

THE CENTURION: OR AN EXHORTATION TO THE VIRTUOUS

NO. 600

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”
Luke 7:4-9

THIS centurion certainly had a high reputation. Two features of character blend in him which do not often meet in such graceful harmony. He won the high opinion of others and yet he held a low estimation of himself. There are some who think little of themselves, and they are quite correct in their feelings, as all the world would endorse the estimate of their littleness. Others there are who think great things of themselves, but the more they are known the less they are praised, and the higher they shall carry their heads, the more shall the world laugh them to scorn.

Nor is it unusual for men to think great things of themselves because the world commends or flatters them. So they robe themselves with pride and cloak themselves with vanity, because they have by some means, either rightly or wrongly, won the good opinion of others.

There are very few who have the happy combination of the text. The elders say of the centurion, that he is worthy, but he says of himself, “Lord, I am not worthy!” They commend him for building God a house, but he thinks that he is not worthy that Christ should come under the roof of his house. They plead his merit, but he pleads his demerit. Thus he appeals to the power of Christ, apart from anything that he felt in himself or thought of himself.

O that you and I might have this blessed combination in ourselves. To win the high opinion of others, so far as it can be gained by integrity, by uprightness, and by decision of character, and yet at the same time to walk humbly with our God!

Now there are three things I shall speak about tonight, and may God make them profitable. First, *here is a high character*. Secondly, *here is deep humility*. And thirdly, here is, notwithstanding that deep humility, *a very mighty faith*.

I. To begin then, dear friends, here is A HIGH CHARACTER, let us thoroughly appreciate it, and give it a full measure of commendation.

When preaching Jesus Christ to the chief of sinners, we have sometimes half dreamed that some who are moral and upright might think themselves excluded. They ought not so to think, nor is it fair for them to draw such an inference. We have heard the whisper of some who have said they could almost wish that they had been more abandoned and dissolute in the days of their unregeneracy, that they might

have a deeper repentance and be witnesses of a more palpable and thorough change, so that they might never have cause to doubt of the triumph of grace in their experience.

We have heard some even say, "I could have wished that I had groveled in the very mire of sin. Not that I love it, on the contrary, I loathe it, but because had I then to be rescued from such a course of life, the change would be so manifest and apparent, that I should never dare to ask myself whether I was a changed man or not. I should feel it, and see it in my everyday course and conversation."

Dear friends, if anything we have ever said should have led you into this mistake we are sorry for it. It was never our intention. While we would open the gates of mercy so wide that the greatest blasphemer, the most unchaste and the most debauched, may not be without hope, yet we never want to shut those gates in the face of such as have been brought up in a godly manner, and through the providence of God and the checks of education, have been kept from the grosser vices.

On the contrary, we thought that when we opened it for the worst there would be room for the best. And if Noah's ark took in the unclean, certainly the clean would not be afraid to enter. If Jesus Christ was able to cure those who were far gone in sickness, you might infer that He would certainly be able to heal those who, though they were sick, might not be so far advanced in disease.

Besides, a little reflection may suggest to you that the penitence of contrite believers is not regulated by the extent of their crimes against what you call the moral code. It is one thing to estimate sin by its apparent turpitude, and another and an infinitely better thing to have the eyes of the understanding enlightened to see sin in its infinite malignity as it appears in the light of heavenly purity and perfection, which proceeds from the throne of God, or as it is reflected from Mount Calvary where the amazing sacrifice of Christ was offered.

What! do you think the whitewashed sepulcher of a Pharisee's heart is less loathsome to the Almighty than the open pollution of a Magdalene's life? Or in the matter of experience, could the recollection of a thousand debaucheries give such a melting sense of contrition as a sight of the Crucified One?

O friends, let me remind you of the words of Jesus, "When he"—the Spirit of truth—"is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me." That one sin of unbelief is such a concentration of all wickedness that it could outweigh the crimes of Sodom and Gomorrah, and make them more excusable in the day of judgment than the men of Capernaum who saw the mighty works of Christ and repented not.

That one sin of unbelief is so heinous that the groans of the whole creation were but pitiful sighs to deplore it. And rivers of tears were but a weak tribute to lament it. However, as mistakes do arise, and misapprehensions will take place, let us have a few words concerning a high character *in the sight of men*.

Such a character among your fellow creatures may be gained in any situation. The centurion was a soldier—a profession of life not altogether the most propitious for moral excellence, though there have been in the army some of the brightest saints that ever lived. He was a soldier moreover in a foreign country—not the place where he was likely to win esteem.

He was there as one of the representatives of a power which had conquered Judea, and had treated it with great cruelty, yet, notwithstanding the prejudices of race and nationality, this man's kindness of disposition and goodness of conduct had won for him the esteem of others.

Moreover, being a commander of soldiers, naturally every act of violence would be set down to him. Whatever might be done by his hundred men would be laid to the captain, so that his was a condition of peculiar difficulty, and yet, notwithstanding this, the elders said, "He is worthy."

Let none of you despair! Wherever you may be placed, a noble character may be earned. You may serve God in the most menial capacity. You may compel your very foes to admit your excellence. You may stand unblamably before men, and you may walk so uprightly before God, that those who watch for your halting may bite their lips with disappointment, while they shall not have a single word to say against you except it be touching the religion of your God and King.

Let no man, wherever he may be thrown—though he be surrounded by those who tempt him—despair, especially if the grace of God be in him. Let him pray like Joab that he may have favor in the eyes of his Master, and expect to win it.

This centurion must have been a man of sterling worth. He was not merely quiet and inoffensive like some men who are as insipid as they are harmless. Though a high character may be won, it cannot be won without being earned. Men do not get character among their fellows by indolence and listlessness, or by pretensions and talk. Action! action!—this is what the world wants, and there is more truth than we have dreamed of in Nelson's aphorism, "England expects every man to do his duty."

Certainly, men will not speak well of you unless you do well. This centurion did so, for you will observe that they said he was worthy—which must have signified that he was just in his dealings and generous in his habits, or they would not have thought him worthy.

It would appear too, that his *private temperament* as well as his *public spirit*, contributed to the estimation in which he was held. You will notice in the circumstances which bring him before us, how his tender feelings, and his intense anxiety, were drawn out on behalf, not of a child, but of a servant, peradventure of a slave!

And then we might have thought it had been enough to have said that the man was highly valued by his master, but the expression is one of fondness, he was "*dear unto him.*" The fidelity of the servant may be implied, but it is the amiability of the master which is most prominent, and chiefly arrests our attention.

Nor need we overlook the fact that Matthew lays an emphasis upon the servant being "*at home*" under his master's roof. We know that the Romans were not remarkable for the kindness they showed to their dependents, often they were merely looked upon as slaves.

Why, in our own days, and in the midst of our boasted civilization, when Christianity has exerted a salutary influence upon all our social relations, I suppose it is not uncommon for a domestic servant to go home to her parents' house in the case of sickness. It is not every good man among us, I fear, whose gentleness would equal that of the centurion in the love which he bears to his servant, and the comfort he provided for him in his own house.

Next to this, you will observe his *generosity*. It is not, my dear friends, by occasional deeds of showy luster, but by the habitual practice of comely virtues that a worthy character is built up. A thousand kindnesses may be nestling beneath the soil, like the many-fibred root of a gigantic tree, when it is said, "*He loves our nation,*" and then the conspicuous fruit appears in its season. "*He hath built us a synagogue.*"

This example of liberality is spoken of as a mere supplement. The Jewish elders do not say, "He loveth our nation"—*for*—but "He loveth our nation, *and* he hath built us a synagogue." This last was a visible token of innumerable good offices which had already won their secret esteem before it bloomed in an open reputation.

I have heard all sorts of men praised, and I have noted the qualities which win the plaudits of the crowd. Even the high and haughty have some to praise them, but I think I never heard a miserly man praised, or one who was perpetually guilty of meanness. Let him have whatever virtues he may, if he lack liberality, few if any, will speak well of him.

Let me commend to the Christian, liberality in all his actions, and benevolence in all his thoughts. This may sound commonplace, but I am persuaded that the little tricks in trade, those little savings of the pence, those sharp dealings, are just the things which bring religion into disrepute.

It were infinitely better that the Christian should pay too much than too little. He had better be blamed for an excess of generosity, than take credit to himself for a rigid parsimony. Rather let him become now and then the dupe of an imposter, than shut up the bowels of his compassion against his fellow man. I would seek, Christian man, to win a noble character. I cannot see how you can do so, except you should put generosity into the scale, and enroll it in the list of your virtues.

A high character, when earned, is very useful. I am saying this because some might imagine that, in the preaching of the Gospel, we put the base and the wicked before those who have walked uprightly. A good character, when earned, a good reputation in the esteem of men, may win for us, as it did for this centurion, kind thoughts, kind words, kind acts, and kind prayers.

There is many a man who will pray for you if he sees you walk uprightly, ay, and your very adversary, who would otherwise have cursed you, will find the curse trembling on his tongue. Though he would fain rail, yet does he bate his breath, abashed at your excellencies. Let the Christian labor so to live that he shall not lack a friend. “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,” is one of Christ’s own precepts.

If to stoop, to cringe, to lie, win you friends, scorn to do it. But if with uprightness before God, you can still mingle such affection and such generosity towards men, that you shall win their suffrages, do it I pray you. The time may come when their sympathy shall befriend you.

But remember, and here I close this point, however good your character, or however excellent your repute, not one word of this is ever to be mentioned before the throne of the Most High. Job could say when he was talking with his adversaries, “I am not wicked.” He could boast in his excellencies, as he did, but in the presence of God how he changed his note, “Now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Coming before the Lord, we must all come as sinners.

When on your knees, you have nothing to boast of more than the veriest *roué*, or the man who has sinned against his country’s laws. There, at the foot of the cross, one needs the cleansing blood as much as the other. At mercy’s gate we must alike knock, and we must be fed by the same generous hand. There are no degrees here, we enter by the same door, we come to the same Savior, and we shall ultimately—glory be to His name!—sit together in the same heaven whether we have earned a good reputation or no, whether we have crept into heaven, as the thief did, at the eleventh hour, or through forty-and-five years of public service earned the applause of men, as did Caleb the son of Jephunneh.

*“Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling,”*

must be the common footing, and the like confession of both before the God of mercy. Thus much by way of tribute to the high character of the centurion and the high motives to emulate it.

II. Secondly, in the centurion we see coupled with this high and noble repute, DEEP HUMILIATION OF SOUL. “I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof.”

Humility, then, it appears, may exist in any condition. There are some men who are too mean to be humble. Do you understand me? They are too crouching, crawling, sneakish, and abject to be humble. When they use humble words, they disgrace the words they use. You perceive at once that it is rather a rise than a stoop for them to be humble. How could it be otherwise? It certainly is not for the least vermin who creep the earth to talk about humility. They must be low, it is their proper place. Such the creatures who cringe and fawn—“Whatever you please, sir,” “Yes,” “No,” in the same breath. They have not a soul within them that would be worth the notice of a sparrow hawk. They are too little to be worthy of observation, yet they say they are humble.

But a man to be humble needs to have a soul. To stoop, you must have some elevation to stoop from. You must have some real excellence within you before you can really understand what it is to renounce merit. Had the he been unworthy, had he been ungenerous and an oppressor, he would have spoken the truth when he said, “I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof,” but there would have been no true humility in what he said. It was because of his excellence, as acknowledged by others, that he could be humble in the modesty of his opinion of himself.

We have heard of a certain monk, who, professing to be humble, said he had broken all God’s commandments, he was the greatest sinner in the world, he was as bad as Judas. Somebody said, “Why

tell us that? we have all of us thought that a long time!” Straightway the holy man grew red in the face, and smote the accuser, and asked him what he had ever done to deserve such a speech.

We know some of that kind, they will use the words of humility, appear very contrite, and perhaps even at prayer meetings you would think them the meekest and most broken-hearted of men. But if you were to take them at their word, straightway they would tell you they use the language, as some ecclesiastical persons do, in a non-natural sense, they do not quite mean what they were supposed to mean, but something very different. That is not humility, it is a kind of mock-modesty which hankers after applause, and holds out specious words as bait for the trap of approbation.

Our centurion was truly humble. This a man may be, though possessing the highest excellence, and standing in the most eminent position. I believe, in my soul, that no man had truer humility in him than John Knox, and yet John Knox never cringes, and never bows.

When Luther dared the thunders of the Vatican, no doubt many said how self-conceited, egotistical, and proud he was, but for all that, God knew how humbly Martin Luther walked with Him. When Athanasius stood up and said, “I, Athanasius, against the world,” it had the ring of pride about it, but there was true and sound humility before God in it, because he seemed to say, “What am I? not worthy of taking care of, and therefore I do not use the subterfuges of cowardice for my own personal safety. Let the world do what it will to me, God’s truth is infinitely more precious than I am, and so I give myself up as an offering upon its altar.”

True humility will comport with the highest chivalry in maintaining divine truth, and with the boldest assertion of what one knows in his own conscience to be true. Though it may be the lot of Christians to be *thought* proud, let it never be true or capable of being substantiated concerning them.

The centurion, though worthy, was still humble, his friends and neighbors found him out by what he said and what he did. He asked them to go for him, seeing he was not worthy, then finding that they asked too great a boon, he comes to stop them, “I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof.” You need not tell people that you are humble. You have no occasion to advertise that you have genuine humility. Let it discover itself as spice does, by its perfume, or as fire, by its burning. If you live near to God, and if your humility is of the right kind, it will tell its own tale ere long.

But the place where humility does speak out, is at the throne of grace. Beloved, there are some things we would confess of ourselves before God, which we would not confess before men. There is an attitude of prostration at the throne of the Most High, which will never be so gracefully or graciously taken as by that man who would spurn to prostrate himself before his fellows. That is no true humility which bends the knee at the tyrant’s throne, that is true humility which, having bearded the tyrant to his face, goes down on its knees before the God of heaven, bold as a lion before men, but meek as a lamb before JEHOVAH.

The true man, whom God approves, will not, dares not swerve, for the love he bears his sovereign Lord, when he faces men. But when he is alone with his Maker, he veils his face with something better than the wings of angels. Wrapped all o’er with the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, he rejoices with fear and trembling that he is justified from all things now. Yet, conscious of the total defilement of his nature, with deep prostration of soul he uses the leper’s cry, “Unclean! unclean! unclean!” Thus does he fix all his hope upon that cleansing blood, and depends alone on that meritorious obedience of Jesus, upon which every sanctified believer exclusively relies.

Seek then, as much as lies in you, that high character which the Christian should maintain among men. But with it always blend that true humility which comes of the Spirit of God, and ever behooves us in the presence of the Lord.

III. The main thing I am aiming at, because, after all, the most practical, lies in my third point. However deep our humility, however conscious we may be of our own undeservingness, WE SHOULD NEVER DIMINISH OUR FAITH IN GOD.

Observe the confession, "I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof." What then will be the inference?—"I fear, therefore, my servant will not be healed"? No, no, but—"Say in a word, and my servant shall be healed." It is all a mistake that great faith implies pride.

Beloved, the greater the faith, the deeper the humility. These are brothers, not foes. The more the glories of God strike your eyes, the humbler you will lie in conscious abasement, but yet the higher you will rise in importunate prayer. Let us take this principle, and endeavor to apply it to a few cases. I say that a deep sense of our own nothingness is not to prevent our having strong faith. We will take a few instances.

There is a minister here who has been preaching the Word of God, he has so proclaimed it that God has been pleased to own it in some degree, but it may be, he has stirred up strife. He has caused I know not what amount of turmoil and of noise, as the faithful servant of God will in his measure.

And now, coming before God, he is asking that a greater blessing than ever may rest upon his labors, but something checks his tongue. He remembers his many infirmities. He recollects, perhaps, how slack he is in his private devotions, and how cold he is in his pleading with the sons of men. He has before Him the promise, "My word shall not return unto me void," but for all that, so conscious is he that he does not deserve the honor of being useful, that he is half afraid to pray as he should pray, and to believe as he should believe.

Dear brother, may I press upon you the case of the centurion? It is right for you, it is right for me, to say, "Lord, I am not worthy to be made the spiritual parent of one immortal soul." It is right for me to feel that it is too great an honor to be permitted to preach the truth at all, and almost too high a thing for such a sinner to have any jewels to present to the Redeemer to fix in His crown. But oh! we must not from this infer that He will not fulfill His promise to us, and hear our prayers, "Lord, speak in a word, and feeble though the instrument may be, the congregation shall be blessed. Say but the word, and the marvelous testimony, though marred with a thousand imperfections, shall yet be 'quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.'"

Let this comfort and cheer any desponding pastor, let him take heart from this, and learn that it is not himself to whom he is look to, but that he is to look to God, and that it is not his own arm upon which he is to depend, but the promise of God and the strong arm of the Most High.

Or am I addressing some brother or sister in a somewhat similar perplexity of mind? In your private life, dear friend, you have laid upon your heart some of your relatives and neighbors who are very dear to you. Or perhaps, you teach a class in the Sabbath school, or possibly you have a larger class of adults, and sometimes Satan will be very busy with you. The more useful you are, the more busy he will be, and he will say to you, "What are you, that you should ever hope to see conversions? Other men and women have had them, but they were better than you are. They had more talent, they had more ability, they served God better, and God gave them a greater reward. You must not hope to see your children saved, you cannot expect it. How should such teaching as yours ever be useful?"

Friend, you are right in saying, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof." The more you can feel *that*, the more hopeful shall I be of your success. You are right in feeling that David is not fit to meet the giant, and that the stones out of the brook are scarcely fit weapons for such warfare. But oh! do not push the right into a wrong. Do not, therefore, mistrust your God. No matter what a fool you may be, God has confused wise things by the foolish, long ere now. No matter how weak you are, God has brought down the mighty by weak instrumentalities often enough before this time.

Have you hope in Him, and tonight in your prayer, when you have made your confessions, do not let your faith fail you, but say, "Lord, say in a word, and my class shall be blessed. Say in a word, and those stubborn boys and girls, those to whom I have talked so often, who seem to be none the better, shall be saved."

Have faith in God, beloved fellow workers! The result of all, under God, must rest with your faith. If you believe for *little* success, you shall have little success. But if you can believe for *great* things, and expect great things, you shall certainly find your Master's words fulfilling your desire.

Do I now also address parents here who have been praying for their children? or a husband who has been pleading for his wife? or a wife who has been making intercession for her husband? God only knows what heart-rending prayers are often heard in families, where only a part is saved! Ah! what grief is it to a truly godly father to see his sons and daughters still heirs of wrath! and what a pang to know that the partner of your bosom must be separated from you forever by the stroke of death!

I marvel not that you pray for your friends. Should I not marvel at you if you did not? And now, when you have been praying lately, a sense of your unworthiness has almost stopped you, and though, perhaps, there has been no public sin about you, though before others you could have defended yourself, you have said in private, "Lord, I am not worthy of this blessing." You have said, "Lord, my children are not saved because my example is not as good as it should be. My conversation is not as upright as it should be."

You have felt, as I have sometimes, that there was no creature in the whole world so little, and no man loved of God in all the world that was so great a wonder of ingratitude as you are. I say it is right that you should feel this, but do not let this stop your prayers, proffer your request, depend upon the blood of Christ for its plea, and upon the intercession of Christ for its prevalence. Do not be afraid.

A black hand drops a letter into the post office, but the blackness of that hand will not hinder the dispatch of it. There is a stamp upon it, and it will go. And your black hand drops a prayer before Christ's feet, but that black hand will not stop its being heard, for there is a stamp upon it—JEHOVAH Jesus' blood. It may be blotted and misspelled, and there may be many blurs all over it, but do not be afraid, for God knows His Son's signature, and that will give a worth to your prayers. It is the bloody signature of Him whose hand was nailed to the cross that will carry the day with God. Therefore do not, I pray you, give place to fear. Your prayers shall return into your bosom with an answer of peace.

"Well, but," says one, "I have prayed so long." Ah! brother, do not, "limit the Holy One of Israel." Sister, do not let your doubts prevail. Renew your appeal to Jesus, "Say in a word: only say one word" It is all done if He shall speak. Darkness fled before Him in the primeval chaos, and order followed confusion. Think you, if He shall say, "Let there be light," in a dark heart, that there shall not be light there? Angels fly at His bidding. At His presence the rocks melt, and the hills dissolve. Sinai is altogether on a smoke, and when He comes forth, dressed in the robes of salvation, there are no impossibilities with Him. He can win and conquer to your heart's best desire. Therefore be humble, but be not unbelieving.

By your leave, I shall now turn the principle of my text to an account in another way. Concerning yourselves, friends, what are the mercies which you want? If every man could write down his own peculiar prayer, what a variety we would have upon the paper as it just went round the front row of that gallery. If it went round to all, it would not be like Jeremiah's roll, written within and without with lamentations, but it would be filled within and without with divers petitions.

But now just imagine what your own case is, and the case of others, and let us apply this principle to it. We are utterly unworthy to obtain the temporal or spiritual mercy which, it may be, we are now seeking. We may feel this, but in asking anything for ourselves, we must still ask in faith in God, in His promise, and in His grace, and we shall prevail.

This blessed principle may be turned to all sorts of uses. Whatever your desire may be, only believe, and it shall be granted unto you if it is a desire in accordance with His will, and in accordance with the promises of His Word, or else God's Word is not true. Be humble about it, but do not be doubtful about it.

The case I have in my mind's eye, is this, there is an unsaved soul here tonight. It happens to be one whose character has been morally admirable. Nobody finds any fault with you, and as I said before, you almost wish they could. For you cannot feel, as some do, the terrors of the Lord. Your heart is not broken with conviction as the hearts of some are, but there is this desire in it, "Lord, save me, or I perish!"

Now, dear friend, it is well that you should feel that there is nothing in you to commend you to Christ. I am glad that you do feel this. Though before the eyes of men, and even of your own parents, there is nothing which can cause you a blush, I am glad that you feel that before God you have nothing whatever to boast of. I think I see you now, you are saying, “My church-goings, my chapel-goings, I do not trust in *them*. I would not give up attendance at the means of grace, but sir, I have no reliance upon all this. As for my baptism, or my confirmation, or my taking the sacrament, I know that all this has nothing whatever in it which can save my soul, and though I *love* God’s ordinances, yet I cannot *trust* in them. Sir, I have fed the poor. I have taught the ignorant. In my measure I would do anything to assist those who need my aid, but I do solemnly renounce all this as a ground of trust. Nothing have I of which to glory.”

Well now, dear friend, there remains only one thing to give you perfect peace tonight, and may the Master give you that one thing! Lift up this prayer to Him, “Say in a word, and I shall be made whole.” Christ can do it. The offering is made, the precious blood is spilt, there is an Almighty efficacy in it. He *can* put away your sin. Christ lives to intercede before the throne, and “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.” Doubt not, then, but now, trusting yourself with Jesus Christ, remember you are saved.

I am not now looking for the vilest of the vile. How many times have we said from this place that none are excluded hence but those who do themselves exclude. No mountains of sin, nor height of vileness, can shut a man out of heaven if he believes in Jesus, but just now we are after *you*. I know you are a numerous class. You are, in some respects, our dear friends, and though not of us, you hover round us. If there is anything to be done for the cause of God, you are, perhaps, first in it, and yet you yourselves are not saved.

I cannot bear the thought of your being cast away—to be so near the gates of heaven, and yet to be shut out after all. Why should it be? The voice speaks to you now. The Spirit of the living God speaks through that voice. There is life in a look for *you* as well as for the chief of sinners. Without the strong convictions, without the terrors of conscience, without a sense of any aggravated crimes, if you rest on Jesus, you are saved.

There is no amount of sin specified there. You are lost in the fall—wholly lost, even if you had no sin of your own, but your own actual sin has irretrievably ruined you apart from the grace of Christ. You know this, and to an extent you feel it. You will feel it all the more when you have believed in Jesus. But now the one message of mercy is, “Believe, and thou shalt live.”

I feel as if I cannot get at you. My soul will not go out as I can desire, and yet you know that I am talking about you and about your case. When we are firing our shots at sin, we hardly ever strike you. You have become so used to our appeals, that there seems no likelihood of our getting at you. Oh! there are some of you whom I would not find fault with if I could. You make your mother glad with your industry. You make your sister’s heart rejoice at your many virtues, but yet there is *one thing* which you lack. Remember that when the strength of a chain is to be measured, it is measured at its one weakest link. If you have that one weak link the vital union is snapped. You may have anything and everything else, but you will be only a child of nature and not a living son.

I am only telling you over and over truths which you have known for many years. You will not dispute these things, and sometimes you feel earnestness about your eternal portion, though, like so many others, you are putting off and putting off. But death will not put off. The judgment day will not be postponed for you.

O may you be now brought in! What a happy church should we be if such as you should be brought in. We rejoice over the chief of sinners. We make the place ring when the prodigals come in. But elder brother, why will you not come in—you who have not been standing all the day idle in the market, but only the first hour, say not, no man has hired you. O come in, that the house of mercy may be filled! God grant the desire of our hearts, and to His name shall be the praise. Amen and 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.