

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

NO. 523

A SERMON

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.”

1 Samuel 2:6

THIS sentence occurs in the very remarkable song of Hannah, who was equally illustrious as a poetess and prevalent as a suppliant. She sings an experiential song, for her deep sorrow had been a living death to her and her joyful exaltation was a triumphant resurrection. Her hymn is a golden bracelet, set with the jewels of sparkling contrasts. And this verse, with its vivid opposition between life and death, restoration and the grave, bears in it diamonds of the finest water.

Like the ewes in the Canticles, this verse bears twins. There is the double blessing of Othniel's wife in this text—it has both the upper and the nether springs as its inheritance. It has its own plain and *natural meaning*, which lies upon its surface like dust of gold. It has, moreover, a *spiritual meaning*, which needs to be digged for like silver in the mine.

I. In reference to ITS FIRST AND MOST MANIFEST MEANING, “The LORD bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.” Here the agency of God, in life and death, is clearly revealed to us. How well it is to discern the Lord's hand in everything. Our Puritanic forefathers were wont to speak of God as restraining the bottles of heaven or sending a gracious rain—as sending forth the wind or hiding it in His storehouse.

But we have grown so wise that we begin to understand how the rain is formed, and we talk about the winds as if we had been into the chambers from which they come howling forth, and had discovered all the secrets of the universe. We ascribe events to second causes, to the laws of nature, and I know not what.

I think it were better far, if we would go back to the good old way of talking and speaking of the Lord as being in everything. While we do not deny the laws of nature, nor decry the discoveries of science, we will suffer none of these to be hung up as a veil before our present God. O foolish wisdom, which widens the distance between me and my heavenly Father! O sweet simplicity of love, which sees the God of love in every place, at every hour! I need no telescope to see my God with—behold, O sons of men, He is here and my heart joyfully perceives Him.

God is in life and death, in sickness and in health. This, surely, will soften the pains of sickness and gild the joys of recovery. If you look upon sickness and restoration as merely the products of natural causes, you will not feel humbled when you are stretched upon the bed, nor grateful when you walk out again and breathe the fresh air.

But if you see God's finger in touching your bones and your flesh, you will be humbled under the chastisement. And if you discern His hand in restoring your youth, like the eagle's, you will be able, like David, to say, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” Let others forget God if they will, that is the attribute of the wicked. But let His saints remember Him, and let them speak well of His name, and have it in their mouths all the day long.

*“Tis God who lifts our comforts high,
Or sinks them in the grave.”*

This most precious fact should produce several gracious results in our hearts.

First of all, *it should awaken gratitude*. What a mercy it is that we are here this evening! You would think it more a mercy, perhaps, if certain of yonder seats had been left unoccupied, because those who sat there but a few days ago have gone the way of all flesh. If those pews could tell you where their former owners now are, you would praise the preserving hand of God far more heartily.

Why, I looked just now with solemn gaze upon a spot where was wont to sit one who has heard me preach for years, but God has lately called him to His bar. And I turn my head and look upon another spot—just there!—where used to sit another friend, but this last week, while journeying in Wales for his health, he ran down a slope on one of the beautiful mountains a little more rapidly than he should have done, the fence at the bottom gave way, and he was precipitated into an eternal world.

Even in our recreations, what dangers dog our heels! You sometimes smile at old-fashioned people who thank God for “journeying mercies” and “journeying protections,” but indeed, such petitions are as fitting as ever they were. I always like to offer to my God thanksgivings for mercies known and mercies *unknown*. Christ had unknown sufferings, and we enjoy, as the result thereof, unknown mercies.

When we know that—

*“Dangers stand thick through all the ground,
To push us to the tomb,
And fierce diseases wait around,
To hurry mortals home,”*

our preservation from these dangers should make us bless our God, “who redeemeth our life from destruction.” Glory be to that solitary arm which shields us from a vast array of foes.

While it causes gratitude, dear friends, it should *compel consideration*, and lead us to pray that sickness and health may be sanctified to us. “The LORD bringeth down to the grave,” and it is His rule never to do anything without a purpose. “He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men for nought.”

There is always a “needs be,” if “we are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” Is it not the part of wisdom to say, with Job, “Show me wherefore thou contendest with me?” Should not the sick chamber be a place where we should seek God? Indeed, where is there a place in which we should not seek Him?

Brethren, we ought to ask the sanctified use of everything. Are we not to ask a blessing at the table upon our every-day meal? What is there, then, upon which we do not need the blessing of God? But especially do we need it upon our trials. Ask a blessing, my brethren, upon your troubles. Say grace over a table which is not as well-loaded as it used to be. Say grace over broken bones and aching heads, over pains, and pangs, and partings, for there you want grace more than anywhere else, with the exception, it is true, of your prosperity—and there, likely enough, you need a double portion of His Spirit.

If we have been lifted up from the couch of languishing and suffering, then let us quietly expect the comfortable fruits of righteousness which are afterwards to be brought forth in those who are exercised with trials. Let us pray God that the pruning may make us bring forth more fruit—that the filing may make us shine the more brightly—that the furnace may consume our dross, and the deep rivers drown our follies. If the rod shall scourge our sloth to death, and the staff shall strengthen our faith, both rod and staff shall be seen to be in the Lord’s hand, and shall therefore comfort us.

I think you will all agree with me, too, that the Lord’s bringing us low and raising us up again, *should cause great searching of heart*. Suppose I had died when last I was sick—was I then prepared to die? Woman, you remember when you last were stretched upon that sickbed and even the physician had given you up for hopeless—God spared you.

But if He had not, where now would your soul have been? Let your conscience answer that question, and it may be that it will make you tremblingly say, “I should have been like unto them that go down into the pit.” If it had been your lot, my hearers, some of you to have perished as this friend of ours has

done during the past week, I dare not have said of you, “Lord, we thank You that it has pleased You to take this our brother to Yourself.”

I could not have uttered a sentence of hope concerning you. I would have forged a lie had I comforted your friends by holding out a fraction of hope concerning your soul’s salvation, for alas! are there not some of you who are Gospel-hardened and grow worse rather than better? While we are preaching to you, and pleading with you, and weeping for you to turn to Christ, and trying to lift up Jesus upon His cross in the hope that the Spirit may thereby attract you, you are getting to look upon the Gospel as an old, old tale, and upon the preacher himself as one whom you have heard so often, that really he is growing quite tedious and dull.

Ah! there are some of you whom I could stir *once* as a thunder-clap or a flash of lightning would have startled you, but you can almost sleep under my voice now. God knows I am willing enough to confess my own want of zeal and earnestness, but still, my hearers, it is not that which keeps some of you from coming to Christ.

It is because you keep putting off the day of repentance by perpetual procrastination. You live in a continual suicide, always destroying your own soul. Meanwhile, that which does not melt you hardens you, and so you grow worse and worse, ripening like tares for the fire. My dear friends, let the judgments of God lead you to try your hearts, and to see what your state before God may be. “Beware lest He take you away with His stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver you.”

To those of us who are believers in Christ, restoration from sickness, and the privilege of again coming up to God’s house after an absence from it through illness, *should suggest renewed activity*. Haste you! haste you! for behind you are the flying wheels of the chariot of death, and the axles thereof are growing red-hot with speed. Fly, man, if you would accomplish your lifework, for you have not a moment to spare!

I think I see my work before me—the wheat ripe unto the harvest—broad acres and wide fields—“multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision!” “Arise,” says the Master, “reap for Me!” I have reaped until my arm aches and my head swims. I wipe the hot sweat from my weary brow, and would fain rest awhile, but He says, “Reap! reap! reap! Reap while the morning’s dew is falling! Reap while the hot sun scorches the ripening corn! Reap while the sun is setting! Reap until he has quite gone down, then you shall rest from your labors. But until then your work shall not be done!”

Am I to reap alone? My brethren, there are many new, bright sickles—here is one for each of you. Up and to the fields, my fellow reapers! Men and women, up from your lethargy. Woe unto you that are at ease in Zion, that lie upon beds of down, and forget that men are making their beds in hell! Get you up and begin to be troubled for the sorrows of God’s people, for the deaths of sinners, for the destruction of this great city.

If ever Jonah’s soul was stirred within him as he thought of Nineveh, much more ought yours and mine to be stirred with the burden of this great London. There is no time to waste. Men are dying! Hell is filling! How dare you loiter! Again I sound the alarm. Work, O you saints of the Lord, with all your might. Work with both your hands, by night and by day. Sow beside all waters. In the morning, sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand. Let, then, the nearness of death, and the shortness of life, be to us as double spurs to stimulate our jaded spirits to fresh action.

What need I say more? You who are scholars in the college of affliction, are fitter to instruct me than I am to teach you. I shall but add this one thought—surely, if it is the Lord who brings down to the grave—and He may do it at any day, *we ought to be very watchful*. Are we not, many of us, like the virgins of the parable? We have fallen asleep. We have our lamps with us, but are not they almost out?

It is the dead hour of night and all things are quiet. Methinks I hear a cry which ought to startle every sleeper—“Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him!” Do you sleep after that? Do I not see you startled? You rub your drowsy eyes. You look at your lamps and you find the oil gone. You seek to trim them, and the cry fills you with alarm and confusion, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him!”

But some of you have no oil and now you would fain borrow it where it is not to be had. Alas for you, for you will be shut out, and shut out forever. Others of you have oil in your vessels, but you need hastily to trim your lamps or else the Bridegroom will come and find you sleeping. The Lord grant that as He may come today—as you, sitting there in your seat, may die—as I, standing here, may cease to breathe ere the next word shall come from my lips, we may all be ready.

*“That awful, that tremendous day,
Its coming who shall tell? For as a thief
Unheard, unseen, it steals with silent pace
Through night’s dark gloom. Perhaps as here I stand,
And rudely talk of these tremendous themes,
Soon shall the tongue be check’, and dumb the mouth
That lisps the faltering strain.*

*“O Power supreme, Thou Guardian of my life,
Preserve me from a dread surprise in death.
From ways where I might weep to find a grave,
Keep Thou Thy servant by Thy mighty grace.*

*“O may Thy heavenly summons ne’er disturb,
Nor come, unwelcome, to my waiting heart.
But find me rapt in meditation high,
Hymning my great Creator!—or in prayer,
Bringing the blessing down upon the crowd;
In earnest work for Jesus, lifting up
His cross, and glory of His saving name.”*

Be watchful, brethren, for the Lord brings down to the grave, and from that grave he brings us not up again to work, though He will bring us up to the reward and to the rest which remain for the people of God.

I shall now leave the text as it stands naturally. And briefly, but O may the Spirit of God help me to do it earnestly, try to speak of it in a spiritual sense.

II. OUR TEXT SEEMS TO INDICATE A STATE OF HEART THROUGH WHICH THOSE PASS WHO ARE BROUGHT TO GOD.

There always is in every case, though not to the same degree, a stripping-time before there is a clothing-time. There must be an emptying before there is a filling. There is the digging out of the foundations before the building up of the house. There is a time in which this verse is fulfilled—“The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.”

Let me describe now, for the comfort of those who are passing through the same, what that state of heart is in which the Lord brings down to the grave. I shall speak now experientially, for if there breathes one soul on earth who can speak experientially here, I am that man.

The sinner is led, first of all, *to hear his own sentence pronounced*. He was getting careless and thoughtless before, but now he is brought to think. Thinking, he perceives his sins. Perceiving his sins, he fears an angry God looking down from heaven—nay, with His sword drawn, reaching down from heaven, to smite him on account of his iniquities.

Well do I remember when I stood at God’s bar speechless. Not a word had I to answer Him with for one sin of a thousand. When I read, “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them,” I knew that that curse was upon me, for I had not continued in anything, much less in all things written in the book of the law.

It seemed to me as though I saw the Judge open the book, not to read my indictment—for that had already been published—but to proclaim the sentence. The trial had been gone through. I myself had

made confession of my crimes, and now the Judge put on the black cap, and commanded me to be taken to the place from which I came to suffer eternal wrath. When that sentence was to be executed He did not tell me, but it appeared to me as if it must come the next moment. And if it did come, I knew I could not blame the justice of God, for I deserved it well.

Is that *your* position? Oh! where are you tonight, poor condemned sinner? Perhaps I cannot see you, for the crowd is great, nor can you see me, for you are in a corner, but yet you are bowing your head and saying, “Ah! that is just my case. I am cursed and I deserve it. God is angry with the sinner every day—I am a sinner and deserve that anger.”

*“There is a dreadful hell
And everlasting pains,
Where sinners must with devils dwell,
In darkness, fire, and chains.”*

“That is my lot,” you are saying, and you are wringing your hands while you are speechless as to any self-justification, and are only able to say, “It is most just. I deserve it well.”

Further than this—the convinced sinner is often made to feel, not only the sentence and the justice of it, *but the very horror of death itself*. You may have read in the narrative of the old American war, of the execution of deserters. They were brought out one bright morning, while yet the dew was on the grass, and were bidden to kneel down each man in his coffin, and then a file of soldiers stepped forth. The word was given and each man fell down in his coffin in which he was to be buried. Such things as the punishment of deserters are common in every war, but what must be the horror of the man who stands there, knowing that the bullet is waiting to reach his heart?

In the old wars, they used to have a black heart sown on the man’s breast, and all the soldiers were to take aim and fire at that. Why the man must suffer a thousand deaths while he stood waiting for the word of command. I have stood there, spiritually and there are hundreds here who have thus faced their eternal doom. They have felt the horrors of death get hold upon them, and the pangs of hell encompass them, and they have found trouble and sorrow.

O sinners, if you know yourselves, you will soon feel this, for do you not know that if you are without Christ, you are standing in that position right now? The great guns of the law, charged to the muzzle, are all pointed at you. They do but wait the fatal moment, when the uplifted finger of justice shall bid them be discharged, and where will you be then?

Lost beyond hope! ruined beyond remedy! Beware, sinner, beware of this. “Well,” says one, “that is the horror which I felt tonight. I felt as I came along that it was a wonder the earth did not open and swallow me up, and though I am now in God’s house, I feel as if such a wretch as I am ought not to be in the company of the faithful. I wonder that I am still alive, and I am ready to cry out with the hymn writer—

*“Tell it, unto sinners tell;
I am, I am out of hell.”*

Ah! dear friends, this is another part of the experience through which many are called to go, before the Lord who brings them down to the grave vouchsafes to bring them up again.

Then there is yet a further death which the convinced sinner is made to feel and that is *the death of inability*. While we are unregenerate, we think that we can do everything. Nothing is so easy, we imagine then, as believing. It is mere child’s play to pray to God, quite a trifle to turn to God and get a new heart.

Ay, but when man begins to work in real earnest, he finds it a very different thing. He feels like one in a swoon. There lies a woman who has fainted. You tell her, it is but to put up her finger, to open her

eyes, to move her limbs, to walk into the fresh air, to drink a draught of water, and to recover. Yes, but she cannot do any of these things.

In one sense she can—the faculties are there, but they are all in a dormant state, and so utterly powerless that all the woman is conscious of is her inability. Such is the state of the sinner when under a sense of guilt. He feels that deadly swoon of death into which Adam threw all his children. Now he moans most wretchedly, in words like those of good old John Newton—

*“I would, but cannot sing,
I would, but cannot pray;
For Satan meets me when I try,
And frights my soul away.*

*“I would, but can’t repent,
Though I endeavour oft;
This stony heart can ne’er relent
Till Jesus make it soft.*

*“I would, but cannot love,
Though woo’d by love divine;
No arguments have power to move
A soul so base as mine.*

*“O could I but believe!
Then all would easy be;
I would, but cannot—Lord, relieve,
My help must come from Thee!”*

He feels himself brought into a perfect state of death, as if a stupor had gone through every nerve, and frozen every muscle rigidly in its place, so that even the lifting of his little finger to help himself appears to be beyond his power. I am glad, dear friend, you are brought here, for I know the Lord never does empty a soul thoroughly of all creature-strength without very soon showing what the Creator can do.

If He has brought you down to this grim sepulchre of corruption, dishonor, weakness, and self-despair, He will shortly bring you up again. It is when you are strong that I am afraid for you. But when you are weak, then my hopes are high. The climax of your disease is just the dawn of my hopes. Your direst poverty is the time when I expect to see you enriched—for when you are completely emptied and have nothing, then Jesus Christ will be your strength and your salvation.

Trust Him to be your all in all now that you are nothing at all. There must, at least in some degree, be a sense of thus being brought down to the grave before there will be a bringing up again.

No doubt, the man *now sees death written upon all his hopes*. There was a door through which I had hoped to enter eternal life. I had spent much time in painting it and making it comely to look upon. It seemed to me to have a golden knocker, a marble threshold, and posts and lintels of mahogany—and I thought it was the door of life for me.

But now what do I see? I see a great black cross adown it, and over it there is written, “Lord, have mercy upon us.” This door is the door to heaven by my own good works, which I thought full sure would always be open to me. But lo, I see that all my best works are bad and “Lord, have mercy upon us,” is the highest thing my works can produce for me. Still must I cry, even over them, “God have mercy upon my good works. Forgive me for my best deeds, for I need to be forgiven even for these.”

The death of legal hope is the salvation of the soul. I like to see legal hope swung up like a traitor. There let him hang to rot before the sun, more cursed than any other that was ever hanged on a tree. O, soul, have done with him, for whilst you are so fond of him, whilst you do treat him with the best you

have, and do set him at the head of your table, you are ruined. But when you do slay him and drive him from you, then it is that your joy and your hope begin.

No more, then, concerning this death—"The Lord bringeth down."

But now a word or two of comfort for any of you who are brought down to this spiritual grave. There are many precious promises for such. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

Remember the experience of Jonah—"For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple....I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God."

Let the hope of Jeremiah be your consolation—"But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." You that are brought very low, you feel that you are wounded tonight. Do you not know how many promises there are to the wounded ones?

"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Was not Jesus Christ sent on purpose for this—"To bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound?" The name of our God is "JEHOVAH-Rophi—the Lord that healeth thee." His own words are, "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds." "I have seen his ways and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners."

You are tonight like the dead. Do you not remember that passage in Ezekiel, fraught with rich mercy to you, where the Lord speaks concerning Israel, that they said their bones were dry, their hope was lost, and they were cut off from their parts. But yet, nevertheless, He would raise them up and they should live in His sight?

"Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the LORD God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD."

Remember how Hosea, speaking of the dead who were slain as you are, says, "The third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight"? And that passage we read just now—"I kill, and I make alive"—do you not see the comfort of it? That "and" is a diamond rivet, joining the two sentences together. You cannot separate the "I kill" from the "I make alive," for where God kills by His Spirit, He always quickens by the same. He does not in this life kill our legal hopes and our carnal security, without by and by making us alive.

You will tell me that the Lord has withdrawn from you, but oh! what a multitude of promises there are for you! "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." "If any walk in darkness and see no light, let him trust in the name of the LORD." So that though you have lost the comfortable hope of His love, you are still to trust in Him. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," said Job. And do you, though you are slain, still trust—for there is still ground for trust—no sinner was ever brought too low for God to bring him up again.

Others have been as low as you are now. Remember Heman the Ezrahite, whose mournful notes we read just now in the eighty-eighth Psalm. What words are these—"Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves....I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off?"

Yet this man of God received comforts, after all, from the God of his salvation. You yourself are not brought so low as you would be if you had a still clearer view of your sins. Remember, God's mercy is so great that you may sooner drain the sea of its water, or deprive the sun of its light, or make space too narrow, than diminish the great mercy of God. So that though brought to the very last pinch, and dead like the free among the slain that go down into the pit, you may still find mercy in the Lord our God.

Let me beg you never to be satisfied until you get a Savior. Do not be content with any comfort short of faith in Christ. Do recollect, dear friends, that you must not be satisfied because you have good desires or because you experience holy feelings. When friends say to you, "God has begun the good work in you, and you may be content, for He will carry it on"—remember, you can never be sure that God has begun the good work till you have believed in Christ.

Believe in Jesus Christ. That is, as far as you are concerned, the first clear proof that God has begun a saving work in you. And it is for you, though dead and ruined, though swooning and fainting, and unable to do anything as of yourself, to swoon into the arms of the Savior, to faint, as many a child has done, into its father's arms—to die into the bosom of the Savior and lie buried in His grave. Oh! this is a happy, happy way of being nothing—that Christ may be all in all.

And now, I close, for time fails us, by just noticing, that where God has thus killed and brought down, we may rest assured He will certainly bring up again.

Beloved friends, the Lord does not send His Holy Spirit to bring to a sense of their need those sinners whom He does not intend to save, for that were a waste of His divine energy. He leaves reprobates, for the most part, to their natural hardness and stolidity of heart, but those whom He deigns to make sensible of guilt, those whom He deigns to condemn in their consciences, and to write the sentence of death in their members—these He intends sooner or later to bring up again from their despondency.

Why, it stands to reason that He will. "Ah!" said one good old divine once to a fainting sinner, "You cost Christ too much for Him to let you perish. He bought you too dearly to let you be a castaway forever." Remember, since you are His—and we have a comfortable hope that you are, because you sigh and cry, and have a blessed hunger and thirst after Him—since you are His, I say, you are very precious in His sight, and He will not, therefore, allow you to be lost.

"Oh," says one, "can I be a child of God after all, and yet be brought so low as I have been?" Some months ago, there were two women who kept a shop, and they put all their money, some hundred pounds, in sovereigns, under the fender of the fireplace at night, in a bag, to save it from thieves. The cleaning girl cleared away the ashes, and of course, cleared away the sovereigns too, and they were swept into the dust heap.

Well, this gold might have said to itself, "Now I am going to the dust heap. How worthless I am, because I am put here among the lowest dregs—here is a piece of old rag—and here a rotten mass of filth. I cannot be a gold sovereign or else I should not be cast here." Ah! but you see, when they came to rake the heap, they raked the golden coins out again. The sovereigns were by and by discovered.

They might be in the ashes, but they were not to lie there forever. So you may be brought to feel yourselves the lowest, the worst, and the most useless of all creatures—but if the Lord has set His love upon you, you are gold in His esteem—none the less because of the ashes and the dunghill upon which you may be cast and He will yet bring you up again.

Recollect, there may be a work of grace in your heart and yet you may not know it. There are many pebbles in the bottom of a river which you cannot see, but they are there. There may be some degree of faith, and hope, and love, and yet your soul may be so much disturbed that you cannot as yet perceive it. Or the Lord may be really bringing you up from the grave, and yet the muddiness of your thoughts and the darkness of your soul's eye may prevent your perceiving what the Lord is doing for you.

Still, I repeat it, He *will* bring you up again. O let your faith seize hold on this comforting assurance. If it is not done yet, it will be in due time. "Well, how will it come?" says one, "How will the Lord give me comfort?" My dear friend, I do not know the manner of it. It may come suddenly—before this

service is over you may feel all the joy that a believer can know. It may be that the Lord will reveal Himself to you as you are walking home, or tonight while you are in prayer before you go to your rest.

Possibly it will come gradually—first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. There are some to whom the light of life comes as the light of the rising sun—first a glimmering twilight. Then, the ruddy hues upon the clouds, then, a flood of light, and afterwards the sun has fully arisen.

It may be so with you. But there is one thing I know—that when your hope does come, when God quickens you from your grave—it will be just at that moment when you are led to look away from your own feelings, your own doings, and your own willings, and to look to Christ alone.

I heard the other day a trembling woman—I hope she will yet be rejoicing in the Lord—I heard her saying she was afraid she would never be saved, and I told her I was afraid so, too, for she *would not* believe in Christ, but was always raising questions and doubts, and peradventures Well, she said, she did not know whether the Lord had begun a good work in her. I told her I did not know that either and that I did not inquire about it.

I knew what the Gospel said and that was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” But she said, perhaps it was not God’s time. Ah! I said, “To-day is the accepted time; to-day is the day of salvation.” Ah! she said, but she could not believe. I asked her why she could not believe. Could she not believe what Christ said? Was He a liar? Could she dare to say that she could not believe her God? Well, she did not exactly mean that, but then, there were her sins.

But I said, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.” Well, she said, she hoped she should have the strivings of the Spirit and that one day she would get right. My sister, said I, I charge you before God do not get any hope out of that. Your business is to come to Christ and to come to Christ *now*. But if you stop anywhere short of that, in any sort of feelings or experience, then you will never get to your journey’s end.

A believing sinner’s business is with Jesus, and not with the Spirit’s operations. The Spirit works salvation in him, but he is nowhere bid to look to the Spirit for salvation. No man can come to the Father but by Christ, and no man can come to an acknowledgment of the Spirit’s operations but by a sight of Christ. I grant you that the Spirit bringeth us to the cross, but we do not know when we come that the Spirit is at work with us. By a mysterious force we come to Jesus, and then afterwards we look back and say, “Why, it must have been the Spirit of God that drew me to Christ.” You are not however to begin with that, but you are to begin by looking at the cross.

Although I have been talking to you about how God wills to bring us down, I have not set up these feelings as a standard of experience or as being the ground of our salvation. A sense of need is a sign of our salvation, for no soul ever will come to live through the life of Christ unless he has first been slain by the great sword of the law. No sinner ever comes empty-handed to Jesus till he has been knocked down and robbed of all the worthless trash which he prizes as jewels.

But still, I say, for all this, the thing which saves the soul is for that dead, helpless, swooning, feeble, lost, ruined soul, to look to Him who hangs on yonder cross—where the just suffers for the unjust—that He may bring us to God. This is how the Lord bringeth us up again.

I know there will be some who will say they have not felt all I have described to any great degree or extent. Remember, again, I do not set this up as a standard to keep you from Christ. I have been preaching thus in order to catch you who do not come because you have terrors—not to frighten those who come without them.

There are two sorts of you we have to deal with. Some of you say you cannot believe in Christ because you have such terrible convictions. You wish you had not felt them. And another class of you say, if you had these horrible terrors, you could believe in Christ. There is no pleasing either of you. Now, remember, you that have the convictions, the Lord who brings you low will bring you up again. And you that have not the convictions, you still have this preached to you—“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

Come to Jesus just as you are, you shall have such conviction as the Lord sees fit for you. You shall, indeed, be led in the same way as others. Though, being blind, you will not know at the time that it is the same way. You will be killed and you will be made alive. You will be emptied and you will be filled. you will be made nothing and Jesus shall be your all in all.

O that my Master would bless these few rambling remarks to some of you. I do not like drawing the bow at a venture. I cannot bear that metaphor, but I do love to draw the bow at a certainty, to smite some of you, and I would to God that the Lord would do that now.

The Lord greatly blesses that class over which our dear sister, Mrs. Bartlett, presides—but there are still some in it who are unconverted. O that the Lord might bring some of them in tonight. You, young women, who do take an interest in the things of God—may the Lord now decide you. I want to speak personally and affectionately to you now, because you may be in the grave before another Sabbath-day.

As I look around me here, I miss some of my congregation, and in such a large congregation as this, there are at least two who depart every week. I suppose, according to the natural order of things, two of you must die each week, and when I think of this solemn fact, I ask—where are the two? Where are the two who are to be the victims of death this week?

“Perhaps they are at home, sick,” you say. Ah! well, perhaps also they are here in good strong health. Prepare to meet your God, young men, for you are not too young to die! And you in the Sabbath school—I am so pleased to hear of the boys being converted and of the girls being brought in. But O children, some of you may soon make a little hillock in the cemetery with your young bodies! May the Lord make you young Samuels. Remember, it was Samuel’s mother who penned this text—may you be led to feel your need of Jesus, and then to find Him for the salvation of your soul.

You who are diligent in business, but are not fervent in spirit, you will be busy buying and selling all the week, but oh! do not sell your souls. “Buy the truth and sell it not.” You, grey heads, yonder, what a multitude of old men we always have in this assembly, and I am glad to see the fathers here, though I often wonder how aged Christians can be fed by such a child as I am. But still, those grey hairs only make a fool’s cap for you if you have grown old in sin as well as old in years. God help you that you may yet be made babes in grace though you are on the very verge of the grave.

God add His blessing, but we will not separate till we have sung this one verse—and I beg none to sing it but those who deeply can feel it—

*“Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!”*

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.