

TO THE RESCUE NO. 3462

A SERMON
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*“Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive be delivered?”
Isaiah 49:24*

IN the days when this prophecy was written, there were certain great nations of the earth that sought and obtained their wealth, not by commerce, but by rapine—not by fair trading, but by fiercely invading their richer neighbors. The Babylonians and the Chaldeans gathered together great armies and then pounced upon small territories, such as those at Israel and Judea, and carried off all the substance of the inhabitants as a prey.

When the marauding host, flushed with victory, was returning home with its booty, it would have been a very dangerous thing to attempt to rescue the spoil. “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?” What a great king has captured and what his mighty hosts have fought for—shall this be taken from them? Where are the warriors that have hardihood enough to attack the victors as they return with the spoil?

Sometimes treaties were broken and then the Babylonians made that a pretext for taking the people away captive. They were “lawful captives,” as they had broken certain conditions and made themselves amenable, according to the articles of war, to be lawfully taken prisoners. Now where such is the case, when enraged kings and princes have taken cities which have proved traitorous to them, shall anybody deliver the prisoners? Who shall step in between the monarch and his righteous captive? That is the literal meaning of the verse, “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive be delivered?” It was first applicable to the Jewish people. They were taken into captivity in Babylon. Shall they ever be set free?

God declared that they should be delivered, and so they were. In due time they came up without price or reward into their own land. God had promised it by His Word, and by His providence He performed it. Leaving, however, this primary literal interpretation, we intend to draw your attention to the spiritual sense, and to ask the question concerning some of you whom it most intimately concerns. If it should appear that you are “prisoners,” and that, according to the conditions of your captivity, you are “lawful captives,” you will see and feel the urgency of the matter. “Is it possible for you to be set free?” Is there any arm that has strength enough to tear off your fetters?

We will begin by describing—

I. THE NATURAL CAPTIVITY IN WHICH EVERY UNREGENERATED MAN IS HELD.

Every creature of Adam born, who has not been saved by grace, is a prisoner to sin. He is *a lawful captive to God's law*. His nature is in thralldom under the power and dominion of sin, for that nature is evil. The man does not sin by accident—he sins because he wills to sin. He wishes to do it—he takes delight in it—he casts his heart into it.

As the fish naturally swims in the stream, so the unconverted man finds sin congenial to his depraved instincts. He chooses to do that which is evil and revels therein. He omits to do that which is good and recoils from it. Who shall set free the man whose nature is thus enslaved? Moreover, the chains of habit become more and more highly riveted on those who indulge their lusts, but never restrain their passions.

Time was when you hesitated whether to follow the pleasure that allured you, or to heed the conscience that would restrain you. Then you chose the wrong—and now the Ethiopian might sooner

change his skin, or the leopard his spots, than you can change your guilty propensities—so hard is it for the man accustomed to do evil to learn to do well.

As well try to reverse the course of the sun, or make the waters of Niagara return to their source, or check the north wind in its fury, or stop the rising tide, as hope to make men cease from ways which by constant repetition and steady accumulation over a long course of years have acquired the force of a natural disposition and produced an unmistakable type of character.

Unhappily, too, custom, of which it has been well said that it is the law of fools, gives sanction to vices which would otherwise be abhorrent. A man will willingly consent to be the slave of sin, because his fellow man sins after the same fashion. He must do this and that because his neighbors or his comrades do the same. Why should he be singular? Why should he swim against the general current? If others see no harm, feel no compunction, and find it pleasant sport, why should he not join them? Is it not always more lively to follow the multitude? What road is better than the broad road where all sorts of good company may be met with?

And brethren, the less scrupulous men are, the more self-complacent they become. Mirth, it would seem, extracts the venom from sin, and wit can robe ribaldry in innocence. But be not deceived. The customs you adopt and the habits you cherish combine with the depravity of your own nature to weld a chain which the strength of Hercules could not snap—a chain that makes the creature an abject slave to the flesh, instead of a liege subject of his adorable Creator.

Each man, according to his own order, has some peculiar chain to bind and chafe him. There are aberrations to which the constitution is prone. There are temptations to which one's business or employment expose him. Or there may be entanglements in the social relationships and the home circle that involve a heavy bondage. Raging passions, restless anxieties, and rigorous circumstances carry men far out to sea and leave them to the tender mercy of the waves and breakers.

Is the fit on a man, he seems to be as powerless to resist as the chaff in the wind that blows athwart the summer threshing-floor. Like some bird borne out to sea by an impetuous hurricane, they cannot stem the torrent. They are hurried away whether they will it or not. But alas! Alas! their will concurs. They do not struggle or contend for the right, but whither their passions bear them, there do they float.

'Tis so with some men. The slavery of other men consists in their self-righteousness. They do not hold themselves guilty of any crime. They have always acquitted themselves to their own satisfaction. As for their transgressions, they are trifles. They account themselves as good as their neighbors in all respects and in some points better. And because of this is their conceit.

Repentance they will not practice. Remission they will not seek. In vain the Gospel tells them that they are lost. To them the Gospel is a fiction—a thing scarcely consonant with the delicacy of their feelings. They will try to find a way to heaven by their merits. Why need they cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner"? What need for them of scalding tears of penitence? What occasion for them to fly to the blood of sprinkling to be cleansed? They are not conscious that they are foul. Others may say—

"Black, I to the fountain fly."

But they are not conscious that they are black—therefore, to no fountain will they resort. This is another chain and how heavy a one it is! how difficult to take it off! Some of the victims of self-flattery are faster bound and harder to set free than the most reckless and profligate of their neighbors, with whom they would count it an insult to compare them.

So it was in Christ's days. Publicans and harlots, the dregs of the town, the refuse of the population, entered into the kingdom of God, hailed it with joy and were received into it with welcome, while Scribes and Pharisees, the upper circle of society, the chief and representative men of the synagogue, clogged and bound with their self-righteousness, scorned the sinner's hope, refused the Savior-King, and perished in their infatuation.

And oh! *how many are there upon whose hearts a willful unbelief lays its icy chains?* They ask for evidences and proofs, only to rebut them. They are shown signs and wonders, but they merely cast discredit on them till their hearts grow more callous. No reasons will weigh with them. To give *reasons* may be easy enough for us, but to impart *reason* to them is difficult.

Indeed, to furnish motives that would suffice to move their understanding to discern Him were a miracle. Cut the ground from under their feet. Let them look confused. Nay, let them acknowledge themselves non-suited.

***“Convince a man against his will,
He is of the same opinion still.”***

His conversion is as far off as ever. A new difficulty and a fresh dilemma will they start. Making sport of matters too weighty to be trifled with, they raise another question and argue another point. So perverse do they become that they could argue themselves into hell. At issue with their own mercies, they contend with all the might of logic against the cross of Christ.

Unwilling to yield obedience to the precepts, they cast discredit on the promises of the Gospel. How hard it is to rescue men that are thus manacled and fettered, whose heads and hearts are alike enslaved. We have known sad cases—and those not among the most hopeless—of persons carried away and left a prey to despair, because they are too guilty in their own apprehensions to obtain mercy, therefore they will not repent. Supposing that there can be no pardon for them, they sit down in sullen rebellion against God—they will not believe in Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Because they have sinned so much, therefore they will even sin more. And because the disease is so dreadful, they will, therefore, decline to adopt the remedy. Oh! miserable souls! To what a plight do such arguments reduce you. Yet how many unhappy creatures are subject to such thralldom, we, who have to deal with them, find out. And how hard it is to take the prey from the mighty and to deliver these lawful captives, we know too well.

And are not full many of you chained hand and foot—fastened, as it were, in the stocks—your *spirits so crushed that you cannot move?* You have forgotten the meaning of spiritual liberty, if you ever had an idea of it. By nature lost, by practice lost, by custom led astray, by evil habits bound and fettered, by all manner of vice enslaved, you are under the dominion of Satan.

But the worst remains to be told. That which aggravates the horror of the situation is this—that such persons are lawful captives to the law of God. They have violated the precepts, transgressed the ordinances, offended the Divine Majesty—therefore, they must be punished. It is inevitable that every offense against God’s law should ensure the penalty due to the offender. God will by no means spare the guilty. From Sinai’s summit there sounds no note of mercy. Justice and judgment hold undisputed sway. “Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.”

That curse falls on everyone of us by nature—there it leaves us, bruised and mangled, and incapable of rescue. Who can deliver the man who is God’s lawful captive? Who can claim exemption for him that has broken God’s law? Such is the helpless, hopeless case of the sinner. Believe me, I do not overstate it.

Though my words may sound rough, they do not fully describe the state that you are in, my unconverted friend. You are in such a state, that unless One interpose for you—of whom I will tell you anon—you will have but a short reprieve. From the haunts of your folly, from the scenes of your toil, from the home of your affections, you will ere long be taken to the place where hope will never dawn upon you.

You are lost now, you are already condemned. If infinite mercy prevent not, the pit will soon shut its mouth upon you. Although my words were never so weighty, they could not be weighty enough to fitly describe your momentous peril. It is not possible for human language to set out the horror of an impenitent soul, the terrible condition of a sinner at enmity with his God.

Oh! you may bedizen your person, you may make merry and spend your little day in frivolity, you cannot avert the summons that awaits you. But were you wise, and you would heed the voice that says, “God is angry with the wicked every day.” Nor would you ever rest till that anger was appeased and you were reconciled to God by the only method through which reconciliation can be found.

The more we consider this question before us, the more does *the hopelessness of finding any answer to it, apart from the revelation of the Gospel* appear. “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive be delivered?” Answer—no, no, most emphatically no. The thing is beyond all human power.

Look ye first at the man, the hapless victim—he has lost the will to be delivered—like you may have seen sometimes in the Zoological Gardens, a small creature given to a voracious serpent for food. The reptile fixes its eyes upon its prey, which seems to be quite unconscious of what is coming. Calm, still, motionless, it is fascinated—charmed either by the brightness of the serpent’s eyes, or by some kind of influence unknown to us exercised over it—until the monster darts at him and devours him.

Even so does the unconverted man offer no resistance to the destroyer. It has been said that birds have been so fascinated by serpents as to fly to their foe and put themselves within his reach. Who can save the man that is determined to venture life and soul upon a hazard that every onlooker sees must end in death?

Sitting sometimes in your little chamber with an open window on a summer’s evening, you may have watched a moth that has dashed into your candle. In vain you have taken it up and put it away, for no sooner has it recovered strength enough than it darts back again to the flame. You put your hand out and stop it—it is but for a little while that you can keep it from its destruction, for it is desperately set on mischief and bent on suicide.

So it is with man. Either with naked overt sin, or else with covert lust and ill pretense, he is so besotted and fascinated that he will plunge his soul into ruin. Who can deliver the man who resists deliverance? Who can save the man who will not avail himself of succor? Can the prey be taken from the mighty?

Will eloquence avail? It has been tried and it has failed over and over again. There was never a soul divorced from his sins by the blandishments of rhetoric. You cannot persuade men to give up their favorite passions by goodly words. The trembling pathos or the withering scorn of your address will prove alike unavailing.

Beza once preached to a heap of stones, and I doubt not, that the result was quite as happy as any that I could anticipate from an audience like the present, unless the Spirit of God shall move upon the hearts of those who lend their ears. Melancthon thought that he might convert everybody by the force of his argument and the fervor of his mien, but after a while, he said that old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon.

The devil is not to be driven out of his stronghold by music’s melting mystic lay, nor yet by the declaimer’s subtle art, though he is like one that plays well upon an instrument. Cannot evil be dislodged, some will ask, and cannot the captive be set free by sacred rites and ceremonies? The experiment is attempted in our day all over this country. With what success judge you?

We are told that men can be regenerated by baptism—and we have seen these regenerated infants develop into what, to our minds, was nothing more than “baptized heathens, washed to deeper stains.” All the ceremonies that can possibly be practiced, with the sanction of antiquity or the invention of modern priestcraft to recommend them, can have no effect in changing the bias of the human will, or in renewing the qualities of human nature. The disease is too deep and too irritant for the prescription to grapple with as a remedy. As well hope to vanquish Leviathan with a straw as to drive out the devil with a ceremony. Oh! no, the captive is not delivered thus.

But could not a man deliver himself from his sins, if he were to desperately strive? Ay, brethren, there is the pinch—that “if.” Therein—in that “if”—you touch the seat of the delinquency. Men do not, will not, cannot strive. They are so held by the morbid vein and malevolent propensity of their own

nature, and by the fatal obstinacy of their own disposition, that they treat the Gospel of the grace of God with the most bitter aversion—and the “*if*” becomes the master.

They do not, will not, cannot be induced to strive. What says Christ about it? “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.” Well, but could not they have come if they would? Ay, but there is the rub—they *would* not if they could. “How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye *would* not.” There, sinners, is the pith of the indictment. Were it said you *could* not, you might find an excuse, but it is charged against you that you *will* not, and this is damnable.

Did man sin by compulsion, I see not how he could be blamed, but since his sin is voluntary and he recklessly chooses the evil, clings to it, and will not give it up, the slavery becomes the more obnoxious. When the iron enters into the soul and the man becomes a slave, not through misfortune merely, but through very baseness of heart and prostitution of his nature till he is ground down to be a serf of Satan and a drudge of sin, his woe-begone wretchedness entitles him to little pity. The man is so far sunk that he cannot, will not deliver himself. No others can deliver him.

Bound hand and foot, the prey of the mighty and the lawful captive—oh! Lord, what can be done for him? Do I hear anyone say, “Perhaps as he grows older the power of sin will grow weaker”? I have heard that suggestion many times, but my solemn conviction is, that if you want the worst of man, you will find them amongst the oldest of men. And if you seek a confirmed criminal, you most generally find him with grey hairs upon his head.

Have you never noticed in the annals of the church who were the men that fell most grievously? I never read in all of God’s Book of such instances of foul defection among young believers as I do among the venerable sires whose names have come to be like a tower of strength in their generation. The youths were weak and knew it—and God kept them.

But Lot was an old man when he committed incest, even as Noah before him had long years, ripe experience, and rich honors on his side when he defiled himself with drunkenness. David was far past the prime of life when he coveted Bathsheba and slew Uriah, her husband, with the sword of the children of Ammon. Peter, when he denied his Master, was no raw recruit. His Master had pronounced on him high encomiums and endowed him with rich blessings.

The fact is, when we begin to lean on experience, we grow weak. Temptation, instead of getting weaker with our age, gets stronger. The passions which we thought would expire when the heat of youth had evaporated, become more fierce as we grow more infirm, till some lusts are more rampant in those who have the least power to gratify them.

In whose breast does avarice rage with the most unquenchable ardor, but in that of the man who is lingering on the margin of life, about to quit the world? He, indeed, in the course of nature, is the most loath to part with the gold that he has scraped together. Portray the miser. Do you not picture to yourselves the skeleton with bald scalp, wan visage, and withered fists, knocking at death’s door?

Ah! no, the devil does not release his grasp, because our eyes wax dim and our senses grow dull. Instead thereof, he seems to hold the victim more tightly. The thralldom of a man does not slacken as his vital powers wane. If one passion expires, another takes its place. Could we imagine that the power of evil might sometimes sleep, we might imagine that the man might escape.

Thus we read of giant Despair in the *Pilgrims Progress*, that in the night Christian and Hopeful, when the Giant was taken with a shivering fit, made their escape. Ay, but they were children of God, and not mere natural men. In the case of the sinner there is no sleeping of the foe. The mighty power of evil has the sinner under its control and never refrains its dreadful watch. He is held, whether he be alone or in public—he is watched by night and by day, nor is it possible by accident or stratagem that the captive should get free.

So far the story is all black, and like Ezekiel’s roll, it is written within and without with lamentation. Remember, friend, that while I speak to you, it is of you I speak, if you are not a believer in Jesus.

Unconverted men and women, to you I address these solemn words of God's own truth. You are the prey of the Mighty, and the captive of God's law. Can you be delivered? Can you be redeemed?

We now turn to the brighter side of our picture—to the more cheerful aspect of our text—

II. CAN THE PREY BE RESCUED? CAN THE CAPTIVE BE DELIVERED? WE ANSWER, HE CAN.

Yes, sinner, *you can*. Your nature *can* be radically changed. Your habits can be snapped. Custom can lose its spell. Your besetting sins can be put under your feet and those vices which you now cling to with tenacity, you can be made to hate with deepest abhorrence. And this can be done for you, done now, done without preparation. But where is He that can achieve it?

Ah! He is present with us here, though not to be seen by the eye—the Holy Spirit of God. Be You worshipped, O most Holy Spirit! There is one whom God has been pleased to give to His church, who has the power to enlighten the understanding, to renew the will, to change the affections—in a word, to make us “new creatures in Christ Jesus.”

That Holy Spirit is God. Know that unless the same God who first made Adam and Eve in the garden come and new-make us, we never can be saved. There must be as great a miracle performed upon you, dear friend, as if you should be killed, put into the grave, and then be raised up again to live anew.

God must create you a second time. He must quicken you in Christ Jesus unto good works. “Is that ever done?” says one. It is often done. There are hundreds here on whom that strange transformation has passed, so that they are no longer what they were. “Old things have passed away, and all things have become new.” You cannot work this of yourself. No priest can effect it, but the Holy Ghost can produce it. He can complete it now, so great is His power—so divine.

I could give you many living proofs. Memorable, however, is one that the New Testament history will not suffer you to doubt. There was Saul, the hater of Christ. The persecutor of Christians—a Pharisee, desperately resolved to oppose and efface the Christian faith. He had hunted out the brethren in Jerusalem. He had compelled them to blaspheme by his cruelty.

He had obtained letters from the high priest and he was on his road to Damascus, saying to himself, “I will harass them. I will make these professors of the Christian religion bite their tongues. I will scourge them in the synagogues. I will weary them of trusting in the Nazarene.” He is riding proudly on his horse—it is about the noon of day—the orange groves of Damascus are just coming into view, when suddenly a light brighter than the meridian sun shines round about him. Astonished and blinded, he falls to the ground.

Soon a voice rings in his ears, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” That voice pierced his heart and entered into his understanding. He soon perceived that the Christ whom he was persecuting was God's own Son and he quickly answered, “Who art thou, Lord” To this question the voice replied, “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Thus he found out his mistake. He had been persecuting the Christ, the Messiah, ignorantly, supposing that he had been hunting down an impostor. It was all he wanted—he arose, blind it is true, yet he saw more than he ever beheld before. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

Oh! what a change had passed over him! What an altered man was he! Within three days, Ananias, an obscure Christian brother, is instructing him in the faith and saying to him, “Brother Saul, receive thy sight.” He is baptized, and not many days after you find him in the synagogue, not to persecute, but to proselyte. Not to betray the saints, but to testify of the Savior. Through all his after-life you can discern the sincerity of his profession, the fervor of his spirit, the unwavering attachment of his soul to the person of Christ—and the steadfast confidence of his faith in the Atonement.

“God forbid,” says he, “that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” For Him he could say, “I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in him.” A like change must be wrought in you. It can be wrought in you. It has been wrought in many of us. It can be wrought in you at this good hour.

“Oh!” says one, “I wish it were. What can I do towards it?” I will tell you. I spoke of a lawful captive. Now you are in the condition of a lawful captive. Since you have broken God’s law, justice demands that punishment in full measure should be meted out to you. This is inevitable. Every sinner stands accountable for his sins and every sinner must receive its due recompense.

But hearken. Listen to this and believe it—God Himself in the person of His dear Son, out of pure love to you came down into this world and He suffered what you ought to have suffered. For all who believe in Jesus, Jesus Christ suffered the penalty due for them.

“What,” says one, “If I trust Jesus Christ to save me, do I understand you to say then, all that is due to me on account of sin Christ has already borne?” I do say that. I say, you are straightway forgiven and henceforth secure against the wrath of God—if you can trust Jesus Christ with your whole heart. Because He lived, and loved, and died for such as you are, you are forgiven. God loves you. The past is blotted out of His book. “Oh!” say you, “is that true?” Most certainly true. Only put now your trust in Christ and this is true to you. Your sins are gone, your iniquities are blotted out.

Now I think I hear some dear soul say, “Well, I do believe it. Yet I can hardly realize it—the mercy seems so great. Oh! what love God must have to me! What tender melting pity the dear Son of God must have had towards me, that He should give Himself to die for me!” Are you favorable to this? Then it is done. You are changed.

Already you are talking as you did not use to talk—your heart is now towards God, as it was not before—the Holy Ghost has blest the story of the love of Christ to you, and that love of Christ has been the key that has turned your heart right around. Have you believed this with all your heart? Then you will be a new man from this time forth.

You will not love what you loved before. The people of God whom you once despised, you will honor, for you will say, “I am one of them. Christ has washed me in His blood. I was, I know not what in wickedness, but it is all gone. God has blotted out my transgressions. My God is reconciled. His love I feel within my heart. Oh! how I do repent of all my sins against Him! Lord, help me to give up everything that is impure in thought, or word, or deed. The dearest thing I have, if it stands against You, O Lord, I will renounce it and away with it. Down with you, my sins! Down with you, my lusts! Away, you drunkard’s cups! Away, far away, be the company of the profane and the songs of the lascivious! Hence, be gone from me!—I cannot bear you now. My God has made me to love Him, because He first loved me. Now, from this day, I am a new creature, pardoned, purified, welcomed, accepted in Christ. Take me, Lord! Avouch me to be Your own! You have bought me with Your blood, anointed me with Your Spirit, acknowledged me as Your child. Take me and make use of me to Your glory. Whether I live or die, may I praise Your dear name.”

I recollect hearing an old sailor say, “I have had the devil’s black flag at my masthead for sixty years, but by the grace of God, I have run it down tonight, and I put up the red cross flag of the Lord Jesus.” Oh! Holy Ghost, come work this wonder in many hearts. So shall the “prey be taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive be delivered.”

Oh! would not some of your neighbors be surprised if you were to go home a Christian! Others of you, who have always been moral and outwardly religious—were you to declare to your companions the great things God has done for you, and show them the reality and power of saving grace—they might laugh at you, and say, “Well, but where have you been? You must have been among the Methodists, I should think, and learned their cant.” How thunderstruck they would be at you!

To this end is our preaching. May such miracles be wrought in the name of Jesus. Let the sot become sober, let the churl grow kind, let the covetous man be generous, let the careless turn prayerful, let the formalist seek after that which is spiritual. Transformations of character like these tell their own story, and while the change is transparent, your kinsfolk and acquaintances will take care that it fails not to be talked about.

Glory to God! He can break chains of adamant and He often does deliver just those very people that we do not think He would take. I believe that, in infinite mercy, He often looks round to find out a

ringleader. There he is! Conspicuous for his vice, proclaiming his own shame. The Gospel musket is leveled at him and down he comes. When an officer in the devil's army falls there is a great cry. God is glorified, the man is saved, and the ranks of the enemy are weakened.

Oh! that some such might be brought to Christ tonight—some proud formalist, some mere churchgoer or chapelgoer, whose whole religion lies in conforming to a few paltry sacraments, or in adopting a few Non-Conformist sentiments. Oh! that God would strike such a one's heart right through and make real heart-work of it with him from this day forth, even forever.

I do hope, as I beat the recruiting drum, there will be some that will come to the standard that have been bold soldiers of the devil, and that they will be quite as bold soldiers of Jesus Christ. My heart longs to know if it be so! Be not slow at once to tell what grace has done for you, and be not slack afterwards to fight for Him who lived, and loved, and died for you.

God bless the Word to every one of you for His name's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ROMANS 4:1-20

Verses 1-3. *What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

He stands as the great Father of believers, and this is the charter given to him, and given to all believers in him. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."

4. *Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.*

That is to say, to him who hopes to be saved by his works, to whom salvation is of merit. He has worked for the reward—He has earned it—do not talk about grace in that case.

5. *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

This is the man who does not go upon the line of works—who does not rest in his works at all, or bring them as a price to God. "His faith is counted for righteousness." It is a very wonderful thing that faith should stand in the stead of righteousness, and should make righteous all those that believe in God by Jesus Christ.

6-8. *Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*

Instead of being a worker, this man had been an offender—a sinner. God did not impute it to him. He was a believer, and God imputed righteousness to him on account of his faith, and did not impute sin to him. Then comes a very important inquiry.

9. *Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also?*

Is circumcision so necessary that a man is justified by faith after he is circumcised, and could not be so justified if he were an uncircumcised man?

9-10. *For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision?*

Look back to the history. See in what condition Abraham was when faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. Was it when he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? The answer is—

10-11. *Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised:*

But the sign is to follow the thing signified. He is, first of all, justified by his faith, and then afterwards he receives the token of the covenant.

11. *That he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised: that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:*

It is a very remarkable fact. A great many readers of the Book of Genesis would never have noticed it if the Holy Ghost had not called attention to the fact that father Abraham was justified by his faith before he was circumcised. And this is the reason of it—that he might be the father of all believers, whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised. “That righteousness might be imputed to them also.”

12-13. *And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

For the law was not even given when that covenant promise was made. The law was four hundred years afterwards. The covenant of grace was the oldest covenant of all, and it shall stand fast, whatever shall happen.

14. *For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:*

If you are upon that tack of salvation by the law, then what have you to do with faith? And what have you to do with promise, and what have you to do with Christ? You are on a different line altogether.

15. *Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.*

That is plain enough. You cannot break a law if there is not any. And thus, through our sinfulness, the law becomes a cause of sin, and never does it become the cause of justification.

16. *Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace:*

Salvation is by faith alone, that it may be seen to be of the free favor of God, that we may not look to merit or look to human strength, but may look away to the abounding mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

16-17. *To the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.*

What a God we trust in—a God who quickens the dead. We have no faith unless we believe in such a God as this. We shall need such a God in order to bring us safely to His right hand at last.

18-20. *Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;*

Men seem to think that only workers can give glory to God, but there is more glory given to God by one drachma of faith than by a ton of works. After all, works usually generate conceit and pride in us. But faith lays itself low before its God and gives to Him all the glory. God is never more glorified than He is by the believing confidence of His people when difficulties seem to come in the way. He was “strong in faith, giving glory to God.”

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