

THE SAINT'S HORROR AT THE SINNER'S HELL

NO. 524

A SERMON
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*“Gather not my soul with sinners.”
Psalm 26:9*

WE must all be gathered in due course. When time shall have ripened the fruit, it must hang no longer upon the tree, but be gathered into the basket. When the summer's sun has perfectly matured the corn, the sickle must be brought forth and the harvest must be reaped. To everything there is a season and an end.

There shall be a gathering-time for every one of us. It may come tomorrow. It may be deferred another handful of years. It may come to us by the long process of consumption or decline. It may advance with more rapid footsteps and we may in a moment be gathered to our people. Sooner or later, to use the expressive words of Job, the Almighty shall set His heart upon each of us, and gather unto Himself our spirit and our breath.

That gathering rests with God!—the prayer of the psalmist implies it and many Scriptures affirm it. As Young sings in his *Night Thoughts*—

“An angel's arm can't hurl me to the grave.”

Accidents are but God's arrangements. Diseases are His decrees. Fevers His servants and plagues His messengers. Our mortality is immortal, till the Eternal wills its death. “Return, ye children of men” can be spoken by none but our heavenly Father, and when He gives the word, return we must without delay.

I do not know, my brethren, seeing that our death is certain and remains entirely in the hands of our gracious God, that there is any prayer which we need to offer concerning it except, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit,” and this brief sentence, “Gather not my soul with sinners.” Scarcely can I commend those who plead to be delivered from sudden death, for sudden death is sudden glory. Hardly can I advise you to request a hasty departure, for flesh and blood shrink from speedy dissolution.

Pray not for long life, nor for an early grave—cheerfully leave all these matters to the choice of infinite wisdom, and concentrate all your desires upon the one desire of the text. Filled with a holy horror of the hell of sinners, let us make most sure of our calling to the heaven of the blessed. Let the fear of being cast forth with the withered branches increase our fruitfulness, and let our horror of the sinner's character and doom lead us to cleave more closely to the Savior of souls.

We will divide our discourse thus—first, *the gathering*, and here let us behold a vision. Next, *the prayer*, and here let us note an example. Thirdly, *a fear*, and here let us observe a holy anxiety. And then fourthly, *an answer* yielding a consolation.

I. First, THE GATHERING.

Let the man who has his eyes open behold the gathering of sinners and in the sanctuary of the Lord let him understand their end.

There have been many partial gatherings of the ungodly, all ending in sudden ruin and overthrow. Turn your eyes hither. Two hundred and fifty men have impudently taken censers into their hands, and have dishonored the Lord's chosen servants, Moses and Aaron. Mark well their proud revilings of the Lord's anointed. In the gainsaying of Korah they all have a part.

The people hasten from their tabernacles and they stand alone. It is but for a moment. See! The earth cleaves asunder. They go down alive into the pit and the earth closes her mouth upon them. My soul trembles and hides her face for fear—and my fainting heart groans out her desire—“Gather not my soul with sinners!”

Look yonder, my brethren, to the city of palm trees surrounded by its strong munitions. All the inhabitants are gathered together within it. From the top of the walls they mock the feeble band of silent Israelites, who for six days have marched round and round their city. The seventh day has come and the rams' horns give the signal of destruction. The Lord comes forth from His rest, and at the terror of His rebuke the walls of Jericho fall flat to the ground.

Now where are your boastings, O congregation of the wicked? The sword of Israel is bathed in your blood, O accursed sons of Canaan. As we hear the shriek of the slaughtered, and mark the smoke of the city ascending up to heaven like the flame of Sodom of old, we reverently bow the knee unto JEHOVAH and cry, “Gather not my soul with sinners.”

Leaping over centuries, with weeping we behold the holy city, beautiful for situation, once the joy of the whole earth, but now forsaken of her God and beleaguered by her foes. All the Jewish people have come together from the four winds of heaven—as the flesh is cast into the caldron, and the fire burns fiercely, so are they gathered together for judgment.

Well might their rejected Messiah weep over the devoted city as He remembered how often He would have gathered her children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and they would not. Now are they gathered in another manner, and the wings of eagles flutter over them, hastening for the prey.

See yonder the Roman armies and the mounds which they have cast up! Woe unto you, O city of Zion, for the spoilers know no pity. They spare neither young nor old. “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck,” for the day of the Lord's vengeance is come, and the words of Moses are fulfilled, when he said—“The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young....And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the desperate straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee.”

Hark! the clarion summons the warrior to arms. The veterans of Vespasian and Titus dash to the assault. Where are you now, O city polluted with the murder of prophets, and stained with the blood of the prophets' Lord? Your walls protect not your sons, they keep not the temple of your glory. See! A soldier's ruthless hand hurls the red firebrand into the sacred precincts of the temple, and its smoke darkens the sky.

Can you walk those smoldering ruins and behold the heaps of ashes mingled with burning flesh—the crimson streams of gore and the deep pools of clotted blood? Can you linger there where desolation holds her reign supreme, and refuse to see the justice of the God of Israel, or fail to breathe the humble prayer of the psalmist, “Gather not my soul with sinners”?

Wherever the enemies of God are gathered, there we have ere long, confusion, and tears, and death. In whatever place sinners may hold their counsels, when the Judge of all the earth comes out against them, we soon see an Aceldama—a field of blood.

But forgetting all these inferior gatherings, illustrious in horror though they be, my eye beholds a greater gathering which is proceeding every day to its completion. Every day the heavens and the earth hear the voice of God, saying, “Gather ye; gather ye my foes together, that I may utterly destroy them.” “Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.”

As the huntsman, when he goes forth to the battle, encompasses the beasts of the forest with an ever-narrowing ring of hunters—that he may exterminate them all in one great slaughter—so the God of justice has made a ring in His providence round about the sinful sons of men. Within that circle of divine power are imprisoned monarchs and peasants, peers and paupers. That ring encompasses all nations, polite or barbarous, civilized or rude.

No impenitent sinner can break through the lines—as well might a worm escape from within a circle of flame. Every hour the lines grow narrower, and the multitudes of the Lord's enemies are driven into the center where His darts are flying, where His sharp arrows shall pierce them. I hear the baying of the dogs of death today, hounding the unbelieving to their doom. I see the heaps of slain, and mark the terrible arrows as they fly with unerring aim.

Multitudes of sinners are scattered from the equator to the poles, but not one of them is able to escape the avenger's hand. High and haughty princes, boasting their imperial pomp, fall like antlered stags, smitten with the shafts of the Almighty. While their valiant warriors, like wild boars of the forest, perish upon the point of His glittering spear.

The vision of the Apocalypse is no mere dream. He whose name is THE WORD OF GOD, shall tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And meanwhile, the angel standing in the sun cries with a loud voice to all the fowls which fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather yourselves together into the supper of the great God: that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men: and the flesh of horses, and of them who sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great."

At the remembrance of all this, we may well-exclaim with Habakkuk, "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he comes up unto the people, he will cut them in pieces with his troops."

O Thou God of all grace, I pray Thee, by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, in which I trust, "Gather not my soul with sinners." Let that providence which gathers Your people from among men, lay hold on me. Let Your angels who keep watch and ward about Your people, keep me from the snare of the fowler, and from the destruction which wastes at noonday.

But the scene changes—we see no longer the assembling of the multitudes in the great valley of the shadow of death, but we track them further, till we find ourselves on the threshold of the abode of spirits. You have seen the prisoners in their cells, waiting for their trial at the next assize. The strong hand of law has laid them in durance, where they await the summons to appear before the judge.

I pray you note the company, and before the trumpet announces the judge, see what a strange gathering the prison-house contains. Do you mark them? There is the murderer, with blood-red hand. There is he who smote his fellow to his wounding. Yonder lies the wretch who perjured himself before God, and here the man who pilfered his neighbor's goods.

However they differed from one another before, they are on a level in rank in this house of detention, and they all await one common jail delivery. It is no pleasant sight to visit these cells before the assize comes on. Crime, although as yet not condemned, is no comfortable vision. But what of earthly prisons? My heart sees a sight far more terrible—

*"Look down, my soul, on hell's domains,
That world of agony and pains!
What crowds are now associate there,
Of widely different character.*

*"What wretched ghosts are met below,
Some once so great, so little now;
So gay, so sad, so rich, so poor;
Now scorn'd by those they scorn'd before."*

Multitudes are gathered together in the state where souls abide until their final doom is pronounced both on their bodies and on their souls. A place of misery where not a drop of water cools their parched tongue. A state of doubt, and terror, and suspense—a place from which consolation is banished, where the “wrath to come” perpetually afflicts them.

There in captivity abide the formalist, the hypocrite, the profane, the licentious, the abandoned, those who despised God, and hated Christ, and turned away from the glory of His cross. There they are gathered, tens of thousands of them, at this day, waiting till the great assize shall sit. O God, “gather not my soul with sinners,” but let me be gathered with those whose spirits wait beneath the altar for their redemption, to wit, the resurrection of their bodies. Gather me with those who cry day and night until God avenges His own elect. gather me with the multitude of spirits who wait the coming of the Son of God from heaven, that their bliss may be complete.

But now, my eye, prophetic in the light of Scripture, sees another gathering. The trumpet has sounded, the prison doors are loosed, and the gates of death give way. They come, bodies and souls—souls from the place of waiting in the pit of hell, and bodies from their graves, from ocean and from earth—from all the four winds of heaven—bodies and souls come together, and there they stand—an exceeding great army.

This time it is not in the valley of suspense, but “multitudes, multitudes in the valley of *decision*.” “And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army; for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible: and who can abide it?” “Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD. Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get ye down; for the press is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great.”

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged, every man according to their works....And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Oh! well may you and I pray that we may have a part in the first resurrection—upon such the second death has no power. Grant us, O Lord, that we may not be with the wicked, the rest of the dead, who rise not until after a thousand years are finished. But give You us a portion among those whose iniquities are blotted out, who have not received the mark of the beast in their foreheads, who therefore live and reign with Christ a thousand years (Rev 20:4).

May we be gathered with the harvest of the Lord, when He that sits on the cloud shall reap it with His golden sickle. But this gathering of which my text speaks is not the harvest of the righteous, but the vintage of the wicked. When “the angel which had power over fire” shall cry, “Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth: for her grapes are fully ripe.”

How dreadful that great winepress of divine wrath which shall be trodden without the city, and how terrible that flow of blood, like a mighty stream of wine, so deep that it ran even unto the horses' bridles by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs. “Gather not my soul with sinners,” O God, in that terrible day.

I need not stop to paint—for colors equal to its terrors I have none—that dreadful place where the last gathering shall be held. That great synagogue of Satan, the place appointed for unbelievers, and prepared for the devil and his angels. Where “sullen moans and hollow groans, and shrieks of tortured ghosts” shall be their only music. Where weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth shall be their perpetual occupation. Where joy is a stranger and hope unknown. Where death itself would be a friend.

No, I will not attempt to describe what our Savior veiled in words like these, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "Where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." "Outer darkness, where shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." We drop the curtain, hoping that you have seen enough to make you pray, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

Dear brethren, when we recollect that that last gathering will be a perfect one, that there will be no sinner left with the saints, that, on the other hand, no saint will remain with sinners, when we recollect that it will be a final one—no redistribution will ever be made and that it will entail an everlasting separation—a great gulf being fixed, which none can cross—it remains for us to be solemnly anxious to be found on the right hand, and to put up, with vehemence, this prayer—"O Lord, gather not my soul with sinners."

II. Having thus shown the vision of the gathering, let me, with deep solemnity, conduct your minds for a little time to THE PRAYER ITSELF.

I am sure we are all agreed about it, every one of us. Balaam, if he be here this morning, differs not from me. The worst and most abandoned wretch on earth agrees with David in this. Sinners do not wish to be gathered with sinners. Balaam's prayer is, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," which only differs in words from David's petition, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

But then *the reasons* of the one prayer are very different in different persons. We would all like to be saved from hell, but then there is a difference in the reasons why we would so be delivered. The same prayer may be uttered by different lips. In the one it may be heard and accepted as spiritual prayer, and in the other it may be but the natural excitement produced by a selfish desire to avoid misery.

I know why you would not wish to be gathered with sinners—those of you who are ungodly and impenitent—you dread the fire, the flames which no abatement know. You dread the wrath, the suffering. You dread the horrors of that world to come. Not so with the Christian, these he dreads as all men must, but he has a higher and a better reason for not wishing to be gathered with sinners.

I tell you, sirs, if sinners could be gathered into heaven with their present character, the Christian's prayer would be what it now is—"Gather not my soul with sinners." If sin entailed happiness, if rebellion against God could give bliss, even then the Christian would scorn the happiness, and avoid the bliss which sin affords. His objection is not so much to hell, as to sinners themselves. His desire is to avoid the contamination and distraction of their company.

Many of you will say, "Now I dislike the company of sinners." Indeed, most moral people dislike the society of *a certain class of sinners*. I suppose there is scarcely one here today who would wish to be found in the den of the burglar, where the conversation is concerning plunder and violence. You would not probably feel very easy in the haunt of the harlot, where licentious tongues utter flippantly lascivious words. You shun the house of the strange woman.

The pot-house is not a favorite resort for you. You would not feel very much at ease at the bar of the gin palace. You would say of each of these—"This is no joy to me." Even those of you who are not renewed by Christ, despise vice when she walks abroad naked. I fear me you cannot say as much when she puts on her silver slippers and wraps about her shoulders her scarlet mantle.

Sin in rags is not popular. Vice in sores and squalor tempts no one. In the grosser shapes, men hate the very fiend whom they love when it is refined and delicate in its form. I want to know whether you can say, "Gather not my soul with sinners," when you see the ungodly in their high days and holidays? Do you not envy the fraudulent merchant counting his gold—his purse heavy with his gains, while he himself by his craft is beyond all challenge by the law?

Do you not envy the giddy revelers, spending the night in the merry dance, laughing, making merry with wine, and smiling with thoughts of lust? Yonder voluptuary, entering the abode where virtue never finds a place, and indulging in pleasures unworthy to be named in this hallowed house—does he never excite your envy? I ask you, when you see the pleasures, the bright side, the honors, the emoluments, the gains, the merriments of sin, do you then say, "Gather not my soul with sinners"?

There is a class of sinners that some would wish to be gathered with—those easy souls who go on so swimmingly. They never have any trouble. Conscience never pricks them. Business never goes wrong with them. They have no bands in their life, no bonds in their death. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men.

They are like the green bay tree, which spreads on every side, until its branches cover whole acres with their shade. These are the men who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Can we say, when we look at these, when we gaze upon the bright side of the wicked, “Gather not my soul with sinners”? Remember, if we cannot do so without reservation, we really cannot pray the prayer at all. We ought to alter it and put it, “Gather not my soul with openly reprobate sinners.”

And then mark you, as there is only one place for all sorts of sinners, moral or immoral, apparently holy or profane, your prayer cannot be heard, for if you are gathered with sinners at all—with the best of sinners—you must be gathered with the worst of sinners too. I know, children of God, you can offer the prayer as it stands and say, “In all their glory and their pomp, in all their wealth, their peace, and their comfort, my soul abhors them, and I earnestly beseech You, O Lord, by the blood of Jesus, ‘Gather not my soul with sinners.’”

Brethren, why does the Christian pray this prayer? He prays it, first of all, because *as far as his acquaintance goes with sinners, even now he does not wish for their company*. The company of sinners in this world to the saint is a cause of uneasiness. We cannot be with them and feel ourselves perfectly at home. “My soul is among lions, even among them that are set on fire of hell.” “Rid me from strange children.”

We are vexed with their conversation, even as Lot was with the language of the men of Sodom. We lay an embargo upon them—they cannot act as they would in our society—and they lay a restraint upon us, we cannot act as we would when we are with them. We feel an hindrance in our holy duties through dwelling in the tents of Kedar.

When we would talk of God, we cannot in the midst of company to whom the very name of Jesus is a theme for jest. How can we well engage in family devotions when more than half the family are given up to the world? How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? You who sojourn in Mesech, you know how great a grief it is, what a damper it is to your spirituality, what a serious hindrance it is to your growth in grace.

Besides, the company tempts believers to sin. Who can keep his garment pure when he travels with sinful companions? If I am condemned to walk continually in the midst of thorns and briars, it is strange if I do not mar my garments. Often our nearest friends get a hold upon our hearts, and then, being enemies to God, they lead us to do things which we otherwise would never have dreamed of doing.

The company of the sinner is to the Christian a matter of real loss in another respect, for when God comes to punish a nation, the Christian has to suffer with the sinners of that nation. National judgments fall as well upon the holy as upon the profane, and hence, through being mingled with the ungodly of this world, the Christian is a sufferer by famine, war, or pestilence.

Well may he, from the little taste he has known of their company, cry, “Gather not my soul with sinners.” Why, brethren, I will put you for a moment to the test—you shall be in the commercial room of an inn—you are on a journey, and you sit down to attend to your own business, or to await the train. Now, if two or three fast men come into the room, and they begin venting their filth and blasphemy, how do you feel? You do not wish to hear. You wish you were deaf. One of them cannot speak without larding his conversation with an oath.

There is another, perhaps a man elevated above the situation which his education fits him to occupy, who, in his conversation utters the most abominable and atrocious language, and the others laugh at him. Before many minutes you will steal out of the room, for you cannot endure it. What must it be to be shut in with such persons forever?

On board a steamboat, it may be, you fall into the middle of a little knot who are talking on some infidel subject in a manner far from palatable to you. Have you not wished yourself on shore and have

you not walked to the other end of the boat to be out of their way? I know you have felt that kind of thing. Your blood has chilled. Horror has taken hold upon you, because of the wicked who keep not God's law. If such has been your experience, you can well understand the reason of the psalmist's prayer, for much of such torment you could not bear.

Moreover, I do not know any class of sinners whose company a Christian would desire. I would not like to live with the most precise of hypocrites. What ugly company to keep! You cannot trust them anywhere—always hollow—always ready to deceive and to betray you. I would not choose to live with formalists, self-righteous people, because whenever they begin to talk about themselves and their own good deeds, they do, as it were, throw dirt upon the righteousness of Christ, which is our boast—and that is ill company for a Christian.

The believer triumphs in the free grace of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the efficacy of the blood of Jesus, but the self-righteous man speaks only of his church-goings and his chapel-goings, his fasting, his alms-givings, and the like. We cannot agree with the self-truster. We could almost as well associate with the profane as we could with the self-righteous.

As for blasphemers, we could not endure them a moment. Would you not as soon be shut up in a tiger's den as with a cursing, swearing, thievish profligate? Who can endure the company of either a Voltaire or a Manning? Find out the miserly, the mean, the sneaking, the grasping—who likes to be with them? The angry, the petulant, who never try to check the unholy passion—one is always glad to be away from such folks. You are afraid lest you should be held responsible for their mad actions, and therefore if you must be with them, you are always ill at ease.

With no sort of sinners can the child of God be hail-fellow. Lambs and wolves, doves and hawks, devils and angels, are not fit companions. And so through what little trial the righteous have had, they have learned that there is no sort of sinners that they would like to be shut up with forever.

But then, we have other reasons. We know that when impenitent sinners are gathered at the last *their characters* will be the same. They were filthy here, they will be filthy still. Here on earth their sin was in the bud—in hell it will be full-blown. If they were bad here, they will be worse there. Here they were restrained by providence, by company, by custom—there, there will be no restraints—and hell will be a world of sinners at large, a land of outlaws, a place where every man shall follow out his own heart's most horrible inclinations. Who would wish to be with them?

Then again, the *place* where they will be gathered alarms us—the pit of hell, the abode of misery and wrath forever—who would be gathered there? Then, their *occupation*. They spend their time in cursing God—in inventing and venting fresh blasphemies. They go from bad to worse—climbing down the awful ladder of detestable depravity. Who would wish to be with them?

Remember too, their *sufferings*. The pain of body and of soul they know, when God has cast both body and soul into hell. Who would wish to be with them? Recollect, too, that they are *banished forever from God*, and God is our sun, therefore they are in darkness. God is our life, therefore they are worse than dead. God is our joy, therefore they are wretched to the extreme. Why! this would be hell, if there were no other hell to a Christian, to be banished from his God.

Moreover, they are *denied the joys of Christ's society*. No Savior's love for them, no blissful communion at His right hand, no living fountains of water to which the Lamb shall lead them. O my God, when I think of what the sinner is, and where he is, and how he must be there forever, shut out from You—my soul may well pray with anguish that prayer, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

*“Thou lovely chief of all my joys,
Thou sovereign of my heart!
How could I bear to hear Thy voice
Pronounce the sound ‘Depart’?”*

*“Oh wretched state of deep despair,
To see my God remove,*

*And fix my doleful station where
I must not taste His love.*

*“Jesus, I throw my arms around,
And hang upon Thy breast;
Without a gracious smile from Thee
My spirit cannot rest.”*

III. But I am afraid I weary you, and therefore, dear friends, let me take you very briefly to the third point. There is in our text A FEAR, as if a whisper awakened the psalmist's ear to trembling, “Perhaps, after all, you may be gathered with the wicked.”

Now, that fear, although marred by unbelief, springs, in the main, from holy anxiety. Do you not think that some of us may well be the subjects of it? This holy anxiety may well arise if we recollect our *past sin*. Before we were converted we lived as others lived. The lusts of the flesh were ours. We indulged our members, we permitted sin to reign in our mortal bodies without restraint, and there will be times to the pardoned man, even though he has faith in Christ, when he will begin to think—“What if after all those sins should be remembered, and I should be left out of the catalog of the saved?”

Then again he recollects *his present backwardness*, and as the little apple on the tree, so sour and unripe, when it sees the crabs gathered, is half afraid it may be gathered with them, so is he, with so little grace, so little love, he is afraid he shall be gathered with the ungodly. He recollects his own *unfruitfulness*, and as he sees the woodman going round the orchard, knocking off first this rotten bough, and then cutting off that other decayed branch, he thinks there is so little fruit on him that perhaps he may be cut off, too.

And so, what with his past sins, his present backsliding, and unfruitfulness, he is half afraid he may yet have to suffer the doom of the wicked. And then, looking forward to the future, he recollects *his own weakness and the many temptations* that beset him, and he fears that he may fall after all, and become a prey to the enemy.

With all these things before him, I wonder not that the poor plant, set yonder in the garden, is half afraid that it may be pulled up with the weeds and burned on yonder blazing fire in the corner of the garden. “Gather not my soul with sinners.” What man is there among you who has not need sometimes to tremble for himself?

If any of you can say you are always confident, it is more than I can say. I would to God I could always know myself saved and accepted in Christ, but there are times when a sense of sin within, present evil, and prevailing corruptions make the preacher feel that he is in jeopardy, and compel him to pray, as he does sometimes now, in fear and trembling, “O God, gather not my soul with sinners.”

IV. And here comes in, to conclude, THE ANSWER TO THIS PRAYER, which is a word of consolation.

Brethren, if you have prayed this prayer, and if your character be rightly described in the Psalm before us, be not afraid that you shall ever be gathered with sinners. Have you the two things that David had—the outward walking in integrity and the inward trusting in the Lord? Do you endeavor to make your outward conduct and conversation conformable to the example of Christ? Would you scorn to be dishonest toward men or to be undevout toward God?

At the same time, are you resting upon Jesus Christ' sacrifice and can you compass the altar of God with humble hope? If so, then rest assured, with the wicked you never shall be gathered, for there are one or two things which render that calamity impossible.

The first is this, that the rule of the gathering is *like to like*. “Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them”—all the tares together—“but gather the wheat into my barn.” It is not, “Make a mixture of them. Throw them together in a heap—put the corn and the tares in My garner.” Oh, no—“Tares in bundles; wheat in sheaves.”

If then, you are like God's people, you shall be with God's people. If you have their life within, their character without, if you rest on their Savior, if you love their God, if you have a longing towards their holiness, you shall be gathered with them—like to like.

There is another rule—*those who have been our proper comrades here are to be our companions hereafter*. God will be pleased to send us where we wish to go in this life. That is to say, if in this life I have loved the haunt of the sinner, if I have made the theatre my sanctuary, if I have made the drinking house my abode of pleasure, and have found my solace with the gambler, and my comfort with the debauchee, if I have lived merely for business and for this world, and never for the next, then I shall go with my companions. I shall be sent where I used to go—being let go, I shall go to my own company among the lost.

But on the other hand, if I have loved God's house, if I can say with the psalmist, "I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth," if the excellent of the earth have been my companions, and the chosen of God have been my brethren, I shall not be separated from them. I shall have the same company in heaven that I have had on earth. If I have walked with God here, I shall reign with God there. If I have suffered with Christ here, I shall reign with Christ hereafter. That is another thing which prevents your being gathered with the wicked.

Again, you cannot be gathered with the wicked, for *you are too dearly bought*. Christ bought you with His blood and He will not cast you into the fire. It is a doctrine we never can hold, that Christ redeemed with His precious blood any that are damned in hell. We cannot conceive it possible that Christ should have stood as their Sponsor in suffering and yet they should be punished too. That He should pay the debt and then they should have to pay it also.

And again, *you are loved too much*. God the Eternal Father has loved you long and well, and proved that to you by His great gift, and by His daily consideration and care of you. And it is not, therefore, possible that He should permit you, the darling of His heart, the child of His desire, a member of the mystical body of His only beloved Son, to perish forever in Tophet.

Again, that *new nature within you* will not let you be gathered with sinners. What does your new nature do—what must it do? It must love God. What! love God and be in hell! Your new nature must pray. What! pray in the pit! Your new nature must praise the God that created it. What! sing songs to the Divine Being amidst the howling of the damned! Impossible!

If you have a new heart and a right spirit, if your soul clings with both its hands to the cross of Christ, if you love Jesus, and long to be like Him, you may have this fear, but it is a groundless one—for you shall never be gathered with sinners, but your feet shall stand in the congregation of the righteous in the day when the wicked are cast away forever.

I had hoped this morning so to have handled my text that mayhap God might bless it to the sinner—and who can tell it may be so? Sinner, if it be a dreadful thing to be gathered with you, what a frightful thing your gathering must be! My dear hearer, careless and thoughtless, this morning I have no burning *words* with which to awake you. No earnest *tones* with which to startle you. But still, *from my soul* I do entreat you consider that if it be a subject of horror to us to dwell with you forever, it must be an awful thing to be a sinner.

And will you be a sinner any longer? Will you abide where you now are? Alas! you cannot save yourself, you are hopelessly ruined—you have lost all power as well as all virtue. You are as a dead thing, as a potter's vessel that is broken to shivers with a rod of iron. But there is One who can save you, even Jesus, and His saving voice to you this morning is, "Believe in Me and you shall be saved."

To believe in Him is to believe that He can save you and therefore to trust. Do you not believe that of Him who is God? Can you not believe that of Him whose ways are not as your ways, whose grace is boundless, and whose love is free! Will you now believe that Christ *can* save you, and that He *will* save you? And will you now trust yourself to Him to save you?

Say in your heart, "Here, Lord, I give my soul up to You to save it. I believe You will and You can. Your nature and Your name are love, and I trust Your name, I believe in Your goodness, I repose in You."

Sinner, you are saved. God has saved you. No soul ever so believed in Christ and yet was left unpardoned. Go your way. Be of good cheer, "Thy sins which are many, are all forgiven thee." Rejoice you in Him evermore, for you shall never be gathered with sinners. May God give His blessing to you now, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

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.