

ABRAM AND THE RAVENOUS BIRDS

NO. 420

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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“But when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.”
 Genesis 15:11.*

WE might use this text, if we chose, as a picture of the ease with which faith repels all attacks that are made upon Christ, the great sacrifice of the new Covenant. Ainsworth tells us that the original word which we translate “drove” has in it the force of “puffed” them away. As if with a very puff of breath these kites and vultures and eagles, were at once driven away from the bodies of the victims. Faith knows how, when skeptical kites when blaspheming vultures, when speculative eagles come down to attack the sacrifice of Christ, to chase them away with but a puff of her breath. “We know whom we have believed.”

Let the earth shake, our confidence in Him cannot move. He is to us as real a Person as ourselves. No, we might doubt our own existence, but Jesus, His power, His love, His precious blood, His prevalent atonement we dare not doubt. One puff of the breath of prayer and questions and taunts are gone. One puff of the breath of holy faith in praise and every skeptical attack is scattered to the winds as far as we are concerned. When these fowls come down upon the body of Christ, like Abram by faith we “puff” them away.

But I do not intend to use the text with such an object this morning, though one might legitimately do so. It seems to me to represent to us our duty when distracting thoughts invade the sanctity of our holy worship. Here is Abram. He has killed the victims according to Divine order. He has laid them in their places according to heavenly rule. He is waiting until God shall over those victims make and ratify the covenant. But meanwhile the buzzards and kites and vultures scent the bodies from afar and hasten to devour the flesh of the bullock and the ram. Abram chases them away that so his sacrifice may not be spoiled and he may have real fellowship with God.

Brothers and sisters, we never attempt to worship God without finding many difficulties in the way.

*“What various hindrances we meet,
 In coming to a mercy seat!”*

We in our assemblies are like the angels in theirs, “When the sons of God came together, Satan came also among them.” We find that wherever we may be and in whatever frame of mind or with whatever earnestness we may attempt to worship God, there always is a servant with us who must be told to stop at the foot of the mountain white we go and worship God. If not, our offerings will not be profitable to ourselves, nor acceptable before God.

I shall attempt this morning, in dealing with this subject, first to enumerate some of those foul birds which come upon our sacrifice. Secondly, to show the necessity in driving them away. And thirdly, how we are to do it.

I. First then, LET US MENTION SOME OF THOSE WELL-KNOWN INTRUDERS WHICH ARE PERPETUALLY MOLESTING OUR PEACE AND DISTURBING OUR SERVICE.

First, there are *wicked thoughts—the sons of Satan*. These respect no sacred places. The sanctity of our closet has been violated with thoughts of lust—the dignity of the mercy seat has not sufficed to repress the vile insinuations of blasphemy. Wickedness, though it *dwells* no more in the heart of the believer, yet seeks to find a lodging there. And well does it effect its purpose at times for it tarries like a wayfaring man for a night, lingering there sufficiently long to mar our devotion and to prevent our having joy in fellowship with God. Have you not found these thoughts intruding into your house and on the Sabbath have not unhallowed things vexed you in the Sanctuary of God itself? Have you not found the sons of Belial still tormenting you? You would sing God’s praise—perhaps a snatch of some unholy song suggests itself.

You would pray unto God, but in your very access to the mercy seat you meet some fiend-like doubt. You would listen to the voice of God with all attention but wicked temptations distract you. You would thank God with all your soul,

but folly comes in to shut your mouth and prevent your praise. The very best of the saints have need to hold up their shield to keep off the fiery darts of Satan. Upon the best ground that ever was plowed with the Gospel plow Satan will scatter the worst seed. Tares will come up in God's most fruitful field—there *will* be spots, even in our solemn feasts—there *will* be these birds upon our most hallowed sacrifices.

But we must resolutely resist these harpies. These evil ones are not to be allowed at any time—but much less in the service of God. We must guard against them at all times and in all seasons, but much more when we stand in the presence of Him who says, “Put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stands is holy ground.” In company with these foul vultures fly those ravenous kites called worldly thoughts which spring from the force of habit. The wheels have been running the last six days in this direction—it is not quite so easy to reverse the action and to make them go the other way. We have been sinking, sinking, sinking in the miry clay of daily business—it is not very easy for the soul that lies cleaving to the dust to rise at once towards Heaven.

It is no wonder when you have so many things to think of in this acre of competition that the ledger should lie there in front of the pew instead of the Bible—and that at times the day-book should come in when your hand holds the hymnbook, or that you should be thinking of a bad debt, or of a long account which is rather precarious—instead of meditating upon the faithfulness of God and of pardons bought with blood. These traffickers molest the very temple and we have not always the scourge of small cords to drive them out nor the commanding presence of the Savior, to say, “Take these things hence, it is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.”

How many a mother comes here with all her tribe of children on her shoulders? How many a father comes here with thoughts of where he shall apprentice his eldest son or what shall become of his younger daughter? How many a merchant comes in and every wind that makes the windowpanes rattle reminds him of his ships at sea? How many a farmer is thinking of his land and the fitful gleams of sunshine and returning showers make him remember his cattle and his crops? Shops and stalls, bushels and scales, silks and cottons, horses and cows and even meaner things intrude into your house, O King of kings! Brethren, how often do some of you indulge in them? I hope there are none of you who keep your account books on Sunday and yet how common is this in London!

There are some who shut up their shop in front and keep it open at the back—as if they would serve the devil and cheat the Lord! If you register your ledgers on Sunday, why not open your shop? You might as well be in the shop as in the country house—the sin is just the same—only you now add hypocrisy to it—by pretending to serve God when you do not. But how many there are, sure believers in Christ, who would scorn to look at the ledger on the Sunday—and yet their mind is hampered with accounts and debtor and creditor will be striking balances continually in their brain?

Some professors on the Sabbath afternoon will be talking about the state of the markets and asking, “What do you think of the rise and fall of Consols?” “When will this terrible American war be over?” “When is it likely the Manchester factories will obtain full employment by the arrival of ship loads of cottons,” or “How will Louis Napoleon pay his debts?” When they come up to the house of God in the evening they wonder how it is they do not get on with the preacher. The preacher might wonder how he could be of any service to such hearers. They wonder that the Sabbath is not a refreshment to them. But how is it likely to be when they still continue in their worldly employments—giving their hearts really to the world—though they profess to give their bodily presence to the service of Christ?

Besides wicked and worldly thoughts, another set of ravens will be croaking over us. I mean anxious thoughts which are the fruits of our unbelief. “Oh,” says one, “how can I help it? If you knew my condition in business, you would not marvel that care will come in today! Loss after loss, continually going backward, though with energy and perseverance I seek to make progress. A large family—a once extensive connection—the constant fear of ruin—how can I hope to chase away anxious thoughts and carking cares on the day of rest?” My Brother, I make many excuses for you. But while I make all excuses, let me remind you that it is written, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

At least today there is no need that you should carry that burden. Why, it will be none the worse for this one day's letting alone—and it certainly will be none the better for this blessed day being wasted in fretting and worrying yourself. What if the burden is heavy? Is it not enough to carry it six days? Why do you need to carry it on the seventh? What if the toil is severe—and we will allow that it is—is not that the more reason why you should shorten the hours of your labor and not give the whole seven days to it?

On this day pour out before God—empty out your troubles at His feet and leave in His hands your difficulties and your trials—believing that He knows them all and knows how to make them all work for your good. These carking cares must be chased away just as much as wicked thoughts, for “after all these things do the Gentiles seek.”

But sometimes in our prayers and in our Sabbath worship we are disturbed by those carrion crows called annoying thoughts, the offspring of our vanity. I will just mention some of them that you will think, perhaps, rather odd. But I have no doubt you know them. We have known, sometimes, a sister come to worship and she notices—“Why, Mrs. So-and-So is dressed differently from what she was last Sunday and she had a new bonnet the Sunday before!” O silly soul, to be allured like a butterfly with colors and flowers!

Then, look at yonder Brother. There is So-and-So sitting in the opposite gallery that he did not want to see today at any rate, for he does not like the man and he feels that his very presence is a detriment and a drawback to the possibility of devotion. Or, perhaps, my Brethren, as you came in there was some little mistake at the door or when our friend got to the pew he found it occupied by somebody else. Or he is not occupying just the door-seat where he likes to sit. Or, perhaps, he is standing in an inconvenient place. You know these are all trifles, complete trifles, the most despicable of things. But how many there are that irritate themselves about them? And why?

Because they have so high an opinion of their own dignity that they think these little things ought not to be endured by them. No, Sir, the aisle should be carpeted up which you walk—there should be an air cushion always provided, gratis, for you. There should be treadles on purpose to show you into the seat—and when you are there—every objectionable person in the congregation should be removed and everything should be done for your personal comfort! You say, “No, I am not so foolish as that.” I do not know that, my dear Sir—there is the germ of it in most of us.

We want so many of these little punctilious and if we are not duly honored we cannot worship with comfort. The thought of seeing God and enjoying the light of His countenance has not sufficient power over the carnal hearts of some to make them forget all the little inconveniences that must occur in vast assemblies and in a great house like this in which we are gathered. There are some fretty-tempered souls that cannot worship because some trifle not worth a moment’s notice has disturbed their minds. Now, these feelings must be striven against—this vanity is not to be allowed in any one of us.

We must denounce it and chase it out—for it only makes us little in the esteem of others. And if we could but see ourselves, it would make us contemptible in our own sight. Oh, bless His name, when a soul is hungry, it little matters how it gets its Food. When a heart is really set on finding Christ, the man will care but little what may be his comfort or his discomfort. Only let the Truth of Jesus come into the soul, let him feed on its marrow and its fatness and he will say, “I would rather be doorkeeper” (and that is a very objectionable office for anybody—if any of you tried it you would find it very inconvenient to worship God after having kept the door of the Tabernacle). “I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of God, than dwell with comfort and with ease in the tents of the wicked.”

But I will mention a brood of eagles which will haunt Mount Zion—I mean ecclesiastical anxieties. And what do I mean by these? Why, that sometimes when our minds should be perfectly free for worshipping God—Church business, perhaps Church differences—thrust themselves upon us. The deacon thinks he may worry himself a little about something that has occurred with the poor. The elder thinks it would be justifiable to be thinking over the case of such-and-such a refractory individual whose case has troubled him. The member thinks he may be fretting about the dullness of the minister. The minister thinks he may be groaning because some in the galleries have not joined the Church. And mark—all these are good things in their places—but they have no business at all with us when we come up to God’s house to worship Him.

Then these birds, even though they are like the sparrows that build under the eaves of the altar, must be driven away. Until we can get rid of them all we shall not find the day of rest such as it should be nor will our worship be acceptable before the Throne of God. Nor shall our own souls derive the joy they ought to have from the service and presence of the Lord.

Probably in this description I have not yet touched your case but I will not try again, for I think you can yourself remember many things which haunt you. Many a ship has been built here without a dry dock. Many a wagonload of corn has been sold here without a sample bag. Many a broad acre has been planted in this chapel—many a hundred head of oxen has been sold here. Many a loom has been set a-going, many a vessel has been navigated, many a new shop front con-

structed and many a building erected—when you might have been worshipping God. For in all our worship there are those who will be sending their minds gadding abroad over mountains of vanity when they ought to be sitting still to see and to understand the salvation of God.

II. I have described the birds. I have indicated the intruders. I have raised the hue and cry against them. Let me now seek to STIR YOU UP TO CHASE THEM AWAY.

Distracting cares must be driven away, first, *for your own sake*. Brethren, some of us have been alarmed to see how the lunatic asylums are everywhere needing fresh wings and the number of inmates so rapidly increasing. If there is one reason above all others for this, I venture to assert it is the neglect of the Sabbath Day. No human brain can bear the perpetual toils of business except it knows how to pause and oil the machinery by turning the mind in some other direction. Here we have merchants whose brains are exercised from the time they rise till the time they go to rest, yes, and their very dreams are disturbed by great schemes and plans.

And then, when the first day of the week comes, they are scheming still. Instead of pulling up and letting the horses of the mind take a rest so that they may start afresh in the chariot on the next week-day, it is on, on, on, on—and then they wonder that the poor creatures at last flag with weariness, or even drop dead upon the road. Flog them as you will, your minds cannot keep always at this stretch. We, whose hardest toil is on this day and who find that the great cares of a Church so large as this will follow us to our bed and that all the days of the week we are occupied thereby—find it to be one of our sternest trials to resist the fear that our reason may reel.

It is too hard for any man, even for the minister of God, to be always thinking, always working—even though that work be for God Himself. You know what Solomon says. He says—“If the iron is blunt and he does not whet the edge, then must he have more strength—but wisdom is profitable to direct,” by which he means to say if the man would stop and whet his tool, it would be sharp and he would not need to expend half the strength—and he would do far more work. But here you have some who think the Sunday must be all work, work, work. Instead of which, if they were to stop to whet the edge of the tool, they would do far more in the end, while their soul would not be half so soon worn out.

You have heard persons say, “I would sooner wear out than rust out.” There is no occasion for either if we would but keep this day of rest as a perfect rest to our heart and soul. But that we can never do unless we love Christ for a Sabbath is an impossibility to an unconverted man. If we would but, as Christians resting in Christ keep this first day of rest—giving our souls thorough ease—there would be no fear of the brain giving way. We should labor on, even to a good old age and then die in peace and our works would follow us. I cannot expect you to believe me if I should say you can carry on your business all the days of the week without care, without diligence, without very earnest thought. We must be “diligent in business,” and you must put both your hands to the wheel if you would make it go.

But do leave the wheel alone today. Now, have done with it. You will madden yourself, or, if it come not to so sad a climax as that you will destroy your comfort, destroy the acuteness of your mental powers if you do not give them rest today. I am no preacher of the old legal Sabbath, those who are teachers of the Law insist upon that quite enough. As for me, I am a preacher of the Gospel and rejoice that believers are not “under the Law, but under grace.” A worldling is under the Law and it is his duty to remember the *seventh* day to keep it holy for so runs the Law which is his taskmaster.

But I am not under the Law and therefore I keep *this* day—not the seventh, but the *first* day of the week on which my Savior rose again from the dead—keep it not of Law, but of grace—keep it not as a slavish bondage, not as a day on which I am chained and hampered with restraints against my will. But I keep it as a day in which I may take holy pleasure in serving God and in adoring before His Throne. The Sabbath of the Jew is to him a task. The Lord’s Day of the Christian, the first day of the week, is to him a joy, a day of rest, of peace and of thanksgiving. And if you Christian men can earnestly drive away all distractions so that you can really rest today it will be good for your bodies, good for your souls, good mentally, good spiritually, good temporally and good eternally.

Let me give you a second reason. You will find if you are able to take a perfect rest by driving away these evil thoughts when you are worshipping God, that you will do your work during the other days of the week far better. It was an old Popish folly to try and tell what kind of weather there would be by the weather on Sunday—“If it rains before mass, rain all the week more or less.” Now, we do not believe that literally, but we do believe it in a spiritual sense. If you have a bad Sabbath-Day, you will have a bad week but if you have a good day of rest you will find it good with your

souls the whole week long. Not that you will be without trouble all the week—that would not be good for you—but you shall never be without grace during the week.

Nor if you have peace on the Sunday shall you be without peace on the Monday. The old Puritans used to say, “The first day of the week was the market-day.” And you know in the country villages in those times, their being fewer shops than there are now, they went to market to lay in stock for the week and if the good wife bought a small quantity of cheese, or meat, why then they were on short commons the whole week through. So is it with us. This is our market-day and if we gain but little today we shall have slender diet during the other days. But if we get the basket loaded well—if we have reason to say, “The Lord has satisfied my soul with fatness and caused my spirit to delight in His Word”—you will find that during the week your peace shall be like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

And then let me remind you, in the next place, that the character of this day demands that you should get rid of these thoughts. This is the day on which God said, “Let there be light and there was light.” This is the day on which Christ rose again from the dead for our justification. Christ’s finished atonement made an end of sin and brought in everlasting righteousness on this blessed day. This is the day on which the Holy Spirit came down from Heaven—the day on which the rushing mighty wind and the cloven tongues descended upon the Apostles. Therefore, according to apostolic custom, do we keep this day as the day of light, the day of resurrection, the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit the Comforter.

Now, it is inconsistent with such a day—the day of light—for us to be in darkness. It is inconsistent with the day of resurrection for us to be raking in this grave of the world. It is inconsistent with this day of the descent of the Spirit for us to be thinking of carnal things and forgetting the things which are above. It was a Romish tradition that on Easter morning the sun always danced—and to my mind on this day when Jesus rose and left the dead, if the sun does not dance, our heart does. And if the world is not clad in sunlight, yet our soul is. And if today the very sea does not clap its hands for gladness, yet shall our voices send forth gladsome Psalms.

Oh, this is not the day of bondage. Go under the whip of Moses who choose it to be so. This is the day of *freedom* and of delight—the day of peace and calm and rest and tranquility. Work and thoughts of work, doubts, fears, legality, self-righteousness are all inconsistent with the spirit of the day, for Christ has said, “It is finished!” So we must cease to work, too, not only with our hands but with our souls—working no more for life, for that is given. Working no more for justification—for that is concluded. But today resting in Christ, for “It is finished!” And finding peace in Him, for “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”

We must leave all our cares with Him, for “nothing can separate us from the love of Christ” and then give up our souls to a glorious and victorious holy day which shall be a preparation for the eternal enjoyment of the perpetual feast of the glorified at the table of God in Heaven.

Now, for this reason—because they are so inconsistent with this day—I pray you get rid of all these obnoxious thoughts. George Herbert has put all I could say and far more, into two or three of his quaint verses, which I will give you—

*“The other days and you
Make up one man; whose face you are,
Knocking at Heaven with your brow—
The working days are the back part;
The burden of the week lies there,
Making the whole to stoop and bow,
Till your release appears.
Sundays the pillars are,
On which Heaven’s palace arched lies—
The other days fill up the spare
And hollow room with vanities.
They are the fruitful beds and borders
In God’s rich garden—that is bare
Which parts their ranks and orders.
You are a day of mirth—
And where the weekdays trail on ground,
Your flight is higher, as your birth—*

*O let me take you at the bound,
Leaping with you from seven to seven,
Till that we both, being tossed from earth,
Fly hand in hand to Heaven!"*

Oh that is the true way of living—leaping from seven to seven, passing over the six days, that we may get once more to the solid resting place of the day of rest. Be it so with you, Brethren, so when the fowls come down upon the sacrifice you may chase them away.

Another argument. The vain or anxious thought, when we are engaged in the worship of God, must be striven against *because it must be grievous to the Holy Spirit*. How can we expect that we shall have His presence and His assistance if we give Him not our hearts? Good Mr. Manton says, "If a man should send to a place of worship a skin stuffed with straw, it would be thought to be an insult but he might as well do that as go there himself with his mind stuffed with vanities." Was it not a crime of old—"This people draws near to Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me"? Can you conceive it enough to make long prayers if your minds are occupied all the while about the widow's house, or courting the approbation of man?

It is vain for us to bring these oblations unto God, for His requirement is, "My son, give Me your heart." How can the Lord, the high and lofty God ever accept the sacrifice where the heart is not found? It was considered to be one of the worst omens in the Roman sacrifices if the augurs discovered that the victim had no heart. So it must always be an ill omen to us, if in our worship our heart is not set on God and intently engaged in His service. O Spirit of God! how many of us have lost our comfort and the joy and peace of our faith because we have not—when we have been upon our knees or engaged in sacred Songs, or in listening to the Word—compelled our thoughts to keep at home and bow down to the Most High?

What do you think? If you were in the presence of a king would he consider it to be comely or decent if you should forget what you came there for? If while you offered your petition your mind should be engaged on other matters? Or if you should turn your back upon him to gaze out of the windows while His Majesty spoke to you? And what are you doing when your soul is looking to worldliness while God's own face is speaking to you and His Word is being read in your ears? Oh, this is to insult the Most High. Angels veil their faces and shall our eyes be gadding abroad? Angels bow themselves before Him and continually cry, "Holy, holy, holy" and shall we insult the Divine Majesty by coming here with unholy thoughts, or with unhallowed anxieties, not veiling our faces, but permitting them to receive all that the light of day can reveal to us of vanity, of deceit and of care? O God! Give us grace to know what You are—then shall we understand how You are to be worshipped in spirit and in Truth!

I shall add once more—these thoughts and cares must be driven away for *if you do not strive against them they will increase and multiply*. This is a growing habit. I have not to complain in this congregation of any want of attention during the service but I have had the pain of seeing assemblies where the wandering eye has been indulged till at last it would be as pleasant and perhaps as profitable to address a load of bricks as to address the people who were assembled. They come in listlessly, some of them a half-an-hour after the service begins. And in some where the habit has grown worse and worse, the minister generally knows when to leave off because he sees the friends are coming in to see the others go out.

They come gradually later and later and become more and more careless about what is uttered till an angel from Heaven would scarcely make them keep open their heavy eyes and a Prophet sent from God could not stir their stolid souls. The force of habit is like the velocity of a falling stone—it increases in ever multiplying proportions. If I have indulged one unbelieving thought, there has always been another to follow it. If I have allowed some little disturbance in the congregation to cast me down and distract my thoughts there has been another and another and another—till I have been in the pitiable condition of a minister who has been half afraid of his congregation.

And it will be so with you. We must strive against it! We must get rid of these carking thoughts! We must chase these birds from the sacrifice! Away with you! Away with you! We cannot have you here! We must, we *will* worship God and if one effort will not give us quiet, we must try again—for it must be done—or else we shall destroy our peace and render the Sabbath as hard a day as any of the other days of the week, while the service of God will be to us a vanity and to Him a vain oblation.

III. I am now, then, in the last place, to try and briefly SHOW YOU HOW TO DO IT.

And we begin by saying first of all, set your heart upon it, for when the soul is set upon a thing then it is likely to accomplish it. Go up to God's house, saying, "I must give my soul to eternal matters today and I *will*. My soul cries after God as a thirsty stag in the wilderness brays after the water-brooks. O God, my heart is fixed today. I must have done with earth, I must begin with Heaven, I must say to all cares, sit still and I must say to my soul, Wake up my glory, wake, psaltery and harp, I myself will awake right early to praise God. And when the soul is thus set upon the matter there will be half the battle already fought and the victory almost won.

But when you have done this, remember next let the preparation of your heart before coming to the sacrifice assist you when you shall be there. We are told men ought not to preach without preparation. Granted. But we add, men ought not to *hear* without preparation. Which, think you, needs the most preparation, the sower or the ground? I would have the sower come with clean hands but I would have the ground well plowed and harrowed, well turned over and the clods broken before the seed is cast in. It seems to me that there is more preparation needed by the ground than by the sower—more by the hearer than by the preacher.

But this is forgotten—men come to market having made up their minds what they want to sell and what they will buy—and they give their attention to how markets go and they act accordingly. But when men come into these places of worship they do not know what they want—they come they know not what for. Perhaps it is to see the place, or hear the preacher—and they go away and they have no spiritual profit. How could they? What profit would a man make if he went there without a purpose and stayed there without looking after his own interests? Prepare your hearts privately by communion with God and you shall have communion with Him in public. Meet God in *your* house and you shall meet Him in *His* house. What if the preacher should not profit you?—it is not the preacher you came after, but his God.

Be but wakeful and you will meet his God in the hymn, or in the chapter. Your heart must be in a right state beforehand. You know, Brethren, if you have a lake and the water is all rippled, there may be a cedar standing on its banks, but there cannot be perfect reflection when the water is disturbed. But when the water is as clear as glass, then whatever there is on the bank is reflected. Ah, you must bring your heart calm and quiet to the house of God or else there cannot be an unbroken reflection of the image of God upon your spirits. Oh, seek to come up here as a bride adorned for her husband—as wedding guests going to the wedding feast with their garments on—expecting that they shall be made glad. Come here as hungry ones pleading for food and thirsty souls all longing for the Water of Life.

But, this done, above all, *cry to the Spirit of God for help to make your spirit rest*. You have trouble. He is the Comforter. You have infirmities. But "the Spirit itself also helps our infirmities." You have sins. But the Spirit of God applies the peace-speaking blood of Christ, gives you rest in conscience. Cry unto Him! Cry unto Him as a little child cries to its parent when it has attempted something which it cannot perform. Say, "Farther, help me! I would worship You—O enable me to do so. I would see You—touch my eyes with heavenly eye-salve. I would hear You—open my ears today to Your voice and seal them up to all beside. I would feed on You—Lord, open my lips for You, the Bread of Heaven and let me feed on nothing save Yourself." This done, He is a God that hears prayer and He will grant you the desire of your heart.

Then, when you have thus done and you come up to the house of God, still *seek to continue in the same frame of mind*, remembering in whose immediate Presence you are. A Spartan youth was holding the censor at a sacrifice when Alexander was offering a victim. It chanced that while he held the censor a hot coal fed upon his hand. The youth stood still and never flinched, lest by any utterance or cry the sacrifice should be disturbed. For he said he was in the presence of Alexander and he would not have the sacrifice interrupted for him. And thus he bore the pain of the burning coal.

Let us remember that Spartan youth, but adding to what he said—"We are in the Presence of the Almighty God." Then, if there is something which annoys us let us bear it unflinchingly, for we stand before Him for whom it is blessed to suffer and who will surely reward them that seek Him in spirit and in Truth. It is written in Josephus that certain of the Jewish priests, at the time of the taking of the temple, were standing at the altar. They were waving to and fro the slowed censers and offering their prayers and their victims. The Romans rushed in, sword in hand. There were shrieks and cries, murders and deaths.

The pavement was stained with blood. But the priests took no notice whatever, nor would they turn from their sacrifice till they were themselves slain. Oh, for something of their devotedness to God, that even death itself might not interrupt our songs! But when it comes may we be found wrapped in meditation, high hymning our great Creator, expecting

His glory and waiting for His appearance. Many instances we might quote of the attention which the superstitious heathen paid to their worship. Shall we be behind them in the reality and sincerity of our adoration of the Most High and Holy God? No, let us, keeping our minds always fixed upon beholding the face of God, thus seek to chase away the birds from the sacrifice.

Another means I will give you—*take care that your faith is in active exercise*, or else you cannot chase away those thoughts. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Be still and know that He is God. Trust in Him at all times. Pour out your hearts before Him. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage. Depend upon His power and His wisdom and thus you shall have no thought to trouble you of what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, or whether you shall be clothed. But like the birds of the air, the lilies of the valley which keep perpetual Sabbath, so shall you sing and rest and Christ shall be glorified in you.

Take care also that you *attend a ministry which draws you from earth*—for there are some dead ministries which make the Sabbath-Day more intolerable than any of the other days of the week. Such are the controversial ministries in which the brain is set to ivory and exercised and troubled with questions and dilemmas and disputes and contentions. I will not say it is wicked to preach such sermons on the Sabbath-Day. But I will say it is not consistent with Sabbath rest, for that rest is as much for the soul as for the body. The Sabbath was not made alone for the animal part of us, but for the spirit, that it might have a deep, profound calm, the ante past of the rest which remains for the people of God.

Seek a ministry that is full of Christ, full of Covenant faithfulness. A ministry not of “of” and “but,” but of “shall” and “will.” Seek a ministry which vindicates the Spirit’s power. Which, while it teaches fully the sinner’s abject helplessness, dwells much upon the absolute Omnipotence of God to save. Seek one which preaches a full Christ for empty sinners, whose theme is death and resurrection, whose object it is to make Christ precious to your heart and so to compel you to trust in Him. Thus you shall find it more easy to rest on the Sabbath-Day than if you should attend under the legal preaches whose theme is moral duties. Or under the mere doctrinal preacher whose object is contention and fighting. Or under the mere experimental preacher whose aim shall be to stir up the filthy mud of your heart—instead of pouring into you the pure clean water of the Truth as it is in Jesus.

O my Brothers and Sisters! I know how many there are of you who look forward all the week long to this day. And there are times when some of us, when we awake in the morning can spring from our beds saying, “Thank God, this is the day of rest.” Today we can say, “Now, I am not to go to my toil today—farewell, the bricklayer’s trowel or the carpenter’s hammer—I have not to go to my books today. The high stool and the desk and the pen are put away. I am not today to look after the servants and the fields and the barn. Not today to walk along the shop and see how trade is prospering or how it is receding. It is all over now. Just nail up those doors and leave them alone—have nothing to do with them.

“Do not tell me that I have a house, or that I have anything to think of, except Christ Jesus, His Father and the Holy Spirit. Get you gone, vain thoughts! I cannot meddle with you, keep your distance, I have had enough of you. You have had your six days and you have pinched and pained me enough. Now my soul has passed through the wilderness, sits down at the well of Elim, sends down its pitcher, draws up draughts of rest, climbs the tree path, plucks the sweet fruits and enjoys them in anticipation of the feast before the Throne of God.”

Ah, this will be good for your bodies, good for your souls, good for you in all respects. And my sermon shall not be in vain this morning if I have made you think every Sunday, “The birds will come down on the carcasses, but I will drive them away.” Nor will it be in vain if, by God’s grace, you will come to look not only on this one day but on your seasons of prayer and meditation as being unloading seasons. When the ship that has been sinking in the water almost to its edge and seems as if it would go down altogether is unloaded—and rises up and floats higher than it did before. When the eagle gets the chain untied and leaps from the rock, up to its own native eyrie in the skies—when your poor bandaged captive soul that has been lying in the dark dungeon comes out to perfect liberty and takes its stroll abroad, forgetful of the prison and the chain.

Oh, for those heavens on earth—those precious queens of days! Time is the ring and these Sabbaths are the diamonds set in it. The ordinary days are but the walks in the garden, hand trod and barren. But the Sabbaths are the beds full of rich choice flowers. This day is Care’s balm and cure, the couch of time, the haven of divine calms. Come, my soul, throw yourself upon this couch. For now the bed is long enough and the coverlet is broad enough—rest and take your ease—

for you have come unto Jesus, to a finished sacrifice, to a completed righteousness and your soul may be satisfied in the Lord and your spirit may rejoice in the Lord your God. This is to keep Sabbath-Days.

An unconverted man cannot do this and there are many of you, I fear, here present who never knew what Sabbath means—never had a Lord’s Day in your lives. In vain do you keep the day unless your hearts keep it too. Oh, may your hearts know how to find in Christ a perfect rest! Then shall the land have rest and shall keep her Sabbaths. May God give you grace to know your sin and enable you to fly to the Savior and find in Him all your soul wants. May He enable you to rest in Christ today and then you shall keep Sabbaths on earth till you keep the eternal Sabbath before the Throne, “for thus says the Spirit, They rest from their labors.”

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” and you shall have rest. Trust Him and so shall you be saved and your spirit shall be at ease.

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