

A HAPPY CHRISTIAN NO. 736

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.”
Isaiah 58:11*

IT is very important that our preaching should sometimes give descriptions of Christians in an unhealthy and sickly state. So many are in this condition that, when we describe their symptoms, they may discover themselves, and by divine grace be led to desire escape from it. The proper remedies being pointed out, and the Christian being earnestly exhorted to the use of them, I am quite sure that such ministry as describes the unhealthy state of the Christian's experience, will be found useful.

But I have sometimes thought—and I think you will, some of you, have noticed the same thing—that such preaching as continually dwells upon inward corruption and the innate baseness of the heart, is very apt to lead men to think that it must always be so with them. The prevalence of unbelief, depression of spirit, backsliding, and indifference to heavenly things becomes chronic, and they grow so familiar with reflecting upon it that they regard it as a state in which a Christian man may well be content.

Now, when men come to think so, such ministry has done them a serious injury. When they flatter themselves that they outstrip their fellows in the humiliating experience of their own sinful passions, grow proud of those things which should cause them shame, and begin to look down upon others who talk of holy joys and gracious liberties as mere recruits in the army of which they are the veterans, then I say that the ministry has been poison to them, and the descriptions of carnal and devilish lusts they have listened to have fostered a wretched imagination.

Instead of urging them to fight against sin, the sermons they have heard have only been rocking the cradle of their sloth, sewing pillows to their armholes, and saying to them, in some degree, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. It is not so popular a thing to do, but it is better in its influence, frequently to hold up before the eye of the Christian the portrait of a believer in a healthy state—to let all who belong to the church understand that it is not necessary that we should be weak in faith, or that our hands should hang down, and our bones be feeble.

There is a holier, happier, and more exalted state of triumphant faith, of sweet communion, and of hallowed earnestness. And such a state is attainable, nay, it ought to be attained by all Christians, and when attained it ought to be their constant ambition never to backslide from it. Having once been placed upon the high mountain by a divine hand, they should ever pray to be kept there, to the praise and glory of the grace of God.

We cherish a hope this evening, that by means of this text we may be able to give a humble portrait of what the Christian is in his happiest times, when the candle of the Lord shines round about him, when the visitations of the Holy Spirit refresh him, and when he rejoices in God with all his heart.

Will you please observe in what context this sunny sketch of prosperity occurs. It is set in a frame that excites the strong prejudice of some professing Christians. The setting is a framework of *duties*. You will perceive that the blessings are not promised to every Christian unconditionally, but it is fenced in with terms—“If thou doest this, and if thou doest that, then shall such and such blessings be thine.”

We are told that the heart is to be drawn from evil, that the soul is to be purged from the love of oppression, ostentation, and hypocrisy. There is to be a true and holy fast kept before the Lord, the soul being humbled and brought down to seek the Lord according to the spirit of righteousness, and not

merely after the letter of the ordinances—then, and not till then, shall the blessings here promised be enjoyed.

Though salvation is of grace, the happiness of the Christian does depend upon his obedience. Our ultimate safety is of sovereign grace. No man shall exceed me in the plain declaration that in this respect works of any sort cannot touch our salvation. We are saved upon another footing than that of our personal graces.

But it is quite as plainly the teaching of Holy Scripture that answers to prayer, the enjoyment of the presence of God, and a healthy state of spirit, are very much dependent upon our cautious walking and our holy obedience to the divine will. There is an “if” here, and should any of us neglect and despise it, and fancy that we can still have our souls like “watered gardens,” it will not be long before we shall find out our mistake.

Suppose, however, dear friends, that by divine grace we have been brought into communion with God. Having been clothed in the sackcloth of true penitence before Him, and girded with the garments of salvation, it has been our desire, as in God’s sight, to walk as becomes the saints. Supposing, I say, we have been enabled by grace—and it cannot be otherwise—to keep ourselves “unspotted from the world,” then that same Spirit who has sanctified us will, I am sure, fulfill to us the promises of the text.

I must, therefore, address myself to those who are living in the faith, and are walking conformably to their profession, while I depict their happy state. Five distinct features of their felicity are mentioned. They are described *as enjoying perpetual guidance, inward satisfaction, spiritual health, flourishing fruitfulness, and unfailing freshness of supply.*

I. These people who are thus full of God’s Spirit are described as possessing CONTINUAL GUIDANCE.

“The Lord shall guide thee continually.” There come to them, as to other men, dilemmas in providence. Walking along the road of life you may suddenly reach a turning—two roads meet. Which is the way? Is it to the right hand or to the left? Possibly both may appear to be equally right. You ask friends or neighbors. They will readily enough mislead you with the best intentions. You consult your own heart, and if you follow its counsels, you will discover yourself to be a fool.

But if your heart be true, and God’s grace be flourishing in your soul, you will not be long held in the dilemma. You will take the case before God. You will say as David did, “Bring hither the ephod,” and your Urim and your Thummim shall be with the Holy One, and you shall hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

It may be providence will block up one of the two roads and point to the other. Or else, your judgment being further enlightened, you shall see that the one is right and the other wrong. Or peradventure, some stress shall be put upon your soul, so that, though you hardly know why, you will feel that you must choose the right and leave the wrong.

There are no dilemmas out of which you shall not be delivered if you live near to God, and your heart is kept warm with holy love. He goes not amiss who goes in the company of God. Like Enoch do you walk with God and you cannot mistake your road.

The path of doctrine, also, is sometimes difficult. He who understands divine truth will, I am sure, be led to confess that he does not know everything. It is only the man who knows nothing about truth that thinks he can twist the doctrines around his finger, and in a moment tell what is orthodox and what is heterodox.

The true disciple of Jesus Christ often approaches a statement of the revealed Word with awe and reverence, desiring to ascertain what is the mind of God about it. A truth often so nearly verges upon an error that the path is as narrow as a razor’s edge, and only the Spirit of God can lead a man there.

There is a path which the eagle’s eye has not seen, the penetration of intellect cannot discover it. The lion’s whelp has not trodden—all the force of a man’s mind has not been able to lead him into it. But if we wait upon God, He will show us the way.

I believe that a spiritual mind is an orthodox mind. There is not much fear of our embracing any serious errors in the head when the heart is not in error, for there it is that heresies are born and bred, in that witch's caldron of our heart. Let the heart be constantly kept at the foot of the cross, and let the Holy Spirit bedew it with His sacred influence, and though we may for a little time, through our want of mental capacity, fail to understand the truth, it will not be for long. The Holy Ghost will lead us into all truth, and thus the text shall be fulfilled, "The LORD shall guide thee continually," whether as relating to matters of providence or to matters of doctrinal instruction.

So shall it be likewise *in matters of spiritual experience*. Our experience often seems to be as though it had no rule. There is method in some men's madness, but it does appear as if there were no method in our experience. Today we are on the mountain, blessed of God with full assurance—tomorrow we are in the glens beneath the dark shadow, wondering why, and asking if God has forgotten to be gracious.

As when a child on a slate draws zigzag lines everywhere, but straight lines nowhere, so has it seemed with our life—as if we were farther back now than when we started. Our path has been like that of Israel in the wilderness, when the Lord led them about, but yet it is added that He guided them and instructed them.

Brethren, if we are enabled by grace to seek close and vital union with Christ, and to live upon Him daily and continually, we may rest assured that whether our experience be gloomy or delightful, and whether our inward conflicts or joys be paramount, He will still be at the helm and will guide us continually.

As I turned over this sentence I could not help feeling that it was like a wafer made of honey! It is all honey! "The Lord shall guide thee." Not an angel, but JEHOVAH shall guide you. He said He would not go through the wilderness before His people, an angel should go before them to lead them in the way. But Moses said, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence."

Christian, God has not left you in your earthly pilgrimage to an angel's guidance. He Himself will lead the van. You may not see the cloudy, fiery pillar, but JEHOVAH shall never forsake you. JEHOVAH shall guide you continually.

Notice the word *shall*—"The LORD *shall* guide thee." How certain this makes it! How sure it is that God will not forsake us! His precious "shalls" and "wills" are better than men's oaths. "I will never leave nor forsake thee." In one place He puts in five negatives, "I will not leave thee; I will never, never, never, forsake thee."

*"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."*

Then observe that adverb "continually." We are not to be guided only sometimes, but we are to have a perpetual monitor, not occasionally to be left to our own understanding, and so to wander, but we are continually to hear the guiding voice of the Great Shepherd. And as we follow close at His heels we shall not err, but be led by a right way to a city to dwell in.

You have been, perhaps, in a maze and you know how difficult it is to find your way to the center. But sometimes there is one perched aloft who sees the whole of the maze spread out before him like a map, and he calls out to you to turn either to the right or to the left, and if you attend to his directions you soon find the way.

Even so the maze of life is only a maze to us, but God can see it all. He who rules over all, looks down upon it as men look down upon a map. And if we will but look to Him, and if our communion is constantly kept up we shall never err, but we shall come to the goal of our hopes right speedily by following His voice.

Now, brethren, were this the whole of my sermon, and were I now to send you away, methinks you would have heard enough if your faith can only grasp it. Never be afraid, my dear friend, if you have to change your position in life. If you have to relocate to distant shores. If it should happen that you are cast into poverty, or uplifted suddenly into a more responsible position than the one you now occupy. If you are thrown among strangers, or cast among foes, yet tremble not, for “The LORD shall guide thee continually.”

This is more than the statesman can say with all his craftiness. This is more than all the cunning men can say who use their wits to plunder their fellows. This is more than the wisest man can say who trusts in his own judgment. You have infallible wisdom to direct you, immutable love to comfort you, and eternal power to defend you. “JEHOVAH”—mark the word—“*JEHOVAH* shall guide thee continually.”

II. The second blessing promised in the text is one which I trust we have enjoyed, and which some of us are enjoying even now—it is INWARD SATISFACTION.

“And satisfy thy soul in drought.” It is a blessed thing to have the soul satisfied, for the soul is of great capacity. The whole world, someone has said, cannot fill a man’s eye, because a man’s eye can see so much. How much more, if it be the expression of his inward perception, is it true that the world cannot fill it.

The soul is like the grave, it is never satisfied. It is like the horse-leech which ever cries, “Give, give!” Lay your money-bags to your heart and see if they will satisfy you. But your poor soul will say, “How can I be satisfied with this dull earth? What is there here to feed the soul with?” As well bring stones to a horse, as bring gold to a soul.

There is nothing for a soul to feed upon in all the pomp of kings and pride of men—these are no food for the soul! As well feed eagles upon clods, as hope to feed immortal souls upon anything that is earth-born. The soul wants more than all this, but the Christian has got what his soul wants.

He has, in the first place, *a removal of all that which marred his peace, blighted his prospects, and made his soul empty and hungry.* His *sin* is pardoned. He is reconciled to God. He is at peace with the Most High. The soul is never satisfied till it can place its head in the bosom of the Great Father of Spirits, and this the Christian can do.

He is satisfied with God’s dispensations. He believes that the present will work for his good and the future too, even as the past has done. He is satisfied with God’s love. It is a rich feast to him to know that God loves him. It is an infinite joy to the Christian to believe that he is one with Christ, that he is accepted in and through Jesus, that he is a member of His body, and is united to Him, part of His flesh and of His bones.

It is a satisfaction to the Christian to know that the Holy Spirit dwells in him, and that his body is a temple for the indwelling of deity. He is satisfied with promises of God that can never be broken, with covenants that can never be violated, with oaths that stand fast like mountains, and with the words of God which are great as the fathomless sea.

He is satisfied with his God. The consequence of such a satisfaction as this is that the Christian is as well-satisfied at one time as at another, if his soul be right. You see the text says that he shall be satisfied in times of drought. Louth, I believe, translates the word, “severest droughts.” The word seems to apply to places constantly subject to want of moisture, as well as seasons exceptionally dry. Yet it is in the plural, the Hebrew plural being used to intensify as well as to multiply, so that it really reads thus, “In the worst times of distress the Christian is still satisfied.”

There are some houses in London which would tumble down if you were to remove those on either side that help to support them, but there are other houses which are self-contained. You might pull all the houses in the parish down if you liked, but it would not hurt them. Now, the most of men in this world are like houses in a row, they lean one upon another, they are kept up by carnal comforts. But the Christian is self-sustained and does not lean upon any arm of flesh.

You ask, “What about his money?” Well, he is rich in faith, and if all his property were gone, he would still say, “I have not lost my God!” “But what about his family?” Well, he loves them, and if they

were taken away he would weep as other men weep—no, he would weep, but *not* as other men would weep—I may correct myself—for he would say, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” He would still feel that he had not lost his Elder Brother, that he had not lost his heavenly Father, and that he was not an orphan in the world.

“Well, but how about his health?” Well, he prizes that, but if pains of body distress him, and he should be stretched upon a sick bed, he has a little secret, which he cannot tell to you, but which he knows himself, and which enables him to be more healthy when he is sick than he is when he is in health, and to sing God’s praises more sweetly sometimes in a cage of ill health than he did when he was in the open field of vigor. For many of God’s birds sing best in cages, fly best when their wings are broken, get nearest to heaven when they are rolled right down to the earth, and discern most of God, and see most of Him when they have lost the tokens of His love.

You know we can see many things in the dark which we cannot see in the light. I question, indeed, whether we do not see even more in the dark than we do in the light. That is to say, we can see all those starry worlds, those unnumbered orbs floating in distant space—we can see them when the light is gone, but we cannot see them by day.

So, when outward lights are taken away, the Christian often perceives more instead of less, through the inward light and the light of heaven which God is pleased to give him. Is it not a blessed thing, dear friends, to have a heavenly constitution, a satisfaction which does not depend upon outward circumstances?

To be satisfied in times of plenty, why, any fool can do that! But to be satisfied in days of drought, this is the Christian’s privilege, for he can say, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

When the rancher walks out amongst his cattle, and sees them all in good health, and promising a good return, a fine investment for his labors, it is very easy for him to say, “Bless the Lord!” But when the cattle plague comes and empties all his stalls, and there are great heaps out in the field to show where the cattle are all buried, and there has been no compensation for them—how now, farmer? Can you now praise God and be satisfied in times of drought?

And you, friend, when you are in good full work, and wages are high, and the house is well-furnished, and the cupboard is full, it is very easy then for you to kneel down at family prayer and thank God for His kindness. But how about when the husband is sick, when the funds have got very low, and when the little children look at their father wondering where the next meal will come from—to be satisfied even then that it is all right! Oh this is a grand thing!

This is the mark of difference between the Christian and the worldling. The worldling blesses God while He gives him plenty, but the Christian blesses Him when He smites him—he believes Him to be too wise to err and too good to be unkind. He trusts Him where he cannot trace Him, looks up to Him in the darkest hour, and believes that all is well. O Christian, if your heart is right, you will understand this spiritual satisfaction, and your soul will be satisfied in times of drought.

III. The next blessing is SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND HAPPINESS.

“And make fat thy bones.” Note the figure. It is not “make fat thy flesh.” I am anything but sure that that would be a blessing in any sense. Certainly it is rather baneful than blessed, understanding it metaphorically. For when Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked.

Sometimes abundance in earthly things makes poverty in heavenly things. External richness and strength are often the signs of weakness in the inner man. But fatness here is to be upon the man’s hardest and most necessary part of his frame. A man is really built up when his bones, the solid pillars of the house of his manhood, have been strengthened.

Vigor has been put into his constitution where it was most required. His bones have been renovated and made strong. Oh! it is a grand thing when the soul is thus in spiritual health, when the bones are

made fat. Do you know what it means, Christian? It is when you take a promise of God and it is applied with power, and you can feed on it.

When you take a precept and feel the strength granted vouchsafed to go and fulfill it. When you turn to God's purpose and decree, and rejoice in them, seeing that you have a fair portion therein. Or turning to God's testimonies concerning your daily walk, you find just as much comfort in these as you did in those, and can bless God for ability given you to serve as well as for power to enjoy.

I have lately read in the newspaper—I am sure I do not know whether to believe that it is true—an account of a youth in France, twenty years of age, who has been laying asleep for a fortnight, nourished only upon a little gruel given with a spoon, and that he was in the same state a year ago for nearly a month.

Whether this has actually occurred to anybody or not, I have known many cases of Christians who have laid like that spiritually, not for a fortnight only, but for a whole year. Nay, and not for a year only, but it is their general state. They come on Sunday and we have to feed them a little gruel with a spoon, and this lasts them till the next time there is a service. They live on nothing but thin liquid, and as might be expected, they have no strength.

If you listen to them, you will hear them saying such words as these—

*“’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought:
Do I love the Lord or no,
Am I His, or am I not?”*

They have no more health than that! Oh, that they could get strong! Oh! that God would make fat their bones, and then they would be able to sing Toplady's hymn—

*“My name from the palm of His hands,
Eternity cannot erase;
Impressed on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.*

*“Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
Are the glorified spirits in heaven.”*

May we get out of a state of spiritual sickness, and may our bones grow fat, so that we may be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might!

The figure seems to me to indicate two or three things in one. There is health here, the soul is purged from its vices, sicknesses, and unbelief, pride, sloth, and such like. There is vigor here, no lukewarmness, being neither cold nor hot, no laxity nor indifference. There is growth—the man is not stunted. He does not think that he has come to perfection and may therefore stop where he is.

His bones grow fat. Inward satisfaction seems to be couched in the figure. the man is happy, perfectly happy. He is always rejoicing. He is not lean with fretting, but fattened with the oil of joy.

Now, dear Christian brethren and sisters, I would earnestly ask you not to be content without the enjoyment of this blessing. For the more one looks upon the world, the more one is convinced that Christian joy is, after all, Christian strength—doubting and fears cut the very foundations of Christian power.

Strong faith is that which wins the victory, while unbelief deprives us of all hope of conquest, and lays us groveling in the mire beneath the feet of our own very weakest foe. Oh, for more of this holy

joy! I have told you how to get it. Fulfill the conditions we referred to in the former part of this discourse and then you shall have your bones made fat.

IV. The fourth blessing is this, “AND THOU SHALT BE LIKE A WATERED GARDEN.”

This figure of a garden is a very sweet and attractive one. I need not tell you how much taste may be displayed and how much pleasure may be derived from the cultivation of such plots of ground. Our fancy is soon at work to invent a picture of flower beds, and fruit trees, shady walks, and pleasant fountains, laid out close to some grand mansion, and opening its fairest views to the best apartments of the palace.

Such a garden needs constant care, and then, although it may be more beautiful at one season than another, it will never be like a wild heath or totally bereft of charms. But alas! some professors of religion are not like this—there is little evidence of diligent cultivation in their character. Instead of flowers of some kind all the year round, it is hard to say that they ever show much bloom—fruits you would never expect from them.

But dear brethren, you know that it is a comely thing for every Christian church, whether it be a large mansion or a little villa, to have a garden surrounding it, so that you may look out from the windows and see the various walks and the different plants that flourish there. I have seen some gardens attached to small houses where the owner has portioned off little plots to each member of his family. And thus I believe the home has been made pleasanter and happier.

But oh! it is always a good thing when every member of the church has a spot to engage his heart and hands, and when they can all look with so much more satisfaction upon the tender blossoms and the full-blown flowers because they have watched and tended and watered the plants with a ministry of love. This though is merely a hint by the way. It is not the exact meaning of the passage before us. Your own soul is to be under cultivation. The heavenly gardener shall rejoice in your bloom.

An African traveler tells us, that he has often seen the contrast between an unwatered garden and a watered garden, and has been much surprised at it. In the case of the watered garden there may be a spring just outside of it, and the master has diligently brought in the water every morning, or every evening, poured it into a trench, and made it run along, and so the plant receives the moisture, and bears fruit, forming a pleasant contrast to the arid desert outside.

But there is another garden, with similar plants, apparently selected with the same care, but as it has not been watered, the traveler says that he has frequently observed the holes where the plant should be, without a vestige of the plant that has been perceptible. There was the trench where the water should have flowed, there were the paths in the garden. There was everything except this—there was no life, because there was no water.

O Christians, you know what this means! When the Holy Spirit visits God’s people, they are like a garden that is watered every day. They are green and flourishing, and their graces are an honor to the God who nourished them. But if the Holy Spirit be taken away from them how different is it! If He were utterly withdrawn from us—which, thank God, He will not be—we should be just like the wilderness from which we were taken, and not a vestige of grace would remain.

Christian, as all depends upon the watering of the Spirit, so make it a matter of soul concern with you to be watered continually by God’s grace. Oh, do not trust to the stock you have, for it will fail you! Do not rely upon what your soul may find within itself as being its own wisdom and strength, or you will be deceived. But go to the Lord, and pray that you may be as a watered garden—not as a garden only, but as a watered garden. So may each one of us do.

V. Furthermore, there is the blessing of CONTINUED STRENGTH, CONTINUED FRESHNESS, CONTINUED SUPPLY.

“As a well of water whose waters fail not.” There are many wells in the East which do fail, and many apparent springs which deceive the traveler. I observe that the margin has it, “whose waters deceive not, or lie not.” When a caravan comes to a well, if there be no water in it the travelers are

deceived. And if the farmer should come to a reservoir and find that the water is all gone, then the reservoir has lied to him and deceived him.

And how many a man who has appeared like a Christian has been but a mere deceiver! We looked into his conversation, where there should have been a savor of godliness, but we found none. We hoped that in his actions he would be like the Master whom he professed to serve, but we saw none of that Master's likeness. We trusted that when he came into communion with the church, he would add to its comfort and its usefulness, but he has merely added to its numbers, and has been an encumbrance upon its march. He has been a deceiver. His waters have lied to us.

Not so God's true people. They shall not deceive. They shall have so much grace that when a Christian friend expects to find grace in them, he shall not be disappointed. He shall be refreshed by their conversation. He shall be encouraged by their holy example. A spring of water is not dependent upon anything beyond itself.

Deep down in the caverns of the earth great treasures of water have been prepared by God, and the spring subsists upon its own secret source. And so does the Christian. God has provided in the covenant a depth of living water. It is one of the blessings pronounced upon Israel's sons. Christ Himself has declared that he who drinks of the water of life shall find it in him, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The reservoir must be filled at certain times and then it gets dry, but the spring is filled from itself. So the Christian is not dependent upon the ordinances. He thrives upon them, but he is not dependent upon them. If, by providence, he is denied the use of them, he has a spring within. Nay, he has a spring in the secret depths of the eternal love of God, which wells up within him at all times, so that he becomes as "a spring of water, whose waters fail not."

I do not know how some people, who believe that a Christian can fall from grace, manage to be happy. It must be a very commendable thing in them to be able to get through a day without despair. If I did not believe the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, I think I should be of all men the most miserable, because I should lack any ground of comfort.

Certainly I should not be able to understand this text. I could not say whatever state of heart I came into, I should be like a well-spring of water, whose waters fail not. I should rather have to take the comparison of an intermittent spring that might stop on a sudden, or a reservoir which we had no reason to expect would always be full.

If I speak to any brother who has not received the doctrine of final perseverance, I ask him to look it once more in the face. Do you not think that when the Savior says, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life," the interpretation of the figure necessitates the belief that grace is an enduring thing which cannot be destroyed?

Does not the metaphor of the text, to understand it fully, seem to require you to believe that the grace which God puts into men will continue there, will have in itself, through its divine origin, a force and a vitality which will make it continue to spring up as the well does, without any outward pumping or without any need of fresh supply from the depths of deity? The Christian should be satisfied and his piety should never come to an end.

Come then, let us wrap our cloak about us with a word of joy and comfort, and go our way into the cold, bleak world, rejoicing that if our hearts are right, we are resting upon the source of every precious thing. Let us go forth and rejoice that we have within us a life that can never die. That we have a something within us that can satisfy us in the worst of times. That God is with us, to be our guide and our dear companion.

Being the favored sons of heaven, and the heirs of immortality, let us eat our bread with joy. Let us cheer our poverty with hope. Let us make glad our times of trial with holy rejoicing. Let us rejoice in the Lord always, and shout for joy, and so may His blessed Spirit help us to live to His glory.

I can only regret that such a text as this can have no bearing upon some of my hearers. There are some of you to whom we shall have to read the text in the negative. “You shall *not* be guided by God, for you shall follow your own devices, and they shall lead you down to death and to the gates of hell.” O unconverted sinner, tremble at this! You shall *not* be satisfied.

There shall come a day of drought that shall dry up your body, though you flourished as a green herb. There shall come a time when your pleasures shall be of no use to you, when the hollow cheek and the blinding eye shall bring no comfort to you from without, but shall only work the end of all your joy. The text does not say that your bones shall be made fat—your flesh may be made fat, but only that you may be fattened for the slaughter. You may have outward good, but only that you may be more wretched when you have to go and leave it. And there shall be no inward peace, no spiritual joy.

There is no promise to you that *you shall be* a watered garden. You will not ask of God and you shall not have. You do not knock and the door shall not be opened. You do not seek and you shall not find. You shut your ear against God and He will shut His ear against you. You refused the cross of Christ, and therefore you shall lose the crown of heaven, and shall not know joy, because you do not know heart-sorrow.

You do not hate sin, you shall not, therefore, enjoy the bliss of righteousness. And you shall *not* be as a spring of water whose waters fail not. The little joy you have, all brackish as it is, shall be denied you at the last. You shall cry for a drop of water to cool your tongue, but you shall find none. Oh! terrible is your *present* state, but more terrible by far is the *future* which looms in the distance.

Do you not hear the breaking of the waves of the unknown sea? You must go down into it! Do you not even now hear the boomings of its awful billows upon the cliffs of time? What if it should be a sea of fire to you forever? What if every billow in that sea of flame should break over you, and you be cast into it, but not drowned, shipwrecked and lost, but not annihilated? What if you must be drifting forever across that fiery sea, with the word of divine wrath driving you on, never to find a haven?

Sinner, there is yet hope. This is not the realm of despair. Not yet has the great iron key grated in the lock to shut you forever in the dungeon! It is said of Christ that, “He openeth and no man shutteth.” He can open heaven to you. Trust Him with your whole heart, mourning for sin and hating it. Rest in His blood! Find a shelter beneath His cross, and He will not, cannot cast you away, for “He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by him.”

May you so come, and then may your Christian life be fraught with happiness, and overflowing with joy, so that you may sing in the words of David, with which I close—“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 58

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.