forgive them.”

There are no past good works to recommend them—they never did a good thing in their lives—they are soldiers who have slain, every man, perhaps his hundred men. They have learned to split the little infant on the blade of their swords. They know how to rip up, and tear, and cut off the head, and rend out the eye—they are men whose deeds of blood must be written in fire, but whose deeds of goodness have never yet come to light. And yet Jesus cries, “Father, forgive them.”

They are men who, if the Gospel were preached to them, would reject it. If Christ were offered to them, they would refuse Him. If they were moved by some qualms of conscience, they would stifle them. If they were wept over by the minister, they would ridicule his tears. If they were pleaded for by the church, they would laugh at the pleadings, and yet the Savior says, “Father, forgive them.”

Amid such splendors of grace, where shall I find words to fitly describe them? Language, you are a dull, cold thing in such a case as this! Words, you have not strength enough to carry the mighty meaning of my soul just now! Was there ever grace like this, except, when Jesus prayed for me and said, “Father, forgive *him*”? And when He prayed for you and said, “Father, forgive *him*”?

O my hearers, when Jesus pleads for us, it is not because there is anything in us why He should plead. It is not because we flee to Him that He pleads for us. It is not because we long for mercy and value it that He pleads for us. He prays for us long before we pray to Him. He died for us before we knew anything about our death in sin. And He lived and pleaded before His Father’s throne when we were cursing, blaspheming, and defying Him.

Ah, souls, I would that you could get rid, once for all, of any idea that Jesus Christ wants anything in you to move His heart of compassion towards you! Where He loves, He loves for His own sake, not because of the worthiness of the object of His love. The source of grace is in the God of grace, not in the receiver of grace. The reason for pardon is not in the penitent, but in the Pardoner. The ground of acceptance is not in our faith, but in Christ, the Author and Finisher of that faith—and hence it is that the Gospel is adapted to the worst of sinners—to the scum, the chaff, the off-scouring, the parings, the filth, the vileness, the rottenness, the stench, the offal of the world.

Oh, if we had a Gospel that was half grace and half human goodness, then the good, the upright, the educated, the refined, the moral would have some degree of hope, but the poor outcast would have none. But now, tonight, I preach a Gospel which comes right down to you, just where you are, in the bog, the mire, the slough, next door to hell, lying at hell’s gate—not like Lazarus when the dogs licked his sores at the rich man’s gate, but lying at the gate of hell while hell hounds lick your wounds—cast out from God, abhorred, detested, abhorrent to yourself, obnoxious to your own conscience—such a sinner that you wish you had never been born, or that you had been a viper, a snake, a toad rather than have been a

man. Yet can God's grace reach even you and "unto you is the word of this salvation sent." I do believe that over such sinners as you Jesus pleads tonight, "Father, forgive them."

And now, my dear hearers, is there something in you which seems to say, "Unite in that prayer"? Does the Spirit of God whisper in your soul, "Tonight is the hour of mercy. Jesus Christ is passing by—He is interceding for the transgressors"? Then I pray you say, "Father, forgive me." What! Shall my Master say, "Father, forgive him," and will not you pray for yourself? The adamant might melt, the steel dissolve—and will not you melt?

Spirit of God, bring Thou the fire and melt the heart! And now, poor soul, say, "Father, forgive me. I did not know the full guilt of my sin, but I knew enough to make me so guilty that I deserve Your wrath. I have no merits, Lord. I have no righteousness. If You do slay me, You are just. If You do curse me, I deserve it well. But Father, forgive me!" Do not use Christ's plea—that is His, not yours. He could say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." You must use another plea. "Father, forgive me through Your Son's precious blood."

Oh! I think my soul would be ready to leap from earth to heaven if I could but be sure that there was someone here who was saying in his heart, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and am no more worthy to be called Your son." Or if some heart were saying, "By His agony and bloody sweat, by His cross and passion, by His precious death and burial, by His glorious resurrection and ascension, Father, forgive me!" Soul, your prayer is heard—"go, and sin no more. Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you."

Go home and tell your friends and your kinsfolk what God has done for your soul, and by and by, come here and tell us what God has done for you—and then come to this communion table and spiritually eat with us of His flesh and drink of His blood, "for his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed."

May the Lord add His blessing, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 136

[Sermon #787, A Song, A Solace, A Sermon and A Summons—is a sermon by Mr. Spurgeon upon the whole of this Psalm, although he used as a text the refrain, "for his mercy endureth forever"]

This is, indeed, one of the chief songs of praise which we find in the Scriptures, and it is not surprising that such a poet as John Milton should have written that version of it that we often sing,—

*"Let us with a gladsome mind,
Praise the Lord, for He is kind:
For His mercies shall endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure."*

Verses 1-3. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Here, you see, we have three titles of God, first as JEHOVAH, secondly as the Elohim, thirdly as the Adonai or Lord. By whatever name God is known, He is worthy of our highest praise. Whether it is the name referring to His self-existence, or the name relating to His covenant engagements, or the name applying specially to His rule and governorship—in any and every capacity, let us praise Him.

Notice that each of these three verses begins, "O give thanks." We are to praise the Lord for His greatness and to give Him thanks for His goodness. Our praise shall consist largely of the element of gratitude as we think of all that He has done for us. Although I lay no stress upon the fact of these verses

being three and upon the names of God being three, yet it is very remarkable that throughout the Old Testament, even when there is no distinct allusion to the doctrine of the Trinity, yet still the threefold praise is constantly being repeated, as if this sublime truth lay latent, but yet was not unknown to those godly ones who dived deep into the mystery of the triune unity of God. Let us, who have this truth so clearly revealed to us, give thanks unto the Triune JEHOVAH with all the powers of our threefold nature—body, soul, and spirit.

4-5. *To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.* [See sermon #1981, God the Wonder-Worker]

The making of the heavens is a great marvel of wisdom and inasmuch as that wondrous work sprang from the unaided wisdom of God, it is a subject for which we should unceasingly praise Him. When men invent some notable piece of machinery, they are generally long in bringing it to perfection and they usually borrow various ideas from those who have preceded them. But it was not so with God. By His own perfect wisdom, He struck out the arch of heaven and made all that it covers.

6. *To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Once in the history of the globe, the earth and the waters were mingled together, but at God's bidding, the earth rose to its assigned position and the deeps received the sea, and they have kept their places ever since, except when God caused the Flood to cover the whole earth.

7-9. *To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever: the sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: the moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

What should we have been without light? Could any poor unhappy creatures ever have lived in a dark world? Let us praise God for the light. Let us bless Him for the sun—that great mercy, but let us not forget the lesser mercies—the moon and the stars which He also made. It is well, when we are praising God, to dwell upon all His bounties, for, sometimes, mercies which appear small from one point of view become all the greater from another point of view.

Stars seem little to us, but what vast orbs they really are! Let us praise the great Creator for every kind of light that He has made, and let us especially praise Him for all spiritual light, and even for His ministers who are stars in His right hand. They are but little twinkling lights compared with the great Sun of righteousness, but still, "He made the stars also." Therefore let Him have due praise for it, "for his mercy endureth for ever."

So far, we have been reminded of the wonders wrought by the great Creator. Now we are called upon to give thanks to the Lord for His deliverance of His ancient people out of Egypt.

10-14. *To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever: and brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever: with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever: and made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever:*

It was a great miracle by which the Red Sea was divided. I suppose it was somewhere about eight or nine miles in breadth at the place where the Israelites crossed it, yet the sea rolled back and stood in a heap on either side, and left a clear passage for the people through the very heart of the sea. God's mercy made a way for His people through the sea, and a path for them through the mighty waters, but it was no less a mercy to make them go through the sea.

They had not been accustomed to any kind of travelling and certainly not to such travelling as that—through the heart of the sea—but the Lord inspired them with confidence, so that they went down into the very depths without fear and came up again on the other side.

But God's mercy is always consistent with His justice, so there was very different treatment for the Egyptians.

15-16. *But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

In this Psalm you have three leadings. There is, in verse 11, leading out—"brought out Israel." In verse 16, there is leading through—"led his people through the wilderness." And in the 21st we shall

find that there is leading into—“and gave their land for an heritage.” So God leads us out from the region of sin, He leads us through the wilderness of this life’s trial, and He leads us into the rest which remains for His people.

“To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever.” You are today, dear friends, experiencing that kind of leading. Long ago, some of you were led out of the realm of sin—now you are passing through this great and terrible wilderness wherein there would be thirst and hunger were it not for the heavenly water and manna, and we might fear the fiery serpents were it not for Him who was lifted up upon the cross as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. Yet the Lord will safely lead you through the wilderness and give you the land of promise.

17. *To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:*

His mercy and His vengeance are quite compatible—the one has not done away with the other.

18-20. *And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: and Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever:*

Here are four verses where we think that one might have sufficed. Ah, brethren, we often use only one verse when we ought to use four! Scripture sets us a better example—it frequently repeats its references to some one thing, because in that one thing, there are included many mercies. It would be well if the diligence in describing details which we use with regard to our troubles could be exercised upon descriptions of our mercies, for then we would imitate the psalmist’s style and say, “O give thanks to him which smote great kings: for his mercy endures for ever: and slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: and Og the king of Bashan.” [See sermon #1285, Sihon and Og, or Mercies in Detail]

21-22. *And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever: even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Here we have the same thought put into two verses, to show us how to dwell with lengthened notes and repeated Hallelujahs upon the goodness and mercy of God.

Notice how many of these verses begin with “And,” as if every mercy had been linked to another which went before it and would be linked to another which would come after it. I like to see these Ands. They remind us that there is more to follow. After all that we have received from God, there is yet more to come. God has not come to the end of His mercies.

23-24. *Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever: and hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Redemption—what a grand note that is! What voice can ever reach its fullness and its loftiness! Let us praise the name of the Lord as we remember the price and the power with which He “hath redeemed us from our enemies.”

25. *Who giveth food to all flesh:*

There is food for you, then, poor hungry one. There is food for you, child of God. He “who giveth food to all flesh,” can certainly give food to all spirits.

25-26. *For his mercy endureth forever. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.