THE MAN GREATLY BELOVED
NO. 1089

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto you, be strong, yes, be strong." Daniel 10:19.

I ANTICIPATE an objection to my preaching from this text, and using it in reference to any persons in this congregation. "The words were spoken to Daniel and we are not Daniels"—that is probably the shape which the objection will take in certain minds, and my reply is, "If we are not Daniels, at least we should desire to be, and we should remember that there are possibilities of our being such." In many parts of Daniel's character we can, by divine grace, tread in his steps. Daniel is not set up far above us as one who cannot be imitated, but he is an example whom it should be our joy to follow. "But," cries one, "we shall never reach to Daniel's height of grace." I pray God we may. Under all dispensations, there have been men of the class to which Daniel belongs. The antediluvian period produced an Enoch, who "walked with God and was not, for God took him," and he, like Daniel, prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord. In the patriarchal period, there was an Abraham who is called, "The friend of God," with whom the Lord communed in a most peculiar manner. In the later days, under the law, was there not a David, "a man after God's own heart," and though his character was faultier, yet his nearness of fellowship with God, as we read of it in the Psalms, puts him in the same category. If you tell me that all these, and many more whom I might mention, belong to the olden times, and to the days of miracles, and so forth, I would remind you that nowadays the child of God under the gospel has privileges which were unknown to the greatest believers in former dispensations; for even John the Baptist, of whom it was said that none born of woman was greater than he, is said also to be less than the least in the kingdom of heaven. With the clearer light and richer indwelling of the Holy Spirit, instead of being inferior to Enoch, or Abraham, or David, or Daniel, we ought to excel all these! And, further, I would also remind you that the New Testament dispensation produced a John, and is there a nearer *facsimile* of Daniel anywhere than John? The two, though so very different in positions and in circumstances, were in their disposition, in their walk with God, in their familiarity with the Most High, and in the extraordinary visions of the future with which they were indulged, so much akin that I might say that Daniel was the John of the prophets, and that John was the Daniel of the evangelists. Now, if there is one John produced under the gospel, why not another? If two, why not two thousand, or twenty thousand? "And why may I not be one among

them?" each Christian may ask. The Spirit of God is not stinted; the dew from heaven is not exhausted, because it fell on Daniel's branch and rested on John's leaf. You may have it, my brother, and under its fertilizing influence you may bud and blossom, and from every blossom shed around you the fragrance of fellowship with God!

Moreover, if I waive the question of our imitating Daniel, I would add that, from another consideration, I feel justified in using my text most freely, for every true Christian is, in some sense, and that a very deep and true sense, too, a "man greatly beloved." Though there are differences in the manifestation of the love of God, so that we may say there are elect ones out of the elect, yet the entire elect are "greatly beloved." There are choice spirits among the chosen, such as the 70 who were selected from the disciples, the 12 out of the 70, the three—Peter, James, and John, out of the 12, and John out of the three. Election rises out of itself again and again, ascending like a pyramid; yet for all that, the common disciples, at the base of the pyramid, are "greatly beloved," loved with an infinite love. The weakest babes in grace are as truly loved as those who have come to the fullness of the stature of men in Christ Jesus. There are delicious spots where the sun's light seems to rest most constantly, yet the sun of God's love shines on the entire field which He has chosen. The goodly land owned the superior excellence of its Carmel and Sharon, yet from Dan to Beersheba, every acre was blessed of the Lord. Every heir of heaven is purchased with the same blood, written in the same roll of life, called by the same Spirit, preserved by the same divine power, and is ripened under the same spiritual influences for glory; surely then, every believer is "beloved," and "greatly beloved," too. Great love has been shown in the salvation of each one of us, and in our preservation to this day. Therefore, if none of us should be bold enough to hope that the expression of the text could be applied to us in any peculiar and eminent sense, yet our faith, without presumption, dares to know that we are men greatly beloved, seeing we have been saved by the sovereign grace of God, and made near to God by the blood of Jesus Christ. We shall, however, expect every Christian, as he recognizes the great love which he has enjoyed, to also recognize the great *obligations* which spring out of it. This is but common honesty—if we eat the bread of children, we must render the obedience of children.

Now let us proceed to the words themselves. In them I see, first, *a choice title, "O man, greatly beloved";* secondly, *a common infirmity* very gently rebuked—*"fear not";* and then, thirdly, certain *very gracious consolations* given to meet that infirmity—*"peace be unto you, be strong, yes, be strong."*

I. To begin then, the text glitters with a CHOICE TITLE. Daniel is said to be a "man greatly beloved," or as some read it, "a man of desires"—a desirable man towards God whom God desired to commune with; in whose society the Lord delighted. He was a "man greatly beloved."

Now, the great love of God to Daniel is very conspicuously seen in his character. I shall not describe his character as the reason why God loved

him, far from it, but I shall mention his character as being the effect of God's great love to him. God loved him greatly, and therefore, He made him this and that.

The first token of the Lord's great love to Daniel which we shall consider was this—God gave him early *piety*. From his very youth, Daniel feared God. We do not know the time at which he was brought fully to *know* the Lord, but it must have been in his boyhood, for while he was yet a stripling, we find him playing the man for the Lord God of his fathers. It is true his early days were spent in captivity. He was of the royal house of Judah and he was carried away to Babylon, but there is something significant in the fact that he was carried captive at the same time that the holy vessels were taken from the temple of Jerusalem. What if I say that he was himself one of the holy vessels? For he was, indeed, a vessel fit for the Master's use, and he and the golden vessels of the house of the Lord were in captivity together, yet still under divine care, so that they should not be profaned to unholy use. My dear friends, no one can ever overestimate the great privilege of being brought to God in childhood or youth. If it were only to be saved from the injury which a course of sin brings upon the mind, if it were only to escape from the regrets for the past which will arise even when the conscience is, in later days purged from sin, if it were only to have saved those precious hours of the early morning of life and to have used them in the Master's cause, if it were only for those three reasons, and they are but part of a great cluster, they are something for which to bless eternally the special love of God! I appeal to those who have been brought to love the Lord in riper days and those especially who have come to know Him in old age. Beloved brethren, you love the Lord who has called you to Himself, but have you not often said in your heart, "Would to God I had known Him like Timothy, at my mother's knee"? And is it not at this time the dearest desire of your soul, that your children should not delay a decision for God as long as you did, but that they should cast in their lot with the people of God while yet the ruddy hue of youth is on their cheeks? I know I speak your very hearts. You, therefore, are witnesses to the fact that early piety is a choice blessing, and he who has received it may think that he hears an angel say to him this morning, "O man, greatly beloved, when you were a child the Lord delighted in you."

But, secondly, the great love of God to Daniel appeared in *his early and thorough nonconformity to the world.* He was placed in circumstances of peculiar peril, removed from every godly association, taken away from every sacred influence of holy hearth or gracious guardianship; he was carried into an idolatrous country, and trained in an idolatrous court for a superstitious pursuit! Everything was done that could be done to make the young Hebrew forget the God of his fathers. His very name was changed as well as those of the three worthy companions of his captivity. They had grand names in the Hebrew, each one significant of some gracious truth of God, but they were changed into mere Babylonian titles that they might forget that they were Jews, and forget the name of God

Himself! Everywhere around them they saw idolatry, lust, and crime. There was nothing, when they went abroad or when they stayed at home, but what would suggest to them the abominations of the heathen. Yet here it was that, while yet a mere lad, "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." The meat and wine that would be brought to Daniel would not have been of the kind that should have been eaten or drunk by an Israelite. The meat might have been defiled with blood, or killed by strangling, in violation of the legal precept, and frequently the meat eaten by the Babylonians would be the flesh of an unclean animal. The wine also would probably have been dedicated to the false gods by a libation of a part of it, and the meat would have been offered to idols; therefore, Daniel determined to go too far rather than not far enough, and would not defile himself with the king's meat or the king's wine at all. It is always safest, if you are at war with a deadly enemy, to have a very high wall between you and him. There will be no fault in its being too high, if he aims at destroying you. Any division which we establish between us and sin will never be too broad or too deep. Daniel, with surprising decision, determined that he would not defile himself with the king's meat. Now, all this was rather a strong position for a child to take up—a mere school-boy shall I call him, for he was then at the college of the soothsayers, being taught in the wisdom of the Chaldeans—he was but a scholar, and yet upon this, he was very resolute. Being resolute, he was not imprudent; he did not court persecution, but he went to work with that gentle courtesy which is always so becoming a companion of firmness. The *"Suaviter in modo"* should always go with the *"Fortiter in re."* Gentle manners are a fit robe for firm principles.

We read, therefore, that Daniel "Requested of the prince of the eunuchs, that he might not defile himself." Now, "God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs." So that after expressing a fear that he might be injured in health by not eating the food provided, he allowed him to make a trial of it. The trial of a diet of vegetables and water turned out most satisfactorily. Daniel and his friends were found to be both better in health and stronger in mind than the rest of the young students in the college. Was it not a grand thing for this young hero to have taken such a stand? We may hope that he who begins well, will go on well, but, oh, abhor, young Christian, all faltering at the beginning, all bargaining with the world, all trying to parley with evil, all attempting to see how near you can go to sin. If you are not, at the outset, thorough for God, I fear you never will be. Christians ought to grow in grace, but I am sorry to say that with many of them they go from weakness to weakness, and all, I fear, because there is not a sound beginning. Every builder will tell you the necessity of having the foundation laid well. Let the foundation of your religion be decision, resolution, sincerity, and thoroughness. Your half-and-half Christian makes a fine pretense at godliness, builds very rapidly, and daubs with his untempered

mortar only to secure a fall. But may God make us deep Christians, those who know what they know, and mean what they mean, and mean for God and for His truth to be decided by His help! Daniel was a man greatly beloved because even early he was distinguished for his nonconformity to the world.

In later life, we find another sweet result of God's love, in *his courageous trust in God.* He was called on two occasions, at any rate in his life, to exhibit the utmost conceivable courage. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed a dream. Daniel had before interpreted a dream for him, and therefore, on this occasion he obtained admittance to the king. He heard the king's dream, but the interpretation of it was one which foretold the most grievous ill to the tyrant, how could he tell him the dreadful tidings? Only let the monarch lift his finger, and Daniel's head would roll upon the floor. All the empire of Babylon was under the absolute sway of the despot, Nebuchadnezzar, and yet Daniel did not hesitate to tell him that he would be insane and that his hair would grow like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws, and that he would be driven from the abodes of men! I think I see him, with fearless manner and voice; bidding the monarch break his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, that his tranquility might be lengthened. Now, in *these* days, it needs no great courage to speak the truth, because no sudden death awaits the boldest messenger of Christ. We live in days of liberty, in which we may believe what we please, and say almost what we will, but it needed heroic courage then to come like a Nathan, saying, "You are the man," not to a David, with grace in his heart, but to one who had no fear of God before him—a Nebuchadnezzar who thought himself a god. And that was a brave deed on that dread night, when Daniel stood up in the presence of Belshazzar and all his court, while the princes and lords of the different provinces were gathered together, and there interpreted the handwriting on the wall. Remember, he was surrounded by soldiers who would in a moment have put him to death, and he stood before a young and proud monarch, licentious and imperious, who would make no account of human blood, and Daniel had to say to him, "You are weighed in the balances and found wanting; your kingdom is given to the Medes and Persians." It needed no small spirit to be able to be the stern interpreter of a monarch's final doom! When he had been young, he had faced Nebuchadnezzar, and when he had grown gray with years, with the same calm and brave spirit, he faced Belshazzar, and rebuked him for his sins, and for his proud defiance of the Lord God of Israel. He was a man greatly beloved to be such a lion as he was in the midst of all his foes.

Coupled with this, another evidence of God's love to him was *his wonderful endurance of prosperity*. If I have already said that early piety is a great proof of God's peculiar affection to a man, I think I may say that the power to endure popular esteem, success in life, wealth and rank is also a very special and peculiar token of the divine favor. He was but a youth at the time when he went to Nebuchadnezzar and told him his

dream, and the interpretation. I suppose he was about 17 years of age when he sat in the king's gate, and was the head of all the king's wise men in Babylon. Scarcely that number of years had rolled over his head when Ezekiel spoke of him as being well-known as the wisest man of his time. Addressing the King of Tyre, Ezekiel said, "Are you wiser than Daniel?" Now, for a young man to be elevated to that position, we all know, or think we do, the dangers that must surround him. Even a man that has experience does not always find the lofty places of power furnish easy foothold for him, but for the young and inexperienced man to stand there, he must be a man greatly beloved. And then remember that through 43 years or more of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Daniel was one of the great men of the kingdom! All through the reign of Belshazzar, on through the time of Darius the Mede, we still find Daniel one of the greatest men in the government. Belshazzar had made him the third man in the kingdom, there being, I suppose, at that time two kings, and therefore, he could not be made the second, but he was made the next to the kings in all the empire.

Yet never do you see him betraying any sense of his own greatness. His book is singularly free from any desire to set forth himself. Have you not often wondered where he was when the three holy children were put into the burning fiery furnace? I think if I had had the writing of the book of Daniel, I would have wished to insert a verse or two to explain where I was. But Daniel is so forgetful of himself, he does not absolve himself, or try to avert suspicion, and leaves it open to us to think whatever we like. We may be sure he was acting nobly, but he does not try to make us think so. He is nothing; the service of his people and of his God—absorbed all his thoughts. O, it is noble to see a man lifted up into the high places of wealth and position, made to wear a crown and scarlet robe, and yet for all that walking humbly with his God and fulfilling his duties without flaw, even as those do who have not such high things to try them. I read this week of a vessel at sea which was overtaken by a storm, and a mountainous wave, a very alp of water, went right over it, putting out the engine fires at once, and sweeping away the wheel and the steering house, so that the vessel lay like a log in the trough of the sea. Now many a man has been like that—a great mass of wealth and prosperity has come upon him, put out the fires of his former zeal, taken away all the steerage of his soul, and he has lain like a log tossed up and down between the waves of worldliness and pride, and has become a total wreck. But Daniel was a man greatly beloved, for God set him on his high place, and made his feet like hind's feet.

A further instance of God's great love to him comes out in *his firmness under trial.* There will come to most men some special time in which they will be tested, and it happened to Daniel in his old age. There were those who could not bear that he should always be in the front in political affairs, and they plotted against him, but they found nothing against him except concerning his God. They obtained a decree that none should pray during 40 days except to the king. But Daniel cared little for de-

crees—it was his custom, three times a day, to bow before his God with his window opened towards that dear country which he still loved, though he had been an exile from it these many years, and he, with that stern simple-heartedness which was so prominent in him, went to pray at the time he would have prayed if there had been no decree! He did not alter the window; neither to the putting of it up, nor the putting of it down, and as he had been accustomed to do before, he bowed his knees and prayed. The lion's den was nothing to him—his duty was all, and if the way of duty lay through the jaws of wild beasts, Daniel still pursued it. And you know the result, and how God vindicated His servant. Truly, I might have said, when he was thrown into the pit where the lions were raging, that the martyr was a man greatly beloved; and all confess that fact when they see him honored by Darius, brought up alive out of the pit where God had sent His angel to preserve him—then all who saw him confessed that he was a man greatly beloved.

Let me add that here we ought not to forget that God's grace and love shone conspicuously in making Daniel a man *of such continuous devotion.* Every day witnessed his constant regularity in prayer. Not that he was a Pharisee and thought that one time was better than another, but because he probably felt what most of us have, that if we have not a time for prayer, we may neglect it altogether. Three times a day, whatever might occur—notwithstanding the immense pressure of business upon the statesman's mind, three times a day, he cried unto his God. And then he had his special times. Three *weeks* we find him spending in prayer and fasting. The top of his house witnessed to his regular devotions, but his special pleadings were by the lonely willows of the brook, where he cried and wrestled with his God. And we find that as the result of this, he was favored with manifestations from on high which he would never have received had his devotion been less regular or continued! It is no small token of God's love to a man if the man lives in the spirit of prayer, if he delights himself in prayer, and if year after year prayer has not become monotonous to him, if it is real to him, yes, and if he so much hungers after more of it, that he devotes lengthened seasons to its more intense exercise. If God privileges him to become mighty in prayer, then is he a man greatly beloved. Power in prayer is one of the most divine of the Lord's gracious gifts. I could mention here today, the name of one, a name well known to you, of one whose prayers God has heard these many years, and helped him feed thousands of orphans, and send forth scores of missionaries. Whenever we think of him, we think of him as a man greatly beloved. And whenever I look upon a man who is powerful in prayer, who by supplication brings down blessings on his own family, and the church, and his neighborhood, I know that there is to be found a man who is indeed, greatly beloved.

I think that I have shown you that the outward signs of God's love to Daniel were such as many of us have enjoyed in a measure and may enjoy still more, for there are some here who were saved in youth, some who early began to be decided for God. There are some here who have

been brave for Christ and have not denied the faith, sustained prosperity, and have endured trial too, and who have by divine grace been taught to plead with God. Perhaps they will not recognize themselves, but we may be able to recognize them, and call them men greatly beloved.

In one word, there was one crowning token of God's love to Daniel, and that is *the perfect consistency of his life.* Daniel seems to me to be as nearly as possible a perfect character. If anyone should ask me for what peculiar virtue I count him to be famous, I should hardly know how to reply. There is a combination in his character of all the graces. Neither do I think I could discover anything in which he was deficient. Sinner he was, doubtless, before the eyes of God; but he is faultless towards man. His was a well-balanced character. There is an equilibrium maintained between the different graces, even as in John's character, which is also exceedingly beautiful. There is, perhaps, a touch of loveliness about the character of John, a tender softness that we do not find in Daniel. There is somewhat more of the lion in the prophet, and of the lamb in the apostle, but still they are, each of them, perfect after his kind. All through Daniel's life you do not find a flaw—there is no breakdown anywhere. There was a great occasion in which he might have broken down, but God helped him through it. There he was, a business man for a long lifetime, a man bearing the burden of state, and yet never once any accusation could be brought against him of any wrongdoing. A man of large transactions will usually be chargeable with something or other of wrong performed through his subordinates, even if he, himself, should be strictly upright, but here was a man rendered by grace so upright and so correct in all that he did, that nothing could be, even by his enemies, brought against him except concerning his religion. A great mark of grace was this, an ensign of piety far too rare. Many are Christians and will, we hope, creep into heaven, but, alas! Alas! Alas—the less said about their inconsistencies the better. It is a special mark of a man greatly beloved, when he is consistent from the beginning to the end through the grace of God!

II. But my time will fail me, and therefore I must hasten, in the second place, to notice that Daniel became the subject of a COMMON INFIRMITY. He was full of fear on one occasion, and therefore an angel said to him, "Fear not." I am glad of this, because it teaches us that even the best of men may be subject to very great fears. I was pleased to read in our lesson, just now, of Daniel on his face, and of Daniel dumb, and so on, for it shows that he was touched with our infirmities, and that great as God made him, he was *nothing in himself,* and owed all his greatness to the grace of God! Those fears on the part of Daniel were not the result of personal trial just then; they came to him, indeed, when he had been highly honored by revelations from God. His fears sprang from a sight of his Lord, and from a sense of his own unworthiness. Just a word on that: You may be a man greatly beloved, and therefore, you may have a clearer sight of the Lord Jesus than other men have, and for that very reason, you may feel a greater shame and confusion of face whenever you think

of yourself. Remember how Daniel says concerning himself, "There remained no strength in me, my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." O beloved, if the Lord ever favors you with much love, and with nearness of access to Him, you must expect the other side of it—that is to say, you must feel your own *nothingness, baseness, unworthiness*—and while you feel that, I do not wonder that you almost wish you had never been born, and feel as if the sooner this life was ended the better! You will feel as if you were unfit to do anything for God's people, unfit even to bear Christ's name, and yet all the while you may be a man greatly beloved, and may be eminently blessed. Look at Job, when he is covered all over with sores, he justifies himself in some measure, but the moment he sees his God, what does he say? "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You; therefore I abhor myself." It is sure to be so—great love from God will make you have great humbleness of soul, and lay you low in the dust. Do I address someone who has been finding out lately more of the deformity of his own heart than he ever did before? Did he come up here this morning crying, "Alas, woe is me?" No, dear brother, not, "Woe is you," but, "O man greatly beloved." Though you have found this out through a sight of your Lord, yet fear not, this is a blessing to you, and not a curse.

Perhaps, too, Daniel's great fears had been awakened by *the disclosures that had been made to him* of the history of the nations, and especially of his own people. He had a peculiar anxiety for his own people. Did you ever get into that state, and begin to look upon the world, and upon the country, and upon the church, and then fall into a fit of trembling? I do assure you it is wonderfully easy to put on the garb of Jeremy, the weeping prophet. If you look abroad, even on this little island of ours, you see mischief everywhere coming to the front, and error prevailing, and the cause of the truth seems to be like a tempest-tossed ship, almost a wreck. Truly one might find plenty of room for weeping and lamentation. And if we look at the world at large, and see how infidelity spreads, "Woe is me!" we may well say. Yes, Daniel had seen the history of the world for a long period to come; therefore he was full of fear. And are you full of fear too? Well, it is a part of the lot of men whom God greatly loves, that they should bear the troubles of the times that they should be like Christ on the behalf of their age, and should bear the sins of men upon their hearts, and plead concerning them before the living God.

I think, too, that Daniel's sorrow was partly occasioned by the repetition of those words to him—"The vision is true, but the time appointed is long." It seemed to come over and over to Daniel. *"The time is long."* I do not know any trouble that presses more heavily on my heart than that. It seems to be a dreadful long while since God has worked a miracle—such a while since the church has had any great thing done in the midst of her. Christianity only holds under its power a miserable minority of mankind—the number of evangelical Christians in the world is a contemptible fraction as compared with the mass of idolaters, Muslims,

Catholics, and the like. The true churches do not seem to be growing, and meanwhile the challenges of the infidel come to us, and we do not seem to have the pluck to reply to them as they ought to be replied to. One thousand and eight hundred years and more have gone by, and no progress or scarcely any! O Lord, how long! How long! How long! How long! And yet Jehovah is the Lord, yes, He is the only God, and He could, in a moment, enlighten the darkness of mankind, and His Spirit could raise up men who should flash like flames of fire amidst the midnight of the times. Why does He tarry? This is the cry which the church universally sends up wherever she lives near to God. And if any here have been favored to be beloved of God, I am sure this will weigh upon them, "How long Lord, how long? Why do You tarry?"

III. Now we close, in the third place, by noticing THE CONSOLATIONS which the angel brought to Daniel, and which, in proportion as we are greatly beloved, and the subject of like fears, he brings to us.

He said to him first, "Peace be unto you." So he says to all of the beloved here—"Peace be unto you. Why are you fretting, worrying, tossed up and down in your mind? Peace be unto you."

Let peace be yours first because you are *"greatly beloved."* Whatever is happening or not happening, you are greatly beloved. The Lord loved you before the earth was, He redeemed you with the blood of His own Son; He has called you into fellowship with Jesus—Peace! You are beloved—does not that give you peace? "Hush, my baby," says the mother, "lie still and slumber," and the sweetest hush in all her lullaby is the mention of her own love. So, dear child of God, be still, be calm, you are beloved of heaven.

And next, fear not, peace be unto you, God is still ruling—He ruled the world before you were born, and accomplished all His will; He will rule it when you are dead, and He will fulfill His own decrees. Why do you worry yourself? What use can your fretting serve? You are on board a vessel which you could not steer even if the great Captain put you at the helm, of which you could not so much as reef a sail, yet you worry as if you were captain and helmsman! O, be quiet, God is Master—do you think that all this din and hurry-burly that is abroad means that God has left His throne? No, His steeds rush furiously on, and His chariot is the storm, but there is a bit between their jaws, and He holds fast the reins and guides them as He wills! Jehovah is still Master—believe it, peace be unto you—be not afraid!

And whereas you are disturbed about the length of time—with what do you measure? With your own age of 70 years, or with days and weeks—do you measure so? Have you ever seen the measuring line of the Eternal, and do you know that if this world were to last through millions of millions of years, yet it would be but a speck between the two eternities that should precede and follow? God's life is not made up of ticks of the clock! He can wait, He can wait! He can let generations of wicked men follow one another, yes, He could for 10,000 years 10,000 times told, permit the devil to trail his chain around the world, and yet at the end,

be more than conqueror, and the more glorious a conqueror because of the length of the battle. It is a child's fight that lasts but for an hour, but vast is the conflict of nations when they struggle with each other from year to year, when a campaign does but open the war, when another campaign does but kindle the strife, and a third does but inflame the passions—and another brings forth all the fury of the combatants, and only far on, at the close, comes the grand crash which ends all. Shall the wars of God be less in length than the battles of men? You have seen but one campaign, or perhaps but the first flight of the artillery which commences the fight. You have not seen the crossing of the bayonet that may yet be to come, for time of tribulation, such as the world has never seen, is yet in reserve. But rest you sure of this, it is all short to Him, with whom a thousand years is as one day, and one day as a thousand years. Come down from the measuring place, child, come down! It is *God* who weighs and measures. Leave that alone, and sit down at His feet and be still. Be still, it is all well, it shall surely end well. God is still Master.

Then he adds, *"be strong,"* as if these fears of Daniel made him weak, and as if it was important that he should be strong. Now, if there is any importance in us at all, and there is not much, certainly anything that we can do in our present place will require of us all our strength. And since our fears decidedly weaken us, for all practical purposes they should be shaken off. Therefore, the angel says twice, "Be strong, yes, be strong." And, beloved, we ought to be strong in faith, for God deserves it. He has given us promises of our own security, of His own ultimate conquest, and the triumph of His own cause, and God has never lied. Why, then, should we doubt Him? They who trust in Him have never been confounded. He deserves that we should rely upon Him, and if things grew blacker, and the times were worse, and true religion were almost crushed out, and lived only in one solitary man's heart—that man ought yet to believe that God would be conqueror, and have no doubts, for why should even he distrust the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Infallible, the Immutable and True! O brethren, while you have this ground and foothold for your strength, remember your work demands all your strength! How can you pray with these doubts about you? How will you teach others while you doubt yourself? How can you perform your service when sighs come from you? Soul, sweet soul, is that what should stream from the worker for the Lord God of Israel? Be strong, then. Fall before the Lord in earnest prayer, and ask Him to take away your fretfulness, and make you, as you are greatly beloved, to be strong.

Remember, beloved, especially those of you who are at all prominent, that others will take their cue from you, and if you speak with bated breath, with trembling language, others will be weak too. Therefore, fear not—be strong, yes, be strong. And remember, there is no cause for alarm. Have you not lived long enough to see that always when men have judged that things went worst, they have been going best? There is an undercurrent which the eyes see not which is often stronger than the upper flow. And besides, if it were not so, have your never seen it, have

not your fathers told you that the darkest part of the night is that which precedes the dawning day? Have you never perceived that when true religion, either in your own soul or in the world, seems to have gone back, that suddenly it makes a leap again? There will be waves upon the beach, and each one will seem stronger than its fellow, but then there will follow one that sucks them all back, and you might think the sea was retiring from its strength—yet the flood tide is coming in, coming even while that wave recedes so far. All is working for progress, though there may seem to be a delay here and there. The stream rushes on like a mighty Niagara, and you are there by the shore in a little eddy, revolving round and round in a tiny vortex, and you say the stream is rushing in the wrong direction, it has made no progress—"I am weary with this circular motion." Ah, but you have never been in the broad current, or if your eyes have gazed upon it, it has been dazed with the sight of its breadth and length, and you have not understood it. The Lord reigns, the Lord God omnipotent reigns, and Jesus sits at His side, while truth, like His angel, follows at His heel, still mighty! The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall yet perform His word! And the Spirit that, for a while, has hidden His great might and concealed Himself in the secret chambers of His church, shall come forth, and the day shall be in which the Lord's truth shall be declared among the people with power; even with such power that the world shall bow before it, and the song shall go up unto the Lord God Almighty—and He shall be worshipped from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same!

O you virgin souls that have followed the Lamb up to now where ever He goes, follow Him still! Keep your garments unspotted from the world. Be rigidly faithful to the truth and conscience. You are men greatly beloved; let not your spirits fail you. Let no man's heart fail him because of Goliath that stalks before us! He is but a creature, and will fade and die. Fear not; peace be unto you, be strong, yes, be strong! The Lord strengthen you. Amen.

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FOR THE TROUBLED
NO. 1090

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 12, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Your wrath lies hard upon me, and You have afflicted me with all Your waves."
Psalm 88:7.

IT is the business of a shepherd not only to look after the happy ones among the sheep, but to seek after the sick of the flock, and to lay himself out right earnestly for their comfort and succor. I feel, therefore, that I do rightly when I this morning make it my special business to speak to such as are in trouble. Those of you who are happy and rejoicing in God, full of faith and assurance, can very well spare a discourse for your weaker brethren; you can be even glad and thankful to go without your portion, that those who are depressed in spirit may receive a double measure of the wine of consolation. Moreover, I am not sure that even the most joyous Christian is any the worse for remembering the days of darkness which are stealing on swiftly, "for they are many." Just as the memories of our dying friends come over us like a cloud, and "dampen our brainless ardors," so will the recollection that there are tribulations and afflictions in the world dampen our rejoicing, and prevent its degenerating into an idolatry of the things of time and sense. It is better for many reasons, to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting; the bitter cup has virtues in it which the wine cup never knew; wet your lips with it, young man, it will work you no ill. It may be, O you who are today brimming with happiness, that a little store of sacred cautions and consolations may prove no sore to you, but may by-and-by stand you in good stead. This morning's discourse upon sorrow may suggest a few thoughts to you which, being treasured up, shall ripen like summer fruit, and mellow by the time your winter shall come round.

But to our work: It is clear to all those who read the narratives of Scripture, or are acquainted with good men, that the best of God's servants may be brought into the very lowest estate. There is no promise of present prosperity appointed to true religion, so as to exclude adversity from believer's lives. As men, the people of God share the common lot of men, and what is that but trouble? Yes, there are some sorrows which are peculiar to Christians, some extra griefs of which they partake because they are believers, though these are more than balanced by those peculiar and bitter troubles which belong to the ungodly, and are engendered by their transgressions, from which the Christian is delivered. From the passage which is open before us, we learn that sons of God

may be brought so low as to write and sing psalms which are sorrowful throughout, and have no fitting accompaniment but sighs and groans. They do not often do so; their songs are generally like those of David, which if they begin in the dust mount into the clear heavens before long; but sometimes, I say, saints are forced to sing such sorrowful ditties that from beginning to end there is not one note of joy. Yet even in their dreariest winter night, the saints have an aurora in their sky, and in this 88th Psalm, the dreariest of all psalms, there is a faint gleam in the first verse, like a star-ray falling upon its threshold—"O Jehovah, God of my salvation." Heman retained his hold upon his God. It is not all darkness in a heart which can cry, "My God," and the child of God, however low he may sink, still keeps hold upon his God. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," is the resolution of his soul. Jehovah smites me, but He is my God. He frowns upon me, but He is my God. He tramples me into the very dust, and lays me in the lowest pit, as among the dead, yet He is still my God, and such will I call Him till I die. Even when He leaves me I will cry, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

Moreover, the believer in his worst time still continues to pray, and prays, perhaps, the more vigorously because of his sorrows. God's rod drives His children not from Him, but to Him. Our griefs are waves which wash us to the rock. This psalm is full of prayer, it is as much sweetened with supplication as it is salted with sorrow. It weeps like Niobe, but it is on bended knees and from uplifted eyes. Now, while a man can pray he is never far from light; he is at the window, though perhaps, as yet the curtains are not drawn aside. The man who can pray has the clue in his hand by which to escape from the labyrinth of affliction. Like the trees in winter, we may say of the praying man, when his heart is greatly troubled, "His substance is in him, though he has lost his leaves." Prayer is the soul's breath, and if it breathes, it lives, and living, it will gather strength again. A man must have true and eternal life within him while he can continue to pray, and while there is such life there is assured hope. Still, the best child of God may be the greatest sufferer, and his sufferings may appear to be crushing, killing, and overwhelming; they may also be so very prolonged as to attend him all his days, and their bitterness may be intense—all of which and much more this mournful psalm teaches us.

Let us, in pursuit of our subject, first give *an exposition of the text;* and then, *a brief exposition of the benefits of trouble.*

I. I will endeavor, in a few observations, to EXPOUND THE TEXT.

In the first place, its strong language suggests the remark that *tried saints are very prone to overrate their afflictions.* I believe we all err in that direction, and are far too apt to say, "I am the man that has seen affliction." The inspired man of God, who wrote our text, was touched with this common infirmity, for he overstates his case. Read his words, "Your wrath lies hard upon me." I have no doubt Heman meant wrath in its worst sense. He believed that God was really angry with him, and wrath-

ful with him, even as He is with the ungodly, but that was not true. As we shall have to show by-and-by, there is a very grave difference between the anger of God with His children and the anger of God with His enemies. And we do not think Heman sufficiently discerned that difference, even as we are afraid that many of God's children even now forget it, and therefore fear that the Lord is punishing them according to strict Justice, and smiting them as though He were their executioner. Ah, if poor bewildered believers could but see it, they would learn that the very thing which they call wrath is only love in its own wise manner, seeking their highest good. Besides, the Psalmist says, "Your wrath *lies hard upon me."* Ah, if Heman had known what it was to have God's wrath lie hard on him, he would have withdrawn those words, for all the wrath that any man ever feels in this life is but as a laying on of God's little finger. It is in the world to come that the wrath of God lies heavy on men. Then, when God puts forth His hand and presses with omnipotence upon soul and body to destroy them forever in hell, the ruined nature feels in its never-ending destruction what the power of God's anger really is. Here the really sore pressure of God's wrath is not known, and especially not known by a child of God. It is too strong a speech if we weigh it in the scales of sober truth. It outruns the fact, even though it was the most sorrowful living man that uttered it. Then Heman adds, "You have afflicted me with *all* Your waves," as though he were a wreck with the sea breaking over him, and the whole ocean, and all the oceans, were running full against him as the only objective of their fury. His boat has been driven on shore, and all the breakers are rolling over him. One after another they leap upon him like wild beasts, hungry as wolves, eager as lions to devour him; it seemed to him that no wave turned aside, no billow spent its force elsewhere, but all the long line of breakers roared upon him, as the sole objective of their wrath.

But it was not so. *All* God's waves have broken over no man, save only the Son of Man. There are still some troubles which we have been spared, some woes unknown to us. Have we suffered all the diseases, which flesh is heir to? Are there not modes of pain from which our bodies have escaped? Are there not, also, some mental pangs which have not wrung our spirit? And what if we seem to have traversed the entire circle of bodily and mental misery, yet in our homes, households, or friendships, we have surely some comfort left, and therefore, from some rough billow we are screened. All God's waves had not gone over you, O Heman, the woes of Job and Jeremiah were not yours. Among the living none can literally know what *all* God's waves would be. They know, who are condemned to feel the blasts of His indignation, they know in the land of darkness and of everlasting hurricane; they know what all God's waves and billows are—but we know not. The metaphor is good and admirable, and correct enough poetically, but as a statement of fact, it is strained. We are all apt to exaggerate our grief—I say this here as a general fact, those who are happy can bear to be told, but I would not vex the sick

man with it while he is enduring the weight of his affliction. If he can calmly accept the suggestion of his own accord, it may do him good, but it would be cruel to throw it at him. True as it is, I would not like to whisper it in any sufferer's ear, because it would not console, but grieve him. I have often marveled at the strange comfort persons offer you when they say, "Ah, there are others who suffer more than you do." Am I a demon then? Am I expected to rejoice at the news of other people's miseries? Far otherwise, I am pained to think there should be sharper smarts than mine; my sympathy increases my own woe. I can conceive of a fiend in torment finding solace in the belief that others are tortured with a yet fiercer flame, but surely such diabolical comfort should not be offered to Christians. It shows our deep depravity of heart, that we can extract comfort out of the miseries of others, and yet I am afraid we rightly judge human nature when we offer it water from that putrid well. There is, however, a form of comfort akin to it, but of far more legitimate origin, a consolation honorable and divine. There was ONE upon whom God's wrath pressed very sorely, ONE who was in truth afflicted with all God's waves, and that One is our brother, a man like ourselves, the dearest lover of our souls; and because He has known and suffered all this, He can sympathize with us this morning whatever tribulation may beat upon us. His passion is all over now, but not His compassion. He has borne the indignation of God, and turned it all away from us; the waves have lost their fury and spent their force on Him, and now He sits above the floods, yes, He sits King forever and ever. As we think of Him, the Crucified, our souls may not only derive consolation from His sympathy and powerful succor, but we may learn to look upon our trials with a calmer eye, and judge them more according to the true standard. In the presence of Christ's cross our own crosses are less colossal. Our thorns in the flesh are as nothing when laid side by side with the nails and spear.

But, secondly, let us remark that *saints do well to trace all their trials to their God.* Heman did so in the text: *"Your* wrath lies hard upon me; *You* have afflicted me with all *Your* waves." He traces all his adversity to the Lord his God. It is God's wrath, they are God's waves that afflict him, and God makes them afflict him. Child of God, never forget this—all that you are suffering of any sort, or kind, comes to you from the divine hand. "Truly," you say, "my affliction arises from wicked men," yet remember that there is a predestination which, without soiling the fingers of the Infinitely Holy, nevertheless rules the motions of evil men as well as of holy angels. It were a dreary thing for us if there were no appointments of God's providence which concerned the ungodly; then the great mass of mankind would be entirely left to chance, and the godly might be crushed by them without hope. The Lord, without interfering with the freedom of their wills, rules and overrules, so that the ungodly are as a rod in His hand, with which He wisely scourges His children. Perhaps you will say that your trials have arisen not from the sins of others, but from your own sins, Even then I would have you penitently trace them to

God. What, though the trouble springs out of the sin, yet it is God that has pointed the sorrow to follow the transgression, to act as a remedial agency for your spirit. Look not at the second cause, or, looking at it with deep regret, turn your eyes chiefly to your heavenly Father, and, "Hear you the rod and who has appointed it." The Lord sends upon us the evil as well as the good of this mortal life; His is the sun that cheers, and the frost that chills! His is the deep calm and His the fierce tornado. To dwell on second causes is frequently frivolous, a sort of solemn trifling.

Men say of each affliction, "It might have been prevented *if* such-and-such had occurred. Perhaps if another physician had been called in, the dear child's life had still been spared; possibly if I had moved in such a direction in business I might not have been a loser." Who is to judge of what might have been? In endless conjectures we are lost and cruel to ourselves, we gather material for unnecessary griefs. Matters happened not so—then why conjecture what would have been had things been different? It is folly. You did your best, and it did not answer—why rebel? To fix the eyes upon the second cause will irritate the mind. We grow indignant with the more immediate agent of our grief, and so fail to submit ourselves to God. If you strike a dog, he will snap at the staff which hurts him, as if it were to blame. How doggish we sometimes are, when God is smiting us, we are snarling at His rod. Brother, forgive the man who injured you; his was the sin, forgive it, as you hope to be forgiven; but yours is the chastisement, and it comes from God, therefore endure it and ask for grace to profit by it. The more we get away from intermediate agents the better, for when we reach to God grace will make submission easy. When we know, "It is the Lord," we readily cry, "Let Him do what seems good to Him." As long as I trace my pain to accident, my bereavement to mistake, my loss to another's wrong, my discomfort to an enemy, and so on, I am of the earth, earthy—and shall break my teeth with gravel. But when I rise to my God and see His hand at work, I grow calm; I have not a word of fretting, "I open not my mouth because You did it." David preferred to fall into the hands of God, and every believer knows that he feels safest and happiest when he recognizes that he is in the divine hands. Quibbling with man is poor work, but pleading with God brings help and comfort. "Cast your burden on the Lord," is a precept which will be easy to practice when you see that the burden originally came from God!

But now, thirdly, *afflicted children of God do well to have a keen eye to the wrath that mingles with their troubles.* "Your *wrath* lies hard upon me." There is Heman's first point. He does not mention the waves of affliction till he has first spoken of the wrath. We should labor to discover what the Lord means by smiting us—what He purposes by the chastisement and how far we can answer that purpose. We must use a keen eye *to clearly distinguish* things. There is anger and anger, wrath and wrath. God is never angry with His children in one sense, but He is in another. As men, we have all of us disobeyed the laws of God, and God stands in

relationship to all of us as a judge. As a judge, He must execute upon us the penalties of His law, and He must, from the necessity of His nature, be angry with us for having broken that law. That concerns the entire human race. But the moment a man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, his offenses are his offenses no longer—they are laid upon Christ Jesus, the substitute, and the anger goes with the sin. The anger of God towards the sins of believers has spent itself upon Christ. Christ has been punished in their place; the punishment due their sin has been borne by Jesus Christ. God forbid that the Judge of all the earth should ever be unjust; it would not be just for God to punish a believer for a sin which has been already laid upon Jesus Christ. Therefore the believer is altogether free from all liability to suffer the judicial anger of God, and all risk of receiving a punitive sentence from the Most High. The man is absolved—shall he be judged again? The man has paid the debt—shall he be brought a second time before the judge, as though he were still a debtor? Christ has stood for him in his place, and therefore he boldly asks, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

Now, then, the Christian takes up another position—he is adopted into the family of God; he or she has become God's child. He is under the law of God's house. There is in every house an economy, a law by which the children and servants are ruled. If the child of God breaks the law of the house, the Father will visit his offense with fatherly stripes—a very different kind of visitation from that of a judge. There are felons in prison today who, in a short time, will feel the lash on their bare backs, that is one thing; but yonder disobedient child is to receive a whipping from his father's hand, that is quite another thing. Wide as the poles asunder are the anger of a judge and the anger of a father. The father loves the child while he is angry, and is mainly angry for that very reason; if it were not his child, he would probably take no notice of fault; but because it is his own child who has spoken an untruth, or committed an act of disobedience, he feels he must chastise him because he loves him. This needs no further explanation. There is a righteous anger in God's heart towards guilty impenitent men; He feels none of that towards His people. He is their father and if they transgress, He will visit them with stripes, not as a legal punishment, since Christ has borne all that, but as a gentle paternal chastisement, that they may see their folly and repent of it, and awakened by His tender hand, they may turn unto their Father and amend their ways. Now, child of God, if you are suffering today in any way whatever, whether from the ills of poverty or bodily sickness, or depression of spirits, remember there is not a drop of the judicial anger of God in it all. You are not being punished for your sins as a judge punishes a culprit—never believe such false doctrine! It is clean contrary to the truth of God as it is in Jesus. Gospel doctrine tells us that our sins were

numbered on the Great Scapegoat's head of old, and carried away once and for all, never to be charged against us again.

But we must use the eyes of our judgment in looking at our present affliction *to see and confess* how richly, as children, we deserve the rod. Go back to the time since you were converted, dear brother and sister, and consider—do you wonder that God has chastened you? Speaking for myself, I wonder that I have ever escaped the rod at any time. If I had been compelled to say, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning," I should not have marveled, for my shortcomings are many. How ungrateful have we been, how unloving, and how unlovable, how false to our holiest vows, how unfaithful to our most sacred consecrations. Is there a single ordinance over which we have not sinned? Did we ever rise from our knees without having offended while at prayer? Did we ever get through a hymn without some wandering of mind or coldness of heart? Did we ever read a chapter which we might not have wept over, because we did not receive the truth in the love of it into our soul as we ought to have done? O, good Father, if we smart, richly do we deserve that we should yet smart again!

When you have confessed your sins, let me exhort you to use those same eyes zealously to *search out the particular sin* which has caused the present chastisement. "Oh," says one, "I do not think I should ever find it out." You might. Perhaps it lies at the very door. I do not wonder that some Christians suffer—I would wonder if they did not. I have seen them, for instance, neglect family prayer and other household duties, and their sons have grown up to dishonor them. If they cry out, "What an affliction," we would not like to *say,* "Ah, but you might have expected it; you were the cause of it"—and such a saying would be true. When children have left the parental roof, and gone into sin, we have not been surprised when the father has been harsh, sour, and crabbed in temper. We did not expect to gather figs from thorns, or grapes from thistles. We have seen men whose only thought was, "Get money, get money," and yet they have professed to be Christians. Such persons have been fretful and unhappy, but we have not been astonished. Would you have the Lord deal kindly with such surly ill-tempered persons? No, if they walk stubbornly with Him, He will show Himself stubborn to them. Brother, the roots of your troubles may run under your doorstep where your sin lies. Search and see.

But sometimes the cause of the chastisement lies further off. Every surgeon will tell you that there are diseases which become troublesome in the prime of life, or in old age, which may have been occasioned in youth by some wrong doing, or by accident—and the evil may have lain latent all those years. So may the sins of our youth bring upon us the sorrows of our riper years—faults and omissions of 20 years ago may scourge us today. I know it is so. If the fault may be of so great an age, it should lead us to more thorough search, and more frequent prayer. Bunyan tells us that Christian met with Apollyon, and had such a dark

journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, because of slips he made when going down the hill into the Valley of Humiliation. It may be so with us. Perhaps when you were young, you were very untender towards persons of a sorrowful spirit; you are such yourself now—your harshness is visited upon you. It may be that when in better circumstances, you were known to look down upon the poor, and despise the needy—your pride is chastened now. Many a minister has helped to injure another by believing a bad report against him, and by-and-by he has himself been the victim of slander. "With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." We have seen men who could ride the high horse among their fellow creatures, and speak very loftily, and when they have been brought very, very low, we have understood the riddle. God will visit His children's transgressions. He will frequently let common sinners go on throughout life unrebuked—but not so His children. If you were going today, and saw a number of boys throwing stones and breaking windows, you might not interfere with them, but if you saw your own son among them, I will be bound you would fetch him out, and make him repent of it. If God sees sinners going on in their evil ways, He may not punish them *now*—He will deal out justice to them in another state. But if it is one of His own elect, He will be sure to make him rue the day. Perhaps the reason for your trouble may not be a sin committed, but a duty neglected. Search and see—and see where you have been guilty of omission. Is there a sacred ordinance which you have neglected, or a doctrine you have refused to believe?

Perhaps the chastisement may be sent by reason of a sin as yet undeveloped, some latent proneness to evil. The grief may be meant to unearth the sin that you may hunt it down. Have you any idea of what a devil you are by nature? None of us know what we are capable of if left by grace. We think we have a sweet temper, an amiable disposition! We shall see! We fall into provoking company, and are so teased and insulted, and so cleverly touched in our raw places, that we become mad with wrath—and our fine amiable temper vanishes in smoke, not without leaving black soot behind. Is it not a dreadful thing to be so stirred up? Yes it is, but if our hearts were pure, no sort of stirring would pollute them. Stir pure water as long as you like, and no mud will rise. The evil is bad when seen, but it was quite as bad when not seen. It may be a great gain to a man to know what sin is in him, for then he will humble himself before his God, and begin to combat his propensities. If he had never seen the filth, he would never have swept the house! If he had never felt the pain, the disease would have lurked within, but now that he feels the pain, he will fly to the remedy. Sometimes, therefore, a trial may be sent that we may discern the sin which dwells in us, and may seek its destruction. What shall we do this morning if we are under the smiting of God's hand, but humble ourselves before Him, and go as guilty ones, desiring to confess most thoroughly, the particular sin which may have

driven Him to chastise us, appealing to the precious blood of Jesus for pardon, and to the Holy Spirit for power to overcome our sin.

When you have so done, let me give one word of caution before I leave this point. Do not let us expect when we are in the trouble to perceive any immediate benefit resulting from it. I have tried, myself, when under sharp pain, to see whether I have grown a bit more resigned or more earnest in prayer, or more rapt in fellowship with God, and I confess I have never been able to see the slightest trace of improvement at such times, for pain distracts and scatters the thoughts. Remember that word, "Nevertheless, *afterwards* it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The gardener takes his knife and prunes the fruit trees to make them bring forth more fruit; his little child comes trudging at his heels and cries, "Father, I do not see that the fruit comes on the trees after you have cut them." No, dear child, it is not likely you would, but come round in a few months when the season of fruit has come, and then shall you see the golden apples which thank the knife! Graces which are meant to endure, require time for their production, and are not thrust forth and ripened in a night. Were they so soon ripe, they might be as speedily rotten.

II. Now, as time is failing me, I will take up the second part of my discourse and handle it with great brevity. I want to give a very short EXPOSITION OF THE BENEFITS OF TROUBLE. This is a great subject. Many a volume has been written upon it, and it might suffice to repeat the catalog of the benefits of trial, but I will not so detain you.

Severe trouble in a true believer has the effect of loosening the roots of his soul earthward and tightening the anchor-hold of his heart heavenward. How can he love the world which has become so dear to him? Why should he seek after grapes so bitter to his taste? Should he not now ask for the wings of a dove that he may fly away to his own dear country, and be at rest forever? Every mariner on the sea of life knows that when the soft zephyrs blow, men tempt the open sea with outspread sails, but when the black tempest comes howling from its den, they hurry with all speed to the haven. Afflictions clip our wings with regard to earthly things, so that we may not fly away from our dear Master's hands, but sit there and sing to Him! But the same afflictions make our wings grow with regard to heavenly things—we are feathered like eagles, we catch the soaring spirit, a thorn is in our nest and we spread our pinions towards the sun.

Affliction frequently opens truths to us, and opens us to the truth—I know not which of these two is the more difficult. Experience unlocks truths which otherwise were closed against us; many passages of Scripture will never be made clear by the commentator—they must be expounded by experience. Many a text is written in a secret ink which must be held to the fire of adversity to make it visible. I have heard that you see stars in a well when none are visible above ground, and I am sure you can discern many a starry truth when you are down in the deeps of trouble which would not be visible to you elsewhere. Besides, I said it

opened us to the truth as well as the truth to us. We are superficial in our beliefs—we are often drenched with truth, and yet it runs off us like water from a marble slab! But affliction, as it were, plows us and subsoils us, and opens up our hearts, so that into our innermost nature, the truth penetrates and soaks like rain into plowed land. Blessed is that man who receives the truth of God into his inmost self—he shall never lose it, but it shall be the life of his spirit.

Affliction, when sanctified by the Holy Spirit, brings much glory to God out of Christians, through their experience of the Lord's faithfulness to them. I delight to hear an aged Christian giving his own personal testimony of the Lord's goodness. Vividly upon my mind flashes an event of some 25 years ago; it is before me as if it had occurred yesterday, when I saw a venerable man of 80, gray and blind with age, and heard him in simple accents, simple as the language of a child, tell how the Lord had led him and had dealt well with him, so that no good thing had failed of all that God had promised. He spoke as though he were a prophet, his years lending force to his words. But suppose he had never known a trial, what testimony could he have borne? Had he been lapped in luxury and never endured suffering, he might have stood there dumb and have been as useful as if he had never spoken. We must be tried, or we cannot magnify the faithful God who will not leave His people.

Again, affliction gives us, through grace, the inestimable privilege of conformity to the Lord Jesus. We pray to be like Christ, but how can we be, if we are not men of sorrows, and never become the acquaintance of grief? Like Christ, and yet never traverse through the vale of tears! Like Christ, and yet have all that heart could wish, and never bear the contradiction of sinners against yourself? Like Christ, and never say, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death"! O, sir, you know not what you ask. Have you said, "Let me sit at Your right hand in Your kingdom"? It cannot be granted to you, unless you will also drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism. A share of His sorrow must precede a share of His glory. O, if we are ever to be like Christ, to dwell with Him eternally, we may be well content to pass through much tribulation in order to attain to it.

Once more, our sufferings are of great service to us when God blesses them, for they help us to be useful to others. It must be a terrible thing for a man never to have suffered physical pain. You say, "I should like to be the man." Ah, unless you had extraordinary grace, you would grow hard and cold—you would get to be a sort of cast-iron man, breaking other people with your touch. No, let my heart be tender, even be soft, if it must be softened by pain, for I would rather know how to bind up my fellow's wounds. Let my eyes have a tear ready for my brother's sorrows, even if, in order to that, I should have to shed 10,000 of my own. An escape from suffering would be an escape from the power to sympathize, and that were to be deplored beyond all things. Luther was right when he said affliction was the best book in the minister's library. How can the

man of God sympathize with the afflicted ones, if he knows nothing at all about their troubles? I remember a hard, miserly churl, who said that the minister ought to be very poor, so that he might have sympathy with the poor. I told him I thought he ought to have a turn at being very rich too, so that he might have sympathy with the very rich! And I suggested to him that perhaps, upon the whole, it would be handiest to keep him somewhere in the middle, that he might the more easily range over the experience of all classes. If the man of God, who is to minister to others, could be always robust, it might be, perhaps, a loss; if he could be always sickly, it might be equally so—but for the pastor to be able to range through all the places where the Lord allows His sheep to go, is doubtless, to the advantage of His flock. And what it is to ministers, it will be to each one of you, according to his calling, for the consolation of the people of God.

Be thankful then, dear brethren, be thankful for trouble! And above all, be thankful because it will soon be over, and we shall be in the land where these things will be spoken of with great joy. As soldiers show their scars and talk of battles, when they come at last to spend their old age in the country home, so shall we, in the dear land to which we are hastening, speak of the goodness and faithfulness of God which brought us through all the trials of the way. I would not like to stand in that white-robed host and hear it said, "These are they who come out of great tribulation, all except that one." Would you like to be there to see yourself pointed at as the one saint who never knew a sorrow? O no, for you would be an alien in the midst of the sacred brotherhood. We will be content to share the battle, for we shall soon wear the crown and wave the palm.

I know that while I am preaching some of you have said, "Ah, these people of God have a hard time of it." So have you. The ungodly do not escape from sorrow by their sin. I never heard of a man escaping from poverty through being a spendthrift, I never heard of a man who escaped from headache or heartache by drunkenness or from bodily pain by licentiousness. I have heard the opposite! And if there are griefs to the holy, there are others for you. Only mark this, you ungodly ones, mark this. For you these things work no good. You pervert them to mischief; but for the saints, they work eternal benefit. For you, your sorrows are punishments; for you, they are the first drops of the red hail that shall fall upon you forever. They are not so to the child of God. You are punished for your transgressions—he is not. And let us tell you, too, that if this day you happen to be in peace, prosperity, plenty, and happiness—yet there is not one child of God here, in the very deeps of trouble, that would change places with you under any consideration whatever. He would sooner be God's dog, and be kicked under the table, than be the devil's darling and sit at the table with him. "Let God do as He pleases," we say, "for while here, we believe our worst state to be better than your best." Do you think we love God for what we get out of Him and for nothing

else? Is that your notion of a Christian's love to God? We read in Jeremiah of certain ones who said they would not leave off worshipping the Queen of Heaven, "For when," they said, "we worshipped the Queen of Heaven, we had bread in plenty, but now we starve."

This is how the ungodly talk, and that is what the devil thought was Job's case. Said he—"Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not set a hedge about him and all that he has?" The devil does not understand real love and affection, but the child of God can tell the devil to his face, that he loves God, even if He covers him with sores and sets him on the dunghill! And by God's good help, he means to cling to God through troubles ten-fold heavier than those he has had to bear, should they come upon him. Is He not a blessed God? Yes, let the beds of our sickness ring with it—He is a blessed God. In the night watches, when we are weary, and our brain is hot and fevered, and our soul is distracted, we yet confess that He is a blessed God. Every ward of the hospital where believers are found should echo with that note. "A blessed God?" "Yes, that He is," says the poor and needy here this morning, and so says all God's poor throughout all the land. "A blessed God?" "Yes," say His dying people, "as He slays us, we will bless His name. He loves us, and we love Him, and though all His waves go over us, and His wrath lies sorely upon us, we would not change with kings on their thrones if they are without the love of God."

O, sinner, if God smites a child of His so heavily, He will smite you one day! And if those He loves are made to smart, what will He do with those who rebel against Him and hate Him? "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." The Lord bless you, and bring you into the bonds of His covenant, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 88.

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NO. 1091

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 19, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And I say unto you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened unto you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened." Luke 11:9-10.

TO seek aid in time of distress from a supernatural being is an instinct of human nature. We say not that human nature unrenewed ever offers truly spiritual prayer, or ever exercises saving faith in the living God; but still, like a child crying in the dark, with painful longing for help from somewhere or other, it scarcely knows where, the soul in deep sorrow, almost invariably cries to some supernatural being for succor. None have been more ready to pray in time of trouble than those who have ridiculed prayer in their prosperity, and probably no prayers have been more true to the feelings of the hour than those which atheists have offered under the pressure of the fear of death. In one of his papers in the *Tattler*, Addison describes a man, who, on board ship, loudly boasted of his atheism. A brisk gale springing up, he fell upon his knees and confessed to the chaplain that he had been an atheist. The common seamen, who had never heard the word before, thought it had been some strange fish, but were more surprised when they saw it was a man, and learned out of his own mouth, "That he never believed till that day that there was a God." One of the old sailors whispered to the boatswain that it would be a good deed to heave him overboard, but this was a cruel suggestion, for the poor creature was already in misery enough—his atheism had evaporated, and he, in mortal terror, cried to God to have mercy upon him. Similar incidents have occurred, not once nor twice. Indeed, so frequently does boastful skepticism come down with a run at the last that we always expect it to do so. Take away unnatural restraint from the mind, and it may be said of all men that, like the comrades of Jonah, they cry every man unto his God in their trouble. As birds to their nests, hinds to their coverts, so men in agony fly to a superior being for succor in the hour of need. God has given to all the creatures He has made some peculiar form of strength—one has such swiftness of foot that at the baying of a hound it escapes from danger by outstripping the wind. Another, with outspread wings, is lifted beyond the fowler. A third, with horns, pushes down its enemy, and a fourth, with tooth and claw, tears in pieces its adversary.

To man He gave but little strength compared with the animals among which He placed in Eden, and yet man was king over all, because the Lord was His strength. So long as he knew where to look for the source of his power, man remained the unresisted monarch of all around him. That image of God in which he shone resplendent sustained His sovereignty over the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea. By instinct, man turned to his God in Paradise; and now, though he is to a sad degree an uncrowned monarch, there lingers in his memory shadows of what he was, and remembrances of where his strength must still be found. Therefore, no matter where you find a man, you meet one who in his distress will ask for supernatural help. I believe in the truthfulness of this instinct, and that man prays because there is something in prayer. As when the Creator gives His creature the power of thirst, it is because water exists to meet its thirst, and as when He creates hunger there is food to correspond to the appetite; so when He inclines men to pray it is because prayer has a corresponding blessing connected with it.

We find a powerful reason for expecting prayer to be effectual in the fact that it is an institution of God. In God's word we are over and over again commanded to pray. God's institutions are not folly. Can I believe that the infinitely wise God has ordained for me an exercise which is ineffectual, and is no more than child's play? Does He bid me pray, and yet has prayer no more result than if I whistled to the wind or sang to a grove of trees? If there is no answer to prayer, prayer is a monstrous absurdity and God is the author of it—which it is blasphemy to assert. No man who is not a fool will continue to pray when you have once proved to him that prayer has no effect with God, and never receives an answer. Prayer is a work for idiots and madmen, and not for sane persons, if it is indeed true, that its effects end with the man who prays!

I shall not, this morning, enter into any arguments upon the matter; rather, I am coming to my text, which to me, at least, and to you who are followers of Christ, is the end of all controversy. Our Savior knew right well that many difficulties would arise in connection with prayer which might tend to stagger His disciples, and therefore He has balanced every opposition by an overwhelming assurance. Read those words, *"I say unto you,"* I—your Teacher, your Master, your Lord, your Savior, your God—"I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you."

In the text our Lord meets all difficulties—first by *giving us the weight of His own authority*, "I say unto you"; next by *presenting us with a promise,* "Ask, and it shall be given you," and so on; and then by *reminding us of an indisputable fact,* "Everyone who asks receives." Here are three mortal wounds for a Christian's doubts as to prayer.

I. First, then, OUR SAVIOR GIVES TO US THE WEIGHT OF HIS OWN AUTHORITY, *"I say unto you."* The first mark of a follower of Christ is that he believes his Lord. We do not follow the Lord at all if we raise any questions upon points whereupon He speaks positively. Though a doc-

trine should be surrounded with 10,000 difficulties, the *ipse dixit* of the Lord Jesus sweeps them all away, as far as true Christians are concerned. Our Master's declaration is all the argument we need, "I say unto you," is our logic. Reason! We see you at your best in Jesus, for He is made of God unto us wisdom. He cannot err, He cannot lie, and if He says, "I say unto you," that is the end of all debate.

But brethren, there are certain reasons which should lead us the more confidently to rest in our Master's word upon this point. There is God's power in every word of the Lord Jesus, but there is special force in the utterance before us. It has been objected to prayer that it is not possible that it should be answered, because the laws of nature are unalterable, and they must and will go on whether men pray or not. Not a drop of water will change its position in a single wave or a particle of infectious matter be turned from its course, though all the saints in the universe should plead against tempest and plague. Now, concerning that matter, we are in no hurry to make an answer—our adversaries have more to prove than we have, and among the rest they have to prove a negative. To us it does not seem necessary to prove that the laws of nature are disturbed. God can work miracles, and He may work them yet again as He has done in days of yore, but it is no part of the Christian faith that God must work miracles in order to answer the prayers of His servants. When a man, in order to fulfill a promise, has to disarrange all his affairs, and so to speak, to stop all his machinery, it proves that he is but a man, and that his wisdom and power are limited. But He is God, indeed, who without reversing the engine, or removing a single cog from a wheel, fulfils the desires of His people as they come up before Him. The Lord is so omnipotent that He can work results tantamount to miracles without in the slightest degree suspending any of His laws. He did, as it were, in the olden times, stop the machinery of the universe to answer prayer, but now, with equally godlike glory, He orders events so as to answer believing prayers, and yet suspends no natural law.

But this is far from being our only or our main comfort. That lies in the fact that we hear the voice of one who is competent to speak upon the matter, and He says, "I say unto you, Ask and it shall be given you." Whether the laws of nature are reversible or irreversible, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find." Now, who is He who speaks thus? It is He who made all things; without whom was not anything made that was made. Cannot He speak to this point? O You eternal Word, You who were in the beginning with God, balancing the clouds, and fastening the foundations of the earth, You know what the laws and the unalterable constitutions of nature may be, and if you say, "Ask and it shall be given you," then assuredly, it will be so, be the laws of nature what they may. Besides, our Lord is by us adored as the sustainer of all things, and seeing that all the laws of nature are only operative through His power, and are sustained in their motion by His might, He must be cognizant of the motion of all the forces in the world—and if He says,

"Ask and it shall be given you"—He does not speak in ignorance, but knows what He affirms. We may be assured that there are no forces which can prevent the fulfillment of the Lord's own word. From the Creator and the Sustainer the words, "I say unto you," settles all controversy forever.

But another objection has been raised which is very ancient indeed, and has a great appearance of force. It is raised not so much by skeptics, as by those who hold a part of the truth. It is this—that prayer can certainly produce no result because the decrees of God have settled everything, and those decrees are immutable. Now, we have no desire to deny the assertion that the decrees of God have settled all events. It is our full belief that God has foreknown and predestinated everything that happens in heaven above or in the earth beneath and that the foreknown station of a reed by the river is as fixed as the station of a king, and, "The chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as the stars in their courses." Predestination embraces the great and the little, and reaches unto all things—the question is, why do we pray? Might it not as logically be asked why we breathe, eat, move, or do anything? We have an answer which satisfies us, namely, that our prayers are in the predestination, and that God has as much ordained His people's prayers as anything else! And so when we pray, we are producing links in the chain of ordained facts. Destiny decrees that I should pray—I pray. Destiny decrees that I shall be answered and the answer comes to me. Moreover, in other matters we never regulate our actions by the unknown decrees of God, as for instance, a man never questions whether he shall eat or drink because it may or may not be decreed that he shall eat or drink—a man never inquires whether he shall work or not on the ground that it is decreed how much he shall do or how little! As it is inconsistent with common sense to make the secret decrees of God a guide to us in our general conduct, so we feel it should be in reference to prayer, and therefore, we still pray. But we have a better answer than all this. Our Lord Jesus Christ comes forward, and He says to us this morning, "My dear children, the decrees of God need not trouble you, there is nothing in them inconsistent with your prayers being heard. 'I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you.'" Now, who is He who says this? Why it is He who has been with the Father from the beginning—"The same was in the beginning with God"—and He knows what the purposes of the Father are, and what the heart of God is, for He has told us in another place, "The Father Himself loves you." Now, since He knows the decrees of the Father and the heart of the Father, He can tell us, with the absolute certainty of an eyewitness, that there is nothing in the eternal purposes in conflict with this truth, that he who asks, receives, and he who seeks, finds. He has read the decrees from beginning to end—has He not taken the book and loosed the seven seals thereof, and declared the ordinances of heaven? He tells you there is nothing there inconsistent with your bended knee and streaming eyes, and with the Father's opening the windows of heav-

en to shower upon you the blessings which you seek. Moreover, He is Himself God—the purposes of heaven are His own purposes, and He who ordained the purpose here, gives the assurance that there is nothing in it to prevent the efficacy of prayer. "I say unto you." O you that believe in Him, your doubts are scattered to the winds, you know that He hears prayer.

But sometimes, there arises in our mind a third difficulty, which is associated with our own judgment of ourselves and our estimate of God. We feel that God is very great and we tremble in the presence of His majesty. We feel that we are very little and that, in addition, we are also vile, and it seems an incredible thing that such guilty nothings should have power to move the arm which moves the world. I wonder not if that fear should often hamper us in prayer. But Jesus answers it so sweetly. He says—"I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you." And I ask again, who is it that says, "I say unto you"? Why, it is He who knows both the greatness of God, and the weakness of man. He is God, and out of the excellent Majesty, I think I hear Him say, "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you." But He is also Man, like ourselves, and He says, "Dread not your littleness, for I, bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh, assure you that God hears man's prayer." The words come to us with the harmony of blended notes! The God, the man, both speak to us—"Dread not My majesty, your prayer is heard. Fear not your own weakness. I, as a man, have been heard of God."

And yet, again, if the dread of sin should haunt us and our own sorrow should depress us, I would remind you that Jesus Christ, when He says, "I say unto you," gives us the authority, not only of His person, but of His experience. Jesus was known to pray. Never any prayed as He did. Nights were spent in prayer by Him and whole days in earnest intercession—and He says to us, "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you." I think I see Him coming fresh from the heather of the hills, among which He had knelt all night to pray, and He says, "My disciples, Ask, and it shall be given you, for I have prayed and it has been given to Me." I think I hear Him say it with His face all bloody red and His garments as if He had trod the wine vat, as He rises from Gethsemane with His soul exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. He was heard in that He feared and therefore, He says to us, "I say unto you, knock and it shall be opened to you." Yes, and I think I hear Him speak thus from the cross, with His face bright with the first beam of sunlight, after He had borne our sins in His own body on the tree, and had suffered all our griefs to the last pang. He had cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me," and now, having received an answer, He cries in triumph, "It is finished!" And in so doing, He bids us, also, "Ask, and it shall be given you." Jesus has proven the power of prayer! "Oh but," says one, "He has not proven what it is to pray in trouble like mine." How grossly you attest the Savior's trouble was not as bad as yours! There are no depths so deep that He has not dived to the bottom of them. Christ has prayed out of the

lowest dungeon and out of the most horrible pit. "Yes, but He has not cried under the burden of sin." How can you speak so thoughtlessly!? "Was ever such a burden of sin borne by any man as was laid on Him?" True, the sins were not His own, but they were sins, and sins with all their crushing weight in them too! Yet was He heard and He was helped unto the end. Christ gives you, in His own experience, the most divine proof that the asking shall be followed by the receiving, even when sin lies at the door.

Thus much is certain, if you, who are believers, cannot believe in the efficacy of prayer on the very word of Christ, it has come to a strange pass; for, O beloved, you are leaning all your soul's weight on Jesus! If He is not true, then you trust a false Savior! If He speaks not truths, then you are deceived. If you can trust Him with your soul, you must of necessity trust Him with your prayers.

Remember, too, that if Jesus our Lord could speak so positively here, there is a yet greater reason for believing Him now, for He has gone within the veil, He sits at the right hand of God, even the Father, and the voice does not come to us from the man of poverty, wearing a garment without seam, but from the enthroned priest with the golden belt about His loins, for it is He who now says, from the right hand of God—"I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you." Do you believe in His name? How, then, can a prayer that is sincerely offered in that name fall to the ground? When you present your petition in Jesus' name, a part of His authority clothes your prayers. If your prayers are rejected, Christ is dishonored—surely, you cannot believe that? You have trusted Him, then believe that prayer offered through Him must and shall win the day!

We cannot speak longer on this point, but we trust the Holy Spirit will impress it upon all our hearts.

II. We will now remember that OUR LORD PRESENTS US WITH A PROMISE.

Note that the promise is given to several varieties of prayer. "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you." The text clearly asserts that all forms of true prayer shall be heard, provided they are presented through Jesus Christ, and are for promised blessings. Some are vocal prayers men *ask*—never should we fail to offer up, every day and continually, the prayer which is uttered by the tongue, for the promise is that the asker shall be heard. But there are others who, not neglecting vocal prayer, are far more abundant in active prayer, for by humble and diligent use of the means, they *seek* the blessings which they need. Their heart speaks to God by its longings, strivings, emotions, and labors. Let them not cease seeking, for they shall surely find. There are others who, in their earnestness, combine the most eager forms, both acting and speaking, for *knocking* is a loud kind of asking, and a vehement form of seeking. If our prayers are vocal speech with God, or if they are the practical use of means ordained, which is real prayer—or if they should, best of all, be the continued use

of both, or if they are expressed only by a tear or a sigh, or even if they remain quite unexpressed in a trembling desire, they shall be heard. All varieties of true prayer shall meet with responses from heaven.

Now observe that these varieties of prayer are put on an ascending scale. It is said, first, that we ask—I suppose that refers to the prayer which is a mere statement of our needs in which we tell the Lord that we need this and that, and ask Him to grant it to us. But as we learn the art of prayer, we go on further to seek—which signifies that we marshal our arguments, and plead reasons for the granting of our desires, and we begin to wrestle with God for the mercies needed. And if the blessings come not, we then rise to the third degree which is knocking—we become persistent. We are not content with asking and giving reasons, but we throw the whole earnestness of our being into our requests, and practice the text which says, "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." So the prayers grow from asking—which is the statement, to seeking—which is the pleading, and to knocking—which is the persistence. To each of these stages of prayer, there is a distinct promise. He who asks shall have—what did he ask for? But he, who seeks, going further, shall find, shall enjoy, shall grasp, shall know that he has obtained! And he who knocks shall go further still, for he shall understand, and to him shall the precious thing be opened. He shall not merely have the blessing and enjoy it, but he will comprehend it! He shall, "Understand with all saints, what are the heights and depths." I want you to notice this fact, which covers all—whatever form your prayer may assume, it shall succeed. If you only ask, you shall receive, if you seek, you shall find, if you knock it shall be opened. In each case, according to your faith, shall it be unto you. The clauses of the promise before us are not put, as we say in law, jointly—he who asks and seeks and knocks shall receive, but they are put separately—he who asks shall have, he who seeks shall find, he who knocks shall have it opened. It is not when we combine the whole three that we get the blessing, though doubtless if we did combine them, we should get the combined reply; but if we exercise only one of these three forms of prayer, we shall still get that which our souls seek after.

These three methods of prayer exercise a variety of our graces. It is a gloss of the fathers upon this passage that faith asks, hope seeks, and love knocks, and the gloss is worth repeating. Faith asks because she believes God will give; hope, having asked, expects, and therefore seeks for the blessing; love comes nearer and will not take a denial from God, but desires to enter into His house, and to sup with Him, and therefore, knocks at His door till He opens. But, again, let us come back to the old point—it matters not which grace is exercised, a blessing comes to each one! If faith asks, it shall receive; if hope seeks, it shall find; and if love knocks, it shall be opened to her.

These three modes of prayer suit us in different stages of distress. There am I, a poor beggar at mercy's door, I ask, and I shall receive—but

I lose my way so that I cannot find Him of whom I once asked so successfully. Well, then, I may seek with the certainty that I shall find! And if I am in the last stage of all, not merely poor and bewildered, but so defiled as to feel shut out from God, like a leper shut out of the camp, then, I may knock and the door will open to me.

Each of these different descriptions of prayer is exceedingly simple. If anybody said, "I cannot ask," our reply would be, "You do not understand the word. Surely everybody can ask." A little child can ask. Long before an infant can speak, it can ask—it need not use words in order to ask for what it wants, and there is not one among us who is incapacitated from asking. Prayers need not be fine. I believe God abhors fine prayers. If a person asks charity of you in elegant sentences, he is not likely to get it. Finery in dress or language is out of place in the street. I heard a man in the street one day, begging aloud by means of a magnificent oration. He used grand language in very pompous style, and I dare say he thought he was sure of getting piles of coppers by his borrowed speech. But I, for one, gave him nothing. I felt more inclined to laugh at his bombast. Is it not likely that many great prayers are about as useless? Many prayer meetings' prayers are a great deal too fine. Keep your figures and metaphors and parabolic expressions for your fellow creatures, use them for those who want to be instructed, but do not parade them before God. When we pray, the simpler our prayers are the better—the most plain, most humble language which expresses our meaning is the best.

The next word is *seek,* and surely there is no difficulty about seeking? In finding, there might be, but in seeking there is none. When the woman in the parable lost her money, she lit a candle and sought for it. I do not suppose she had ever been to the university, or qualified as a lady physician, or that she could have sat on the School Board as a woman of superior sense—but she could seek. Anybody who desires to do so can seek, be they man, woman, or child; and for their encouragement the promise is not given to some particular philosophical form of seeking, but "He who seeks finds."

Then, there is *knocking.* Well, that is a thing of no great difficulty. We used to do it when we were boys, sometimes too much for the neighbors' comfort. And at home, if the knocker was a little too high, we had ways and means of knocking at the door even then; a stone would do it, or the heel of a boot, anything would make a knocking. It was not beyond our capacity by any means. Therefore, it is put in this fashion by Christ Himself, as much as to tell us, "You need have no scholarship, no training, no talent, and no wit for prayer—ask, seek, knock—that is all and the promise is to everyone of these ways of praying.

Will you believe the promise? It is Christ who gives it. No lie ever fell from His lips. O doubt Him not. Pray on if you have prayed, and if you have never prayed before, God help you to begin today!

III. Our third point is that JESUS TESTIFIES TO THE FACT THAT PRAYER IS HEARD. Having given a promise, He then adds, in effect—"You may be quite sure that this promise will be fulfilled, not only because I say it, but because it is and always has been so." When a man says the sun will rise tomorrow morning, we believe it because it has always risen. Our Lord tells us that, as a matter of indisputable fact, all along the ages, true asking has been followed by receiving. Remember that He who stated this fact knew it. If you state a fact, you may get the reply, "Yes, as far as your observation goes, it is true," but the observation of Christ was unbounded. There was never a true prayer offered unknown to Him. Prayers acceptable with the Most High come up to Him by the way of the wounds of Christ. Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ can speak by personal knowledge and His declaration is that prayer has succeeded—"Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds."

Now, here we must, of course, suppose the limitations which would be made by ordinary common sense and which are made by Scripture. It is not everyone who frivolously or wickedly asks or pretends to ask of God that gets what he asks for. It is not every silly, idle, unconsidered request of unregenerate hearts that God will answer. By no means—common sense limits the statement so far. Besides, Scripture limits it again, "You have not because you ask not or because you ask amiss"—there is an asking amiss which will never obtain. If we ask that we may consume the good things upon our lust, we shall not have them. If we ask for that which would not be to our good, we shall be heard by receiving no such answer as we desired. But those things being remembered, the statement of our Lord has no other qualification—"Everyone who asks receives."

Let it be remembered that frequently, even when the ungodly and the wicked have asked of God, they have received. Full often in the time of their distress, they have called upon God, and He has answered them. "How can you say that?" asks one. No, I say not so, but so says Scripture. Ahab's prayer was answered, and the Lord said, "See how Ahab humbles himself before Me? Because he humbles himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house." So also, the Lord heard the prayer of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, who did evil in the sight of the Lord. (2 Kings 13:1-4). The Israelites also, when for their sins were given over to their foes, cried to God for deliverance, and they were answered—yet the Lord Himself testified concerning them that they did but flatter with their mouth. Does this stagger you? Does He not hear the young ravens when they cry? Do you think He will not hear man, who is formed in His own image? Do you doubt it? Remember Nineveh. The prayers offered at Nineveh, were they spiritual prayers? Did you ever hear of a church of God in Nineveh? I have not, neither do I believe the Ninevites were ever visited by converting grace—but they were, by the preaching of Jonah, convicted that they were in danger from the great Jehovah—and they proclaimed a fast, and humbled themselves, and God heard their prayer, and Nineveh for a

while, was preserved. Many a time in the hour of sickness, and in the time of woe, God has heard the prayers of the unthankful and the evil. Do you think God gives nothing except to the good? Have you dwelt at the foot of Sinai and learned to judge according to the law of merit? What were you when you began to pray? Were you good and righteous? Has not God commanded you to do good to the evil? Will He command you to do what He will not do Himself? Has He not said that He, "Sends rain upon the just and upon the unjust," and is it not so? Is He not daily blessing those who curse Him, and doing good to those who despitefully use Him? This is one of the glories of God's grace, and when there is nothing else good in the man, yet if there is a cry lifted up from his heart, the Lord deigns full often to send relief from trouble. Now, if God has heard the prayers even of men who have not sought Him in the highest manner, and has given them temporary deliverances in answer to their cries, will He not much more hear you when you are humbling yourself in His sight, and desiring to be reconciled to Him? Surely there is an argument here.

But to come more fully to the point with regard to real and spiritual prayers, everyone who asks receives without any limit whatever. There has never been an instance yet of a man really seeking spiritual blessings of God without his receiving them. The publican stood afar off and so broken was his heart that he dared not look up to heaven, yet God looked down on him. Manasseh lay in the low dungeon; he had been a cruel persecutor of the saints. There was nothing in him that could commend him to God, but God heard him out of the dungeon, and brought him forth to liberty of soul. Jonah had, by his own sin, brought himself into the whale's belly, and he was an ill-tempered servant of God at best, but out of the belly of hell he cried and God heard him. "Everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened." *Everyone!* If I needed evidence, I would be able to find it in this tabernacle. I could ask anyone here, who has found Christ, to bear witness that God heard his prayer. I do not believe that among the damned in hell there is one who dares say, "I sought the Lord and He rejected me." There shall not be found, at the last day of account, one single soul that can say, "I knocked at mercy's door, but God refused to open it." There shall not stand before the great white throne, a single soul that can plead, "O Christ, I would have been saved by You, but You would not save me; I gave myself up into Your hands, but You did reject me; I penitently asked for mercy of You, but I had it not." Everyone who asks receives. It has been so until this day—it will be so till Christ Himself shall come. If you doubt it, try it, and if you have tried it, try it again. Are you in rags?—that matters not, *everyone* who asks receives! Are you foul with sin?—that matters not, *everyone* who seeks finds! Do you feel as if you were shut out from God altogether?—that matters not, either "Knock, and it *shall* be opened to you, for *everyone* who asks receives." "Is there no election there?" Yes, yes, doubtless there is, but that does

not alter this truth which has no limit to it whatever—*"Everyone!"* What a rich text it is! *"Everyone* who asks receives."

When our Lord spoke thus, He could have pointed to His own life as evidence—at any rate, we can refer to it now, and show that no one asked of Christ who did not receive. The Syro-Phoenician woman was at first repulsed when the Lord called her a dog, but when she had the courage to say, "Yet the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table," she soon discovered that everyone who asks receives. She, also, who came behind Him in the crowd and touched the hem of His garment, she was no asker, but she was a seeker—and she found.

I think I hear, in answer to all this, the lamentable wail of one who says, "I have been crying to God a long while for salvation; I have asked, I have sought, and I have knocked, but it has not come yet." Well, dear friend, if I am asked which is true, God or you, I know which I shall stand by, and I would advise you to believe God before you believe yourself! God will hear prayer, but do you know there is one thing before prayer? What is it? Why, the gospel is not—"He who *prays* shall be saved"—that is not the gospel! I believe he will be saved, but that is not the gospel. I am told to preach to you. "Go you into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; he"…what?…"he who believes and is baptized shall be saved." Now, you have been asking God to save you—do you expect Him to save you without your believing and being baptized? Surely you have not had the impudence to ask God to make void His own word! Might He not say to you, "Do as I bid you, believe My Son. He who believes on Him has everlasting life." Let me ask you, do you believe Jesus Christ? Will you trust Him? "Oh, I trust Him," says one, "I trust Him wholly." Soul, do not ask for salvation any more—you have it already—you are saved! If you trust Jesus with all your soul, your sins are forgiven you, and you are saved! And the next time you approach the Lord, go with praise as well as with prayer, and sing and bless His name. "But how am I to know that I am saved?" asks one. God says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." Have you believed? Have you been baptized? If so, you are saved. How do I know that? On the best evidence in the entire world—God says you are! Do you need any evidence but that? "I want to feel this." Feel! Are your feelings better than God's witness? Will you make God a liar by asking more signs and tokens than His sure word of testimony? I have no evidence this day that I dare trust in concerning my salvation but this—that I rest on Christ alone with all my heart, soul, and strength. "Other refuge have I none," and if you have that evidence, it is all the evidence that you need seek for this day. Other witnesses of grace in your heart shall come, by-and-by, and cluster about you, and adorn the doctrines you will profess—but now your first business is to believe in Jesus!

"I have asked for faith," says one. Well, what do you mean by that? To believe in Jesus Christ is the gift of God, but it must be your own act as well. Do you think God will believe for you, or that the Holy Spirit be-

lieves instead of us? What has the Holy Spirit to believe? You must believe for yourself or be lost. He cannot lie; will you not believe in Him? He deserves to be believed, trust in Him, and you are saved, and your prayer is answered.

I think I hear another say, "I trust I am already saved, but I have been looking for the salvation of others in answer to my prayers." Dear friend, you will get it. "He who asks receives, and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened." "But I have sought the conversion of such a one for years with many prayers." You shall have it, or you shall know one day why you have it not, and shall be made content not to have it. Pray on in hope. Many a one has had his prayer for others answered after he has been dead. I think I have reminded you before of the father who had prayed for many years for his sons and daughters, and yet they were not converted, but all became exceedingly worldly. His time came to die. He gathered his children about his bed, hoping to bear such a witness for Christ at the last that it might be blessed to their conversion—but unhappily for him he was in deep distress of soul. He had doubts about his own interest in Christ. He was one of God's children who are put to bed in the dark—this, being above all, the worst fear of his mind, that he feared his dear children would see his distress and be prejudiced against religion. The good man was buried and his sons came to the funeral—and God heard the man's prayer that very day—for as they went away from the grave, one of them said to the other, "Brother, our father died a most unhappy death." "He did, brother; I was very much astonished at it, for I never knew a better man than our father." "Ah," said the first brother, "if a holy man such as our father found it a hard thing to die, it will be a dreadful thing for us who have no faith when our time comes." That same thought had struck them all, and drove them to the cross—and so the good man's prayer was heard in a mysterious manner. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but while God lives, prayer will be heard. While God remains true to His word, supplication is not in vain. The Lord give you grace to exercise it continually. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
LUKE 11:1-13; PSALM 107:1-31.

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PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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A HOLY CELEBRATION
NO. 1092

A SERMON DELIVERED
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord."
Exodus 12:42.

OF course you will understand that our text relates to the Passover. This is its first meaning. The Israelites were enjoined never to forget that they were once slaves in Egypt, and that God with a strong hand brought them forth. To help their memories an ordinance was instituted, which was to be celebrated every year by every person in the nation; and the young children were to be taught the meaning of that ordinance, so that never in time should it be forgotten that God passed over His own people when He smote His enemies in the land of Egypt. To this day, the Israelites continue to hold this epoch in their national history among their most cherished traditions; and although the rites with which they observe the Passover are so distorted that we might well say they cannot sing the Lord's song in a strange land, yet the Passover is still Israel's celebration; and as long as there exists a Jew, there will not lack a man to tell how his fathers came out of Egypt in that night which is to be much observed.

But, dear friends, the Passover was a type of our Lord's passion. He is the Lamb of God's Passover. It is by His blood that we are preserved; it is by virtue of His sacrifice that God passes over us, who through faith have received the sprinkling of that blood. Never let us forget that night which is to be much remembered—that night when the Lord was taken from prison and from judgment—when there was none to declare His generation—when for the transgression of His people, He was smitten. It was a dark night when He arose from the table where He had supped for the last time with His disciples and went to Gethsemane, there to begin to suffer, and in the very beginning to be sorrowful, even unto death. Then to be taken off to Pilate and to Herod, and to Caiaphas to be condemned to die, to be lifted high upon the cross, to bleed, to suffer physical pain, mental anguish, and unknown spiritual grief never to be estimated by us. It was a night to be remembered in all our generations. Let it never be forgotten. Whatever we do not know, my brethren, let us know the cross; whatever subject may have a second place in our estimation, always let the ransom paid on Calvary be first and foremost. I would have you study much the four records of the evangelists. Dwell upon them. Christians ought to be familiar with every little incident of their Savior's death. There is teaching in every nail; the sponge, the vinegar, and the hyssop

all have a meaning in them, and the spear that pierced His side is full of instruction. We ought to study them—study them again, and again, and again. Here is the very essence of our confidence! This is the pillar upon which our souls lean. If there is any hope for sinners; if there is any consolation for sufferers; if there is any cleansing for the guilty; if there is any life for the dead, it is here. In Your words Emmanuel, it is here and only here. O, dwell at the cross, then. Whatever your minds may forget to consider, let them never lose the savor of this, or leave the meditation of Christ crucified. Keep to this. Remember that to help our frail memories, God has given us an ordinance. Even as He gave to Jews the Passover, He has given to us the Lord's Supper. "This do you, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

It is important beyond everything that you should remember a bleeding Savior. Therefore He gives you the wine cup to symbolize His blood, and that blood separated from the flesh, and therefore He gives you the bread as the emblem of flesh without the life-blood in it—that the two together might be the symbols to you of a violent death suffered by your Lord on your behalf. Instructive are the symbols; do not miss the main intention of them, namely, to draw you with cords of love and bands of a man, to the person of your vicarious sacrifice—Jesus Christ bleeding for you.

And while you harbor this much in your own thoughts, speak much of it to others. Let your testimony be full and frequent. If you are ministers, preach much about the, "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." If you are teachers of others in the Sunday school or anywhere else, make this the main head, and front of your teaching—Christ in the sinner's place; Christ bearing the sinner's sin; Christ smitten with the sinner's stripes, and by His stripes healing sinners, and putting away their sin. Insist upon this again and again, and again. Make it plain to all, so that if they reject it, they may reject that which was evidently set forth before them. Unveil the mystery, the sacred mystery of the incarnate God bleeding in the sinner's place. Yes, should men upbraid you as foolish because you have nothing else to teach but this—keep on, and be thus foolish! Let them say that you have nothing but monotony to repeat concerning the blood! Let them have that monotony again sounded in their ears. To that, to that, to that bend all your strength; to that direct all their attention, for, surely, the night of the passion—or call it day if you will, for though it was day, naturally, it was more nearly night in many senses—surely, that "is a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt. This is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations."

This, however, is not exactly the subject to which we propose to direct your meditation this evening. It is the night of our regeneration; it is the night of our conversion—(night or day, it matters not which)—the time in

which we actually received salvation and were made partakers of this Passover, that we would just now admonish you to remember.

At that particular time important events transpired for us. The most important events to us that ever occurred in our history happened on that occasion. There was a point in our life up to which we were dead; then we were made alive. There was a point up to which we were condemned; then, in an instant, we were acquitted There was a moment up to which we were enemies to God by wicked works, and at once, by an act of God's grace, we were reconciled, and were made to be God's children, and were God's enemies no more! I want to look back upon that. Our first birth would have been a hurt to us if it had not been for this second birth. Our being in this world would be a calamity; it had been better for us that we had never been, if it had not been for this second creation, which gives us our well-being! O, it was a night to be observed before the Lord, in which we came out of Egypt, passed from death unto life and were saved!

Now, what events transpired on that occasion?

Well, the first was, it pleased God to show us the blood of Jesus, and to apply it to our souls. Do you remember it? I remember well when this came to my heart. You had heard the doctrine of the cross before, but you *felt* it, then. You knew that the blood could save, but at that moment you had faith in that blood, and it did save you. It was applied to you by the hyssop of faith, which sprinkled it upon the lintel and doorposts of your house, and you were saved. Do you remember the place—the spot of ground? Some of us remember, and can never forget it. O, happy day that brought us to the Savior's feet, took all our guilt away, and banished all our fears; removed the enmity, and made us friends; prostrated, conquered, and subdued us; then cheered, comforted, and blessed us! No man has anything in the incidents or the records of his life that can compare in importance with that moment in which the blood was applied to his guilty conscience. "Well," says one, "I think nothing of it." No, because you never felt it, but if you had ever felt it, you would. He that has ever felt the weight of the law's great whip upon his conscience—has ever had those lashes laid about him till he hated his very life and longed to die—he will know what it is to have that whip taken away, to have oil and wine poured into those wounds, to have them healed in a moment, and to find himself ready to leap for very joy because of the wondrous things which God has done for him! They who know it not, ought not to say anything about it; they are strangers to it. I know some who are constantly prone to speak lightly of conversion. Why should they? If they do not know anything about it, let them hold their tongues until they do. But those who have been converted—those who have been regenerated, and know it—if they are honest men, and I believe they are accepted as such in other matters—let them be believed here also, when they declare that there is nothing like it under the sun for joy to a man's soul. This appli-

cation of the blood of sprinkling is the thing above all others to be remembered. Whatever else happened that night, let us remember this, that the old leaven was purged out of our hearts. At once, as soon as ever we believed in Jesus, we found ourselves hating the things we loved before. We did not hear the law which said, "You shall not do this, and you shall do that." But we felt our heart changed, so that we did not want to do the evil, and we longed to do the right. And now, though since then, we have found another law in our members, warring against the law of our mind, and causing a frequent conflict—yet the true man, the *I,* the real *I*—longs after holiness! And it is now, no sorrow to be obedient. It is bliss to obey. And it is now, no joy to be sinful, but it brings a thorn into the eyes, a palpitation to the heart, and a trembling into the soul, to stain the hands or defile the conscience with sin. That is a thing to be remembered. Where such a thing as that has happened, it never can be forgotten. And thank God, this has not occurred merely to those who were amiable before, and honest before, but it has occurred to some of the very worst of mankind. O, we could tell stories tonight, which have come under our own observation, of some of the most abandoned transgressors who have become some of the purest characters, full of "sweetness and light," from the very moment of their conversion. The more they were formerly known to delight in sin, the more they have subsequently humbled themselves before God, and the more they had lent themselves to do iniquity, the more they have addicted themselves to works of righteousness, seeking to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. O beloved, it is a night to be observed of the Lord in which the leaven is put away, and we are made to keep the feast in godly sincerity.

That night, too, or that day, whichever it may have been, we remember that we enjoyed a feast upon our Savior. The blood was sprinkled, and so we were saved, and then we sat down at the table and began at once to feast upon the precious things stored up in the person of Christ. I remembered one thing that troubled me; it was that it did seem too good to be true. That I was absolved forever from all my sins, I did believe, for God said it, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." But this used to stagger me, "Am I really, now, in the condition of a child of God, as much a child of God as I am a child of my own father? Has He loved such an insignificant worm as I am? Will He surely bring me into the promised rest, and give me a place and a name among His beloved, at His right hand?" O, how I revolted in such thoughts as that, when faith was strong, when first I knew the Lord. Do you remember it, dear brethren? I want you to let your souls fly back to those early mornings with Christ, when the dew was upon your soul, when the birds began to sing in your hearts, and their notes had not yet grown stale to you. O, the delicacies of the first days with Christ! O, the sweetness of the love of our espousals! Do you not remember how you fed upon Christ

to the very fullest and rejoiced in Him? Well, look back and say it is a time to be observed before the Lord.

And, then it was that for the first time in your life, dear friends, you felt that you were free. Israel in Egypt was free from that night. They were slaves and brick makers, but the moment that blood was over the door, and God had sent forth the angel to smite the Egyptians, the Israelites were free. They were even pressed to go away. O, do you remember how free you felt? You could sing with John Kent—

"Now free'd from sin, I walk at large,
The Savior's blood's my full discharge!
At His dear feet my soul I lay,
A sinner saved, and homage pay."

You remember how you rejoiced in the liberty in which Christ had made you free. You wanted to tell other people about it. You could not hold your tongue. You could have sung as we have been singing tonight—

"Now, oh joy, my sins are pardoned,
Now I can, and do believe!"

You were free, but finding yourself so, you also discovered for the first time, that you were a pilgrim. For the Israelites, as they ate that paschal supper, had to do so with their loins girt and staves in their hands, like men that were to leave that country. You found that now you were a stranger. If you had an unconverted parent, you could not talk to him or her about your soul. If you had old companions, you felt you must bid them farewell, for they would not understand you. If you did not know you were a pilgrim before, you found it out the very next day, when you began to talk with them. Your speech betrayed you, and they began at once to scoff and jeer at you. They called you a Presbyterian or a Methodist, or by some other name—thus you soon found that because you were not of the world, therefore the world would hate you. Perhaps you were surprised at it, but you plucked up courage, and you took up Christ's cross, and you have carried it till now! At length you begin to love it, to esteem it an honor, and to count it to be greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt which you left behind. O, it is a time to be remembered, and I want you to recall it now—those blessed days when we began to live! I think we might date our existence from that time. When we count up our birthdays, we ought always to reckon that among them. To leave that out seems to be leaving out the one that makes all the others worth having. I remember a man's tombstone on which was inscribed—*"Here lies one who died a child three years old at the age of eighty."* You are only as old as the number of years you have lived unto God. All the rest you might wish to be wiped out— yes and the blood of Christ has wiped them out, and you are alive from the dead, new-born souls. O, let the time of your second birth be a season to be remembered before the Lord.

Important results will flow to you from the preservation of this memorial.

It will humble you and foster the grace of humility. Have you become an old experienced Christian, my brother, my sister? Go back to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. While I stand here tonight, preaching to a great many of you, I feel brought down to my proper bearings when I remember how I sat, at about the age of 15, a poor trembling sinner under the galleries of a Primitive Methodist meeting house, and heard Christ preached, and came to Him. O, that ever I should live to preach the gospel to you! I feel humbled at the very thought of it. Get back, you great professors—get back to the cross again! There is nothing about which to praise yourselves. Look to the hole of the pit from which you were dug—remember what you were when God met with you, and remember what you would have been if He had not met with you. Israel would have died like the Egyptians, if it had not been for the blood. And you might have been dead and damned at this hour, instead of sitting here to praise God, if it had not been for special grace. It was no goodness of yours that made you God's child. You know it, for when the Lord cast an eye of love on you, He could not see anything in you to love. You were all unholy and unclean; you were according to Isaiah's description—"From the sole of the foot to the crown of your head you were all wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores," and yet He looked upon you. Remember that and be humbled. Remember your conversion also, and let your faith be refreshed. It does us good to remember. Especially some of you, my dear brothers and sisters, who are now a long way on the road—it does you good to remember what peaceful hours you had at first. O, what lively joy you had then! Well, I daresay you have purer joy now, deeper peace, more unruffled calm. There was a good deal of flesh about you then, but still, for all that, as a man never will forget his honeymoon, so can we never forget that honeymoon with Christ! There was a certain exquisite sweetness in it that still lingers on our souls. We have the flavor of that honeycomb in our mouths up to this moment and we shall never get it out. Well, it will revive our faith to remember it, and it will bring back our love too. We shall begin chiding ourselves, and saying, "Why haven't we done more for His dear name?" O, what we thought we would do when we first began to serve Jesus! We have not been true to those vows and promises, but yet what a mercy that, if we have not been true, He has! He has never failed us, but has kept every promise, and never left us in any emergency. We have been held up till now, and who could have held us up but our Lord? We have sometimes been in a very perilous condition; temptation has almost overcome us, but—

"We know the arm on which we lean,
The name in which we trust!"

And we will bless that name. I am sure if we were to live in recollection of our conversion, we would have our zeal kindled for the conversion of others. Ah, you get altogether away from your first standing-point, some of you. You used to be willing to run anywhere to talk of Jesus, and if you had half a hope of influencing anyone, you had no fear about speaking to

him. Now, perhaps, you have become so familiar with the gospel, that though it ought to have more charms, through the hardness of your heart it has fewer charms with you than it had. Oh, be ashamed, and be confounded about it, and get back, get back, to your first love, and you will feel the first zeal come again! I sometimes wonder what old churches would do if it were not for new converts. The new converts put fresh blood into the veins of the church. The church would die of sheer imbecility were it not that great sinners come in with their great love! They do what Simon would not do—they not only wash the Savior's feet and perform the common acts of piety, but they begin to anoint His head with an extraordinary zeal. And they set the church an example of doing great things and in this way keep us somewhat alive. But I would like to be a young convert always. I would like to be green in old age with young love to Jesus, and would not you, too, brothers and sisters? Well, if you would have it so, go back to the night or day to be observed, and remember it this evening with tears of gratitude. Cannot some of you picture that young man—(yes, you have got boys as old as you were then)—cannot you remember the young man that dropped into Park Street and heard the word of God there? Don't you remember your experience at that time, young woman? You do not call yourself a young woman now, but do you remember when you sat and wept, and your heart broke, and when the very thing happened that we have been singing of in our hymn—that first look, and that second look from Him who hung upon the cross? You have not forgotten that. Many days have passed over some of you, and you are getting near to the end of life. But will you not remember, and lift now a new song for the old mercies, and magnify God whom you have tried and proved this score of years, and so tried Him that you can speak well of His name?

Maybe there is a question which will naturally arise in some minds.

Do I hear someone say, "I trust I am a Christian; I believe I have experienced a great change of heart, but I do not remember the time"? Beloved friend, there is an old legal maxim that, "Possession is nine points of the law," and as long as you have Christ, I am not going to raise many questions about when you got Him. Surely, if the hold you have is equivalent to nine points of the law, it represents *all* the points of the gospel. If you have Christ, He will never be taken away from you. If you are resting upon His blood and righteousness, it is well enough. And if you are producing the fruits of the Spirit, and your life is what it should be, by your fruits you are to be known. We shall ask you no more questions. "But I should like to know exactly when I was converted," says one. Well, I do not wonder that you should, but suppose you do not know and cannot ascertain, what then? Suppose there is a person here who does not exactly know his age, and he wants to find the register of his birth? And suppose he has tried, and cannot find it? Now, what is the inference that he draws from his not being able to tell the day of his birth? Well, I do

not know what the inference may be, but I will tell you one inference he does *not* draw. He does not say, therefore, "I am not alive." If he did, he would be an idiot, for if the man is alive, he is alive whether he knows his birthday or not. And if the man really trusts in Jesus, and is alive from the dead, he is a saved soul whether he knows exactly when and where he was saved or not. At the same time, do not let me be misunderstood. "You *must* be born-again." There is, and must be, in every person who will enter heaven, a time—a point and a place, too—in which he did pass out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. I believe that in many cases it is not easy to tell the precise point, for with them it is like the rising of the sun. Sometimes the sun is up before you know whether he has risen or not, because a long morning twilight precedes his actual appearance above the horizon. So it may be that spiritual life begins by slow degrees before we quite perceive it there. But there *is* a time when it begins; there is a point—there is a place, in which the unsaved become saved, and the unregenerate become regenerate, and there is a broad line between the two characters. A great gulf is fixed between them which only the supernatural grace of God can enable any one to cross. Do not doubt that; do not imagine that I call it in question, for I would not deceive you. I believe there are many people who think they have been converted, who are not—who have experienced *a* change, but not *the* change—that have made a change of life, and a very good change too, but still it is not being born-again. A man may change from a drunkard to a sober man, and that is a noble thing—but that will not save him. He may change from being a thief to being honest, and that is a grand thing—but that will not save him. He may change from being a habitual violator of the Sabbath, to being a constant attendant upon the means of grace, and that is a good thing—but that will not save him. It is not the washing of the stain; it is the washing of the soul that is affected in regeneration. The man's love must be different; the man's whole affections must run in another channel—in the direct opposite channel from that which he pursued before. In a word, "Except a man is born-again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." There must be a time of your new birth, or else, as the Lord lives, you shall never see His face with joy. You must pass under the hand of the Holy Spirit, and nothing short of that will enable you to enter heaven. "It troubles me," says one. Does it? I am glad of that. It is a great mercy when there is enough life to be troubled—a real blessing when that trouble leads to Christ. For if you have ever been to Christ, you have found the Savior, and if you are now looking to Christ, you are saved. Do you ask, "But how about that great change?" I reply that every believer must have experienced that change, for the greatest of all worlds is faith. What does Christ say?—"This is the work of God (or the God-like work), that you believe on Jesus Christ whom He has sent." To believe in Jesus is the climax of virtue, and the surest evidence of a new heart that can possibly be given. Have you that

evidence? If you have not, be troubled. May the Lord trouble you more and more, lest you be troubled in the world to come with a grievous trouble from which there is no relief!

To full many here present the personal inquiries we suggest are momentous and urgent. You say that our preaching is inquisitorial. Be it so, but you are the only inquisitors—each one of you into his own estate and his own pedigree. Murmur not, therefore, if I press you to be strict and rigid. Whatever verdict you pass, it will be referred to a higher court, there to be affirmed or annulled. I felt, before I came into this pulpit, that I might never speak to you again, or that at any rate, some of the hearers now present, would, before my return, be sure to be in another world. We do not speak to a "perhaps," because from long familiarity with this great congregation, we note how regularly some die each week. Of our membership we lose so many in the year as to make a weekly item of names to be removed from the roll, because they have joined the church triumphant above. And in this congregation we know that it is a rare thing that there should ever pass a week without someone who has been our hearer, being transferred to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Now, if I never speak to you again, or you shall never hear this voice again, I would like to put it to you, my dear friend—might not this night become to you a night to be observed unto the Lord for bringing you out of the land of Egypt? Might not this be a night much to be observed with you as long as ever you should live? "Oh," says one," I do not know. I am hopeless about ever being saved." Where does the hopelessness lie? It does not lie in your character, for have we not told you a thousand times over, that "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool," if you will but believe in Jesus? I know that you are not tied up with the notion that you have got to do some works to save yourself. If so, I must have spoken very strangely, or you must have listened to me very oddly, for have we not every Sunday told you that it is, "Not by works, lest any man should boast," but by the grace of God, and the free favor of God towards the most undeserving of men? God saves no man for his goodness.

However bad you are, God is willing to forgive and to accept you, and receive you as His child. "No," you say, "it is not that, but I still despair of ever being saved. I cannot come up to the point." Then whose fault is that, I want to know? Whose fault is that? I will ask you. You say, "I have tried to be saved, and I am not." Did you ever go to God in the silence of your chamber, alone, and confess to Him that you were guilty? Did you ever lie at the foot of His throne, and say, "O God, I deserve Your wrath. I have broken Your law; I justly deserve Your anger"? Have you done that? Now, He has said, "He who confesses his sin shall find mercy." If you have not confessed your sins, whose fault is it that you have not got His mercy? Well, then, have you ever believed in Jesus?—that is, have you trusted in Him who, being God, became man that He might suffer instead of you what was due from God on account of your sins? "Ah, that

is the point; I break down there," says one, "I cannot believe." In what can you not believe? Cannot you believe what God tells you? Do you believe the Bible to be God's word? "Yes!" Then, I ask, how dare you say, "I cannot believe it"? In believing that Book to be true, you believe what it contains to be true! And God's own testimony concerning His Son is this—"He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him," and that whoever trusts in Him *is* saved, and his sins are forgiven him at once. "Oh, but I do not feel that I am forgiven." Who says you are to feel yourself forgiven? God says you are sinful, and admonishes you to confess your sins, to renounce your sins, to supplicate pardon for your sins, to believe in the remission of your sins by the atonement offered once. It is enough for you that the witness of God is what you are to believe. It is not your feeling that is to furnish the rule of your faith. You shall feel happy by-and-by, you shall feel a change of heart by-and-by; but the first thing is to believe God's witness concerning His Son. "But oh, somehow or other I cannot attain to faith." Stay, have you ever tried? "Well, I have sat down and tried to believe." Now, be a reasonable man. Were I to tell you a something that had occurred to your immediate advantage, you would sit down and try to believe it, looking at the possibilities of its being true with many a wishful thought. Or suppose you were compelled to doubt it, and thought that I was mistaken, yet if you had an interest, you would go and look at the papers. You would go and inquire at offices where there are telegrams of fresh news. You would ask persons who were likely to judge whether such an event was at all possible, and in that way you would never rest till you could satisfy yourself about the truth of the statement!

Did you ever search God's Word in that way? Have you read the story of the four evangelists, to see whether it is so? Have you gone to hear sermons with this in your mind—"I desire to hear in order that I may believe"? Have you been really anxious to try and believe it? I speak to you as a believer in the Bible. And to me it seems monstrous that I should believe what is in the Bible, and yet not trust in Jesus Christ! But have you ever sought to trust Him? "Well, I don't know." No, but I *do* know, a little. You are not in earnest. That is the point. You are earnest sometimes, if you are stirred up, but you go to sleep again. The fact is, there is some private sin you don't like to give up, or else there is some old companion that you like to stay on with, and you know you cannot go with him and enjoy his conversation, and yet be a Christian. Ah, there is something that keeps you back; for when the Lord makes a man resolute to be saved, all the devils in hell cannot daunt His resolution! When once the soul says, "I *must* be reconciled to God; I *must* have peace; I *must* have the Savior; I *must* be cleansed by the precious blood"—who is there to stop him? Will God stop him? He delights in mercy. Will Jesus stop him? His flowing wounds invite him! Will the Holy Spirit stop him? It were blasphemy to suppose it. Who is to stop him then? "Why, Satan."

But is Satan by force or fraud to be a match for Christ? "Well, his own heart will stop him." Yes, but God is greater than his heart, and is able to withstand his temptations and to help his infirmities. I charge you soul, if you would be saved, get to your chamber and tell God so. Go and speak to Him in the simplest language—"My God, I have offended You, have mercy upon me. I have followed my own will, but now I desire to be obedient to You. Change my heart; give me Your Holy Spirit. I have no merits of my own, but You have given Jesus to die for sinners. Lord, I am a sinner. I put my child-like trust in You. O Lord, save me." Do you think you will ever be cast away? Why, you will be the first sinner that ever was, who sincerely came to Jesus that way. It cannot be.

Do not be afraid, soul. If you cast yourself on Christ, you can no more be sent to hell than Christ can. If you have cast in your lot with Christ, and have linked yourself to Him by faith, because He lives, you also shall live. Perhaps you know how Mr. Ryland put it? When his wife was dying, and she was deeply desponding, though she had been for years a Christian, he said to her—"Well, where are you going, Betsy?" She had been saying to the nurse that she felt she was going to hell, and she said to her husband, "Oh, my dear, I am going down to hell." "Betsy," he said, "what do you mean to do when you get there?" "Oh, John, don't talk so," she said. "But do you think you will pray, Betsy, when you get there?" "Pray? Yes," she said, "I will never leave off praying." "And do you think you will praise God when you get there?" "Ah, yes, I will never, never leave off praising God, whatever He does to me." "Why," he said, "they would say, 'Here is praying Betty Ryland, and look, she is beginning to praise God! Throw her out—we can't bear to have her here.'" Of course, if any soul that really believed in Jesus were sent there, it would cause a revolution in heaven and hell! It cannot be. God must change before He will let a sinner perish who trusts in Christ. O, it is wonderful what power faith has. I remember standing at the Mansion House one day waiting to cross over to the other side when the omnibuses were coming from all the corners of the compass, and I was looking for an opportunity to run in and out between them. A blind man came up and said, "I am sure you will lead me across; I am sure you will lead me across." I am sure I did not want the job, but I was quite sure that if the blind man was sure I would do it, I could not decline to do it—and I did it accordingly. I did not like to have a blind man's confidence thrown away. It seemed as if his confidence was my compulsion. And, oh, blind sinner, lay hold upon the garment of Christ tonight, and say, "Jesus, I believe You will lead me into heaven. At any rate, I mean to trust You to do it. I have done with saving myself, and I mean to rely on You, and You only." I tell you, your faith will compel Him; your trust shall hold Him fast. He will do anything for faith. Was He not overcome at the brook Jabbok by Jacob's faith? Did not faith in the woman who touched the hem of His garment win a cure? And when He spoke to the Syro-Phoenician woman and called her a

dog—did she not win healing for her daughter by the brave stand she made by her faith? The Lord waits to be gracious! Trust Him, sinner. The Lord help you to do so, and He shall have the glory, forever and ever!

And let me just add here, that it is a night to be much observed among saints in their fellowship one with another. It does us good to listen as well as to talk, when the mighty arm and the gracious hand of God, stretched forth on our behalf, furnishes the theme of conversation. There seems to me somehow or other to be a bias given to the whole life by the first call a man receives, as though it tinted the character with a purer hue than most of the subsequent incidents that belong to individual experience. Besides, dear friends, in recalling the circumstances, there will spring up a tender sympathy as well a devout gratitude, like that to which Paul bears witness—"And they glorified God in me." What love feasts those are in which we commemorate the dawn of spiritual life! How free from conflicting opinions, and turbulent passions! As Cowper sings—

"Hearts may be found that harbor, at this hour,
The love of Christ in all its quickening power
And lips unstained by folly or by strife,
Whose wisdom, drawn from the deep well of life
Tastes of its healthful origin, and flows
A Jordan for the ablution of our woes.
O days of heaven, and nights of equal praise,
Serene and peaceful as those heavenly days
When souls drawn upward in communion sweet,
Enjoy the stillness of some close retreat;
Discourse, as if released, and safe at home,
Of dangers past, and wonders yet to come,
And spread the sacred treasures of the breast
Upon the lap of covenanted rest." **Amen.**

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EXODUS 12.

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PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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QUESTIONS OF THE DAY AND THE QUESTION OF THE DAY
NO. 1093

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 26, 1873,
BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"What do you think of the Christ?"
Matthew 22:42.

IT WAS a custom among the Jews before the Paschal Lamb was killed to shut it up for several days for examination. It was at first selected with great care, for it must be "A lamb without blemish, a male of the first year"; and lest at the first choice some blemish should have been overlooked it was continually inspected from day to day. It was meet that the Lamb of God's Passover should pass through a similar ordeal. It is remarkable that our Savior, during the days which preceded His being offered up for us on Calvary was examined and questioned, both by friends and foes. The sharpest eyes were brought to bear upon Him—eyes made preternaturally keen through the malice of wicked hearts. He passed under the scrutiny of Pharisees, of Herodians, of Sadducees, and of lawyers. They tested Him in all parts, and tried Him from all points; yet they found no fault in Him. "They marveled, and left Him, and went their way"; but, like Pilate, they found no fault in Him. Read the Chapter before us in that light, and it becomes singularly interesting, as exhibiting the unassailable perfection of our Divine Redeemer. Let us pray that when we are proved and tested we also may endure the fiery trial, and be found to be pure gold. As they tried our Master so will they also try us: may we, through His triumphant Grace, endure even to the end.

As I looked upon our Text in my study, another current of thought passed through my mind. The Text stands in a remarkable connection; the Chapter which contains it opens with the parable of the wedding feast. The marriage banquet was spread, the guests were invited; they would not come, and therefore special messengers were sent to compel as many as they could find to partake of the feast. Then, as to warn ministers in all generations that the greatest hindrances they would ever meet with would arise from the quibbling, critical spirit of mankind, we have in the same Chapter a long account of the various cavilers that assailed our Lord. When we preach the Gospel, men do not repel us point blank by telling us that there is no importance in our message; instead they suggest difficulties, propound frivolous Inquiries, or fly off at a tangent upon some other less important topic; they evade the pursuit of the Gospel by plunging into the mists of debate. Like the cuttle-fish, which escapes by clouding the water all around it, so do they avoid the invitations and declarations of the Word of God by raising questions of a secondary character. It was so in Christ's day; His adversaries met His arguments with quibbles, or with wrangling. It is certainly so now; we can-

not get at men—they stave us off, they parry our home thrusts, and baffle us by hiding behind the shields of evil questions. We cannot get close to them; they lie entrenched behind the ramparts of disputation, and with other questions they push off the main question, and keep far from them the soul-saving Truth of God. The Lord Jesus Christ here teaches His ministers the art of leaping over the sinner's defenses, dashing into the center of his stronghold, and smiting him with the edge of the sword by means of the inquiry—"What do you think of the Christ?" We should deal with matters of disputation as He did; answer them, as far as they are to be answered, with wisdom and prudence, but then He would have us carry the war into the enemy's country and attack the human conscience with the demand, "What do you think of the Christ?" This morning I purpose, first, to speak upon *questions of the day,* and then to press home upon you *THE question of the day*—the question of all questions in which life and death are wrapped up!

I. First, a little upon some of the QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, not with any intent of interesting you in them, but rather of calling you somewhat away from them, lest they too much engross you.

The first question of the day is nearly akin to that which was proposed to our Lord by the Pharisees and the Herodians; it deals with the connection between politics and religion, the vexatious question of Church and State. How far does Caesar's rule go? Where does it end? And where are we amenable to God alone? This inquiry, in a very practical shape, presses upon the Dissenters of England. I very largely attribute the partial decline of religious prosperity in some of our churches to the interest which has been taken in the questions which naturally arise out of the unscriptural and adulterous connection at present existing between the Church and the State in this land. We have, each of us, a certain amount of mental power, of time, of energy, and no more; and if it is a necessity, as it *is* a necessity, that every Nonconformist should contend for his rights and liberties, and should never rest till perfect religious equality is established in the land—then so much of our strength is taken away from higher and better matters to attend to that which, nevertheless, it is unavoidable that we should consider. It is not possible for us to cease from our efforts to obtain deliverance from the degrading yoke which now burdens us! We are told that we enjoy toleration—the very word is an insult! What would the members of the dominant sect think if we talked of tolerating *them?* We shall never be satisfied until all religious communities stand upon an equal footing before the Law; Caesar has no right to demand of us that we shall support the religion or the superstition which he chooses to select. An Established Church is a spiritual tyranny! We wear no chains upon our wrists, but on our spirits our oppressors have thrust fetters which gall us worse than bands of steel! We are compelled, as a part of the nation, to support through taxation, a church whose business it is to pull down that which with prayers and tears we live to build up, and would even die to maintain! As Protestant lamenters, we see the Truths we preach assailed by an army of Anglican Papists whom we are compelled to support that they may oppose our most cherished designs! Popery is this day installed and endowed among us, and we are

compelled to acknowledge its puppets as the clergy of our own national Church! That which our fathers died to overthrow, we are compelled to support! We cannot help being indignant; we would be less than men if our blood did not boil within us at such injustice! If men want Popery, or any other form of error, let them pay for it themselves, and call it their own; but to foist their superstition on us as part of the nation is an oppression against which we appeal to the Judge of all the earth! Men cannot long bear to be saddled with the maintenance of a superstition which they abhor—least of all can the descendants of the Ironsides endure it, who, though they have laid aside all carnal weapons, cannot quite forget the fields on which their fathers made the Cavaliers feel the weight of their right arms! The insult to our consciences which is embodied in the present Church and State is a daily provocation to us as men and Christians! Of the present unrighteous domination I would say, Down with it! Down with it, all you who have a spark of justice left in your souls! As for us, we will never rest till we are free from this excuseless injustice, and free we will be, as sure as God, the God of Righteousness yet lives!

Now, we cannot think about all this and be earnest about it; we confess it, and are grieved it is so without very much of our strength running in that direction. But that is strength which we would rather spend upon pure, spiritual religion; we desire to be always preaching Christ, and only Christ. We desire to be building up His Church, and living at peace with all our brethren; we need, in all things, to be giving unto God all our heart and soul, and strength; but this altercation concerning God and Caesar will come in; it imperatively demands our attention, and so it distracts us in a measure from our higher work, and therefore, the sooner it is done with, the better! We cannot be always taken up with this matter; we count the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be worth 10,000 times as much! The Savior, when the Caesar question was brought forward, answered it most completely. They said, "Shall we pay tribute to Caesar?" "Whose money is this?" asked Jesus. "It is Caesar's money." "Very well; you have evidently submitted to Caesar's government. You are under his sway, therefore pay to him the tax which he demands of you, but still by no means forget that you are under God's government; therefore render unto God the things that are God's." He drew a line of distinction here which always ought to be maintained. "To Caesar the things that are Caesar's." To maintain order, to repress crime, to preserve individual liberty, to protect each man's rights—this is Caesar's business. To teach us religion; is Caesar to do that? God forbid, for what religion will Caesar teach us? Is he a Pagan? He will enforce idolatry! Is he a Papist? He will ordain Popery! Is he an atheist? He will establish infidelity. Recollect the days of Queen Mary, and see what Caesar is capable of when he meddles with religion! It is none of Caesar's business to deal with our consciences! We will never obey Caesar in any matter which touches conscience; he may make what laws he will about religion, but by our loyalty to God, we pour contempt on Caesar when he usurps the place of God! He is no more to us than the meanest beggar in the street if he goes beyond his own legitimate authority. Render to Caesar, Caesar's; politics to politicians; obedience, cheerful and prompt, to civil rulers; to God, and to God

only, things that are God's! And what are these? They are our hearts, our souls, and our consciences. Man himself is the coin upon which God has stamped His Image and superscription (though, alas, both are sadly marred), and we must render to God our manhood, our wills, our thoughts, our judgments, our minds, our hearts. Consciences are for God. Any law that touches a conscience is null and void, ipso facto, for the simple reason that kings and parliaments have no right to interfere in the realm of conscience. Conscience is under law to none but God! We do not believe in liberty of conscience towards God. We are bound towards Him, to believe what He tells us, and to do what He bids us; but liberty of conscience in respect to all mankind is the natural right of every man of woman born, and it ought to be tenderly respected.

Our Lord here lays the controversy to sleep by telling us to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Now, if there is any person here who is unconverted, but whose mind is much occupied with the Church and State dispute, whichever side of the question he may take up, I would earnestly say to him—important as this is, and to some of us it is the question which, next to our soul's Salvation, weighs most heavily on our hearts, yet still, first of all, attend to the more serious inquiry—"What do you think of the Christ?" Is He the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Mighty God in your esteem? Are you saved by Him? If not, I would bid you waive the topic upon which we have just now spoken until the higher question is answered. When a man is at the point of death, the question is, what can we do to restore him? When the vessel is going down, the one thing necessary for every man is, "How can I get to the lifeboat?" Sometimes in a desperate case, as that of sudden shipwreck, the love of life may drive men to do even more than they would do for themselves, and tempt them in their mortal terror to become forgetful of the claims of others. O, I wish that something like that excess of diligence, if such could be, would come upon men's hearts with regard to their souls! There are enough saved men who can fight out the ecclesiastical dispute; you unsaved ones had better go to the Cross, and there seek and find Salvation. The question has, doubtless, vast importance, but with you the far more important matter is to believe in Christ! Suppose you were to die tonight? It would then be a small matter to you what may be done in the next session of Parliament with the question of the separation of Church and State. If you have to stand before the bar of God before this year is out, the Established Churches will be of small account to you if you are banished from Heaven and hope! Therefore, see to it, I pray you, that no business interferes with the business of your soul!

A second problem of the age also crops up in this Chapter—the inquiry into the details of the future state. I think none of us remember a time in which so many strange theories have been brought forward with regard to the doom of the ungodly, and the condition of the righteous. Some are teaching, and teaching with great vehemence that Believers, as well as others, die at the time when they depart out of this world, and that there is no more existence for the righteous until the Day of the Resurrection! They teach that there are no such things as immortal

souls, but that even the godly dissolve into dust, and cease to be until the Resurrection raises them out of the grave. Now these are solemn topics, and I believe that it is highly necessary to be orthodox upon them. I do not think any man wastes his time that stands up to defend the old faith with regard to these things; I am persuaded that the generally received views are truthful and healthful, and that the novelties which swarm around us will breed abounding mischief. Still, for all that, there are other matters to be thought about besides that carnival of errors which comprises soul-sleeping, annihilation, universal restoration, and the like. There is a prior question, and that is, "What do you think of the Christ?"

However, since the facts of the future ought to be known, our Savior dealt with the Sadducees' heresy. The Sadducees, believing in pure materialism, and denying the Resurrection, the Savior declared to them the certainty of a future state, and took out of their hands a weapon of fancied difficulty. In answer to their question about the woman married seven times, He declared that in the next world men are neither married nor given in marriage—where death's ravages are unknown; there is no need of reproduction! Since the Sadducees denied that there were angels, our Lord, without noticing their skepticism, declared that the risen ones are as the angels of God—thus killing two birds with one stone! He corrected their views as to what men would be in the other world, and quietly confirmed that there are spirits called angels. Then the Treat Teacher proved beyond question the continuous existence of the saints by reminding the Sadducees of the Voice that spoke out of the bush to Moses. The Pentateuch was the great authority of the Sadducees; they did not reject the other Inspired Books, but they held the writings of Moses in superior veneration. Therefore our Lord, with wisdom, selects from the book of Exodus, and quotes the Words of the Lord's address to Moses out of the bush, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." He then added a well-known Jewish axiom, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living," and routed the skeptics in one battle! It followed clearly enough that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not alive in Moses' day; they were in their graves—that was certain—therefore it was equally certain that a something which was truly Abraham was not in the grave, but was somewhere else; that is to say, that the *souls* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were living, and living in the possession of God, though their bodies had been consumed by the worms! There was the Savior's argument. The Patriarchs, as to their bodies, had been dead for some generations, yet God called Himself their God! Therefore, in the truest sense, they could not be really dead, but must still exist; it has been said that the nerve of this argument lies in the fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were, as to their bodies, dead at the time; that is true, and yet the argument would be strong if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been alive at the time. Note this well, and consider the point. When God says to a man, "I am your God," what an infinite blessing He bestows, and how much the words imply! As long as God exists He belongs to that man, and therefore the man *himself* must exist as long as God does, for that which does not exist cannot possess anything! That which possesses

anything must itself exist; therefore it follows that as Abraham and all other saints must forever possess God, as their God, according to the Word, "I am your God"—therefore they must eternally exist! In order to receive and experience the sum and substance of the Divine Promise, nothing less than eternity will suffice! When God bestows a blessing upon a man, He gives him such a range of being as shall give him the capacity for enjoying that blessing; temporal blessings have attached to them a natural being! The vast *spiritual* blessing of possessing God is infinite, and needs an everlasting existence for its enjoyment; the saints are still living or else God could not be their God—and the saints are still conscious, for God is not the God of unconscious things that by hundreds of years together neither think, nor feel! He is the God of those who are living in the sense of being *active;* they still worship and adore; they still love and serve. Their rest with Jesus is not that of unconsciousness; they are living—not merely existing, but living unto the living God. This was our Savior's proof, and it is one which is overwhelmingly convincing.

The Doctrine of the continued existence of the righteous is bound up with that of the Resurrection. Immortality and the Resurrection are kindred Truths of God. When God said, "I am the God of Abraham," He did not say "I am the God of Abraham's soul." If He had, the existence of Abraham's soul would have fulfilled the Promise. But, "I am the God of Abraham," includes the whole of his person, and Abraham was body as well as soul—it was necessary, therefore, that Abraham's *body* should rise to enjoy the fullness of God! There was, as a learned writer observes, an advance all the way; God was the God of Abraham while he was in the body of this death; He was the God of Abraham when unclothed, and He will be the God of Abraham when he is clothed with his house which is from Heaven.

Now, my dear Hearers, I would at once call you back to the main point. These questions ought to be thought of, and you should receive the teaching of Christ about them, and yield to none of the inventions of these evil days. Yet is there for you this more pressing question—"What do you think of the Christ?" Have you a part and a lot in Him? Are you saved by Him? It seems to me mere folly for an unconverted man to be asking, "What is the nature of Heaven? What is the form of the resurrection body?" Did you ever see a poor, shivering, miserable beggar in the street, starving for lack of food, and yet curious about the exact details of the imperial revenue for the current quarter of the year? What business can that be of his? Is not this his first business—to win a morsel of bread? And should it not be *your* first concern, as a man, that you should be pardoned? That you should be accepted before God? That you should be saved from Hell? Speculations upon the Second Advent, and the prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel—what have they to do with you while you are without Christ? Are you mad, you unsaved ones? Will you gratify curiosity while your souls are perishing for lack of the knowledge of Christ? The Wrath of God abides on you! You are like a man in a condemned cell waiting for the day of execution! Is this a time to be puzzling your head about things which concern others, but which as yet certainly do not concern *you?* "What do you think of the Christ?" Put other things

aside until that is settled! Then you shall attend to them in order, according as God shall help you.

There are, however, other questions which will arise—questions upon theology. One of these was asked of our Savior by the Pharisees; they wanted to know which was the first, and chief Commandment. They believed that Moses had given them 365 Commandments, corresponding to the number of days in the year, and that he had given them 248 prohibitions; they made a great point of knowing the exact numbers. Among them there were great disputes as to which entailed the more sin; the breaking of this or the breaking of that other command. Some maintained that the *ceremonial* ordinances were more important than the *moral* commands; another party held that the ceremonial precepts were very secondary as compared with the moral Law, and Scribes and lawyers wrangled without end. Our Savior answered their question by telling them that the love of God and the love of their neighbor were the two great Commandments, and so He ended that matter! But He did not permit their thoughts to stay there; He pushed on to the more vital question, "What do you think of the Christ?" At the present day, if you speak to a man about his soul, he will ask, "Are you an Arminian, or a Calvinist?" To this we reply, "Dear Fellow, are you saved? That is the matter; we will tell you what we are another time; for the present you need a Savior, and *there* ought your mind to settle." "Well," he asks, "what is your opinion in reference to Baptism?" Our answer is ready enough, for we see the Lord's will plainly enough in His Word, but we beg you to think more of Jesus than of Ordinances. "But," asks the quibbler, "are you Presbyterian in church polity, or do you favor Episcopacy?" Dear Friend, what has that to do with you? Have you passed from death unto life? That is the point! A man is drowning, and I put out my arm to rescue him, but he will not grasp my hand till I can assure him that I pronounce a certain Latin word correctly; is he not an idiot? My dear Fellow, right quantities or false quantities are inconsiderable things compared with your being drowned—let us get you on dry land, first, and then we will talk about long vowels and short ones!

So also we cannot afford to split hairs while souls are being lost. We are far from saying that any Doctrine is insignificant and that any Truth of God is unimportant—a grain of Truth is worth dying for; still, there are solemn facts to be thought of *before* we come to controversial Doctrines! There are persons who will say, "But how would you celebrate the Lord's Supper?" I reply, "We do not celebrate it at all with such as you are; until you know the Savior, we have no Lord's Supper for you whatever." "But," he says, and he begins to question you whether there should be an altar of stone, or a table of wood, and whether the elements should be dispensed by a priest, or by a minister, or by a common Christian—"These are very weighty matters, and I must have them all solved at once." Dear Friends, we also think them weighty, and our testimony about them never hesitates, but we are not going to dispute with you, for we earnestly entreat you, first of all, to know Christ, and Him Crucified! Make your calling and election sure, and then we will be ready to give you reasons from the Word for our faith and practice. At present, "What do you think

of the Christ?" is the only inquiry which demands your care. I think I spoke out plainly enough, just now, upon the first question referring to politics and religion to let you know that I am by no means lukewarm on minor points. And I would speak with equal definiteness here about Doctrines and Ordinances if it were necessary to show you that I do not undervalue them. But for all that, "What do you think of the Christ?" is far above all other questions for a man who is unredeemed; and I do beseech you not to let those other points destroy you, as they may do by taking away your thoughts from the one thing necessary! Till you are saved, you need your mind concentrated on the one essential point; after that we will teach you to observe all things whatever the Lord has spoken. Just now, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved," is the most important Text in the Bible for you to consider.

II. Now let us come to the second part of our subject—THE QUESTION OF ALL QUESTIONS, the question of the day, the question of all days until days shall end—"What do you think of the Christ?"

Observe that it is an inquiry which concerns the Savior. "What do you think of the Messiah, the Sent One, the Christos, and the Anointed One of God?" Do you think His errand was necessary? Was there a need for such a Person to come here? Was a Savior necessary in your case? He came to save men from their sins—have you any sins? Have you sins from which you cannot escape of yourself, for which you can make no Atonement yourself? Have you felt this? Do you feel it now? If you say you have no sin, your thoughts of Christ will be that He was a needless commissioner from Heaven as far as your case is concerned. He came not to call those who need *not* to be saved; why should He do such a work of supererogation? Have you felt sin? Do you confess it? Do you believe, therefore, that God, in sending Christ to save His people from their sins, has done a gracious and merciful act? Do you accept the Person whom He has sent? Are you willing to be saved by Him? Are you willing to be saved on His terms, which are that you yield yourself up to Him, that He shall be your ONLY Savior that He shall have all the glory of your Salvation that you shall not be saved by any merit of your own, but be pardoned through His blood and Righteousness? Do you agree to that? Does your soul say, "Yes," to that before the Living God? If so, your thoughts of Christ are right; but if not, if you kick at His Sacrifice, and say, "I see no need for it." If you think it insufficient to put away sin, and if, therefore, you do not trust in Him, then you have made God a liar by not believing His Testimony concerning His Son! But I trust that this morning your thoughts of Christ are just these—"I am a sinner deserving punishment from God; I see that God has punished sin in Jesus Christ, and I trust myself in Christ, the Atoning Sacrifice, wholly and alone. I give myself up to Christ Jesus that He my save me, that He may rule me, that He may make me Holy even as He is Holy. If He will but have me, I have no opposition to Him. No, I feel, on the contrary, a complete yielding of my soul to His Divine Will, happy to be saved by such a Savior." I am favored, indeed, to be addressing persons who feel this in their very souls! Whatever else you have to perplex you, Beloved, always hold to this, and let your thoughts of our dear Savior ever be humble, ever sweet,

and ever pleasant to your hearts. Then shall you be strong for sacred service! But never, never, never cease to think well of Jesus!

Please notice that this question not only concerns the Savior, but it concerns *the Person of the Savior,* and this is a point too often forgotten. We speak of the Lord's teachings and doings, but we ought, more often, to remember that He is a *real* Person—not a name, or a fiction; not a shadow that has passed across the historic page, but a Man of whom we may ask the question—"Whose Son is He?" as the Master asked it here. Now, shall I put the question to you? What do you think of the Person of Christ? Do you understand how Sonship and Lordship blend in Him? Do you understand Him to be the Son of David, and therefore, yielding obedience on earth, both to man and to God, He became the Servant of servants for our sake? Do you believe He was obedient, even unto death; and yet do you comprehend that He is Lord of All, that the government is upon His shoulders? Is Christ your Savior, and yet your Master? Has He washed your feet, and yet do you bow down and kiss His feet? Has He done all for you, and now do you feel that He is enthroned in your heart's best love, and that you would do anything and everything for Him? Jesus bleeding on the Cross, and yet exalted on the Throne—can you reconcile these two things? The crown of thorns, and the crown of universal monarchy—have you seen how these two are united in His blessed Person? What do you think of Christ—Sonship and Lordship blended? And have you seen, and does your faith know that He is both Human and Divine—Son of David, truly such by natural descent; Son of God, also by Nature and Essence? It is no use our mincing words—we cannot believe in the Salvation of a man who does not believe in the Deity of Christ! We would have the utmost charity possible, but we must have honesty, too, and it seems to us that the rejection of Christ as God is the rejection of His Salvation altogether! Beloved, have you accepted Christ, the whole Christ, the Man Christ, the God Christ, Immanuel, God with Us? Is He your trust? If not, may the Lord bring you to look the question in the face before any other! Put all the rest in the background, and consider this—Have you thought rightly concerning God in Christ Jesus, the Savior of men?

Have you thought rightly of Him, too, in the matter of the opposition which is rendered to His Kingdom, and yet of the sure conquest He will gain? Notice how the Holy Spirit has led David to write concerning it, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit you at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool." Christ is opposed; do you see it? Do you also lament it? Does your faith, at the same time, grasp the thought that all this opposition will be overcome; that Christ will yet sit upon the Throne of His Father David, and will sway His scepter over the fiercest of all His adversaries? Oh, it is well when we can get to this—Christ in my own soul fighting with sin! Christ resisted by my depravity and corruption! And yet Christ sure to reign, and sit as King when all my sins are overcome, and all my corruptions overthrown! It is a blessed sight to see the struggling, and soon the triumphing of the Savior, and to think of Him in that respect! I exhort you to make sure work about the Divine Person of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and to let all other things go or wait their

turn for many a long day until you know Him, and are found in Him—and are saved with a complete Salvation in Him!

But I must pass on a little further. This question is not only about the Redeemer and His Person, but it is about thoughts. "What do you *think* of the Christ?" It has been said that we shall not be hanged for our thoughts. It may be, but many have been *damned* for their thoughts. Indeed, this is the *source* of damnation—that men will think amiss, and from thinking amiss go on to speak and act amiss. "What do you think of the Christ?" This is a searching inquiry to some, for their relation to Christ consists of anything else you like except *thinking!* Many who attend a place of worship never give themselves the trouble of thinking; they say a prayer night and morning, but as to *thinking,* that is out of the question! They go to their "sacraments," and they do not mind how often, but they never *think!* What is a priest but an invention to think *for* me, to do my religion *for* me? But the question is, "What do *you* think of the Christ?" If there is no thought in your religion, there is no life in it! Man invents mechanical forms and modes in order to get away from the horrible necessity of thinking, but in so doing he destroys his soul! Every man should do his own thinking, and do it at home, too, and not need to put it out for somebody else to perform it for him. The mind must exercise itself towards God, and if it does not, our worship is dead worship. Our Savior suggests to us that we must think and think of Him—"What do you think of the Christ?" Is it a pleasure to you to *think* of Christ? Do you so love Him; is He so comely in your esteem that you delight to *think* of Him? Do you frequently *think* of Christ, just as you often think of those you love? And do you naturally *think* of Christ just as we naturally think of food without being reminded of it, seeing we have to live upon it, and therefore inward appetites render impossible to forget? Have you a *passion* for Christ? These are the kind of inquiries which try a man. Is your nature so changed that Christ has become your Friend, and therefore you delight in Him? Has He become your Food, and therefore you inevitably long for Him, and must do so because of new appetites and cravings within your nature? Do you think of Christ joyfully? Can you say—

"In the heavenly Lamb
Thrice happy I am,
And my heart it does leap
At the sound of His name?"

Do you think of Christ, desiring still nearer access, and a clearer view of Him, sighing out with sacred love-sickness, saying, "O that I were with Him where He is, or that He were with me where I am"? Do you think of Him with admiration, wondering at the Altogether Lovely One? Do you think of Him with an ardent wish to be conformed to His Image, saying, "Gracious Savior, make me like Yourself "? Do you think of Him with practical love, so that you help His cause, succor His poor people, proclaim His Truth, aid His Church, and pity sinners for whom He shed His blood? Do you so think of Christ as to speak well of Him, and commend Him to the love of mankind? Do thoughts of Jesus keep you back from sin, and incite you to continue in the paths of Holiness for His name's sake? Do you so think of Christ that you *pray for* Him, that you *give to* Him, that you *work for* Him? "What do you think of the Christ?" Is He

worthy of your actual, practical, diligent service, or is it to be all talk and idle chat, and broken resolutions, and vain professions? *"What do you think of the Christ?"*

Then notice, the question is about your own thoughts. How pleased we all are with the work of judging other people! There are certain persons to whom, if you will speak against all Churches and all religious people, and say, "How all are departing from the Truth, and all going aside," you are furnishing them with the sweetest possible nuts! They delight in sacred scandal! Now it may be true that everybody is very bad, but I do not particularly see what I have to do with that. The main thing, at any rate, for the most of you to consider is—"What do you think of the Christ?"—you! "Ah," says one, "I like to see abuses exposed." Very well, come here and let us turn your heart inside out. "What do you think of the Christ?" "I like a searching ministry," says one. Very well, then, let this question search you, and go right through your soul like a hurricane—"What do you think of the Christ?" "Alas, my neighbors are great Sabbath-breakers." What are you, Sir? Cannot you break the Sabbath, and yet attend a place of worship? Do you not carry burdens in your soul on Sunday; and is it not ordained to be a day of *rest* for the mind as well as for the body? "Ah, but some of my neighbors are very erroneous in their doctrine." What are you the better for your orthodoxy? That is the point. May it not involve more sin to have the Light of God, and not to act upon it, than to be in the dark altogether? I beseech you, each person for yourselves—put the question to your own soul, "What do you think of the Christ?" How many times after a sermon have you said, "I wonder how So-and-So could sit still and listen to that part of it; I thought as I was sitting there, what a home-thrust the preacher gave So-and-So"? Were such thoughts right? Is that the way to hear the Gospel? Are we not to hear for *ourselves?* Should there not be a *personal* application on all matters? I push home this demand with vehemence—with leave or without leave, I beseech each one of you to answer to this inquiry—"What do *you* think of the Christ?"

And here let me close by saying that this question, though it only deals with *thoughts*, is entangled with every other spiritual subject. If you are not right *here,* you are right in *nothing*. The hymn says correctly—

"You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of HIM."

I never knew a man think little of the Savior, but what he thought little of sin; there was never a man who thought little of the Mediator, but what he had very strange ideas of the Godhead; never a man went astray in his thoughts about Christ, but he also was going wrong in his thoughts of himself. If you know Jesus to be a Savior to the fullest, putting away all sin by the Sacrifice of Himself—then you will know yourself to be a sinner, with sin *to* put away—and soon you will know yourself to be a saint with sin *put* away, and so you will get right ideas of everything else! Go to the Fountainhead, I pray you! Make heart-work of that essential question—"What do you think of the Christ?" If you would allow me to catechize you upon your spiritual state, I shall not treat of any peculiarity of creed or sect, but I shall begin and end with this one thing—"What

do you think of the Christ?" If a man has a disease in the vitals, the mere adornment of his person will avail little—the inward parts must be set right! And if you are wrong in reference to the Lord Jesus, the evil must be remedied by the Grace of God, or you will die eternally! Remember, if our views of Christ are wrong, our state is wrong. When a man is born-again, he knows Christ; he may think he knew Him before, but he did not, for only the *spiritual* man understands spiritual things. If your present state is wrong, your future state will be wrong unless you are set right in reference to the Lord Jesus, so that the question before us encompasses both time and eternity!

Do I address any Brother or Sister here who is already saved, but who possesses a scant measure of joy? Dear Brother or Sister, I should not wonder but what the reason of your despondency may mean unworthy thoughts of Christ Jesus! If you knew more about your union with the Living Savior, about the perfection that is given to all His people through His blood and Righteousness, surely your joy would overflow, and your despondency would cease! If we permit groveling ideas of our Lord to dwell in our minds, our whole spiritual nature will decline in consequence. Narrow notions of the Redeemer narrow our love to Him, and our enterprise for His Glory. Low thoughts of Christ will palsy the strongest arm, but a great Savior, greatly loved, leads to great deeds! See Him to be lovely beyond all things, and let Him engross your heart, and fire your spirit, and He will make a man of you to the fullness of your manhood so that you shall serve God wonderfully! Let not Jesus be a shadow to you, or your religion will be unsubstantial; let Him not be just a name to you, or your religion will be nominal; let Him not be just a myth of history, or your religion will be mere fancy; let Him be not just a teacher, or you will lack a Savior! Let Him be not alone an exemplar, or you will fail to appreciate the merit of His blood. He must be the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, the All in All of your spirits! As He is God's Beloved, so let Him be your Beloved! As He is Lord of lords, let Him be your Lord, and when any inquire of you, "What do you think of the Christ?" tell them, "He is all my Salvation, and He is all my desire." Amen and amen!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SEASON—MATTHEW 22.

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ALWAYS AND FOR ALL THINGS
NO. 1094

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 2, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."
Ephesians 5:20.

THE position of our text in the Epistle is worthy of observation. It follows the precept with regard to sacred song, in which believers are bid to speak to themselves and one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord. If they cannot be always singing they are always to maintain the spirit of song. If they must of necessity desist at intervals from outward expressions of praise, they ought never to refrain from inwardly giving thanks. The apostle having touched upon the act of singing in public worship, here points out the essential part of it, which lies not in classic music and thrilling harmonies, but in the melody of the heart. Thanksgiving is the soul of all acceptable singing.

Note, also, that this verse immediately precedes the apostle's exhortations to believers concerning the common duties of ordinary life. The saints are to give thanks to God always, and then to fulfill their duties to their fellow men. The apostle writes, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God," and then he adds the various branches of holy walking which belong to wives and to husbands, to children and to parents, to servants and to masters; so that it would seem that thanksgiving is the preface to a holy life, the foundation of obedience, and the entryway of sanctity. He who would serve God must begin by praising God, for a grateful heart is the mainspring of obedience. We must offer the salt of gratitude with the sacrifice of obedience; our lives should be anointed with the precious oil of thankfulness. As soldiers march to music, so while we walk in the paths of righteousness, we should keep step to the notes of thanksgiving. Larks sing as they mount, and so should we magnify the Lord for His mercies while we are ringing our way to heaven.

My text is a very appropriate one for this cold morning, when wind and snow conspire against our comfort. Let it peep up like the golden cup of the crocus out of the wintry waste. When the weather is unusually dull and dreary, we should resolve to set a stout heart against the pelting storm, and determine that if we shiver in body, we will at least be warm in heart. Our thanksgiving is not a swallow which is gone with the summer. The birds within our bosom sing all year round, and on such a morning as this their song is doubly welcome. The fire of gratitude will help to warm us—heap on the big logs of loving memories. No cold shall freeze the genial current of soul; our praise shall flow on when brooks

and rivers are bound in chains of ice. Let us see which among us can best rejoice in the Lord in bad weather.

This morning I shall ask you to think over *the pleasant duty prescribed;* then I shall lead you to think of *its spiritual prerequisites,* or what is necessary to help a man to always give thanks for all things. And we will close by dwelling upon *the eminent excellences of the duty,* or rather of the privilege, which is here described.

I. First, let us think of the PLEASANT DUTY which is here both prescribed and described. Think *what* it is—*giving thanks*. By this is meant the emotion of gratitude and the expression of it either by song, by grateful speech, by the thankful look, which means far more than words can express, or by any other method. We have sometimes been so overcome by the devout emotion of gratitude to God for His mercy, that we could not help but weep, and strange it is that the same floodgates which furnish vent for our sorrows also supply a channel for the overflow of our joys. We may weep to God's praise if we feel it to be most natural. We are to give thanks in our spirit, feeling not only resigned, acquiescent, and content, but grateful for all that God does to us and for us. We are bound to show this gratitude by our actions, for obedience is at once the most sincere and the most acceptable method of giving thanks. To go about irksome and laborious duty cheerfully, is to thank God; to bear sickness and pain patiently, because it is according to His will, is to thank God; to sympathize with suffering saints for love of Jesus is to bless God; and to love the cause of God, and to defend it for Christ's sake is to thank God. The angels, when they praise God, not only sing, "Hallelujah, hallelujah," but they obey, "doing His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His Word." We must give thanks to God in every shape that shall be expressive of our hearts, and suitable to the occasion, and although changing the mode, we may thus continue without cessation to give thanks unto God, even the Father.

After all, beloved, it is but a light thing to render to our heavenly Father our poor thanks, after He has given us our lives, maintained us in being, saved our souls through the precious redemption of Jesus Christ, given us to be His children and made us heirs of eternal glory. What are our thanks in the presence of all these priceless favors? Why, if we gave our God a thousand lives, and could spend each one of these in a perpetual martyrdom, it would be a small return for what He has bestowed upon us. But to give Him thanks is the least we can do, and shall we be slack in that? He gives us breath—shall we not breathe out His praise? He fills our mouth with good things—shall we not speak well of His name?—

"Words are but air, and tongues but clay,
And His compassions are divine."

Shall we fail even with words and tongues? God forbid. We will praise the name of the Lord, for His mercy endures forever. None of us will say, "I pray You have me excused." The poorest, weakest, and least-gifted person can give thanks. The work of thanksgiving does not belong to the man of large utterance, for he who can hardly put two words together can give thanks; nor is it confined to the man of large possessions, for

the woman who had but two mites, which make a farthing, gave substantial thanks. The smoking flax may give thanks that it is not quenched, and the bruised reed may give thanks that it is not broken. Even the dumb may give thanks; their countenance can smile a psalm. And the dying can give thanks, their placid brow beaming forth a hymn. No Christian, therefore, can honestly say, "I am unable to exercise the delightful privilege of giving thanks." We may one and all at this moment give thanks unto God our Father. Brethren let us do so.

Now, as we have considered what it is we are to do, let us notice *when* we are to do it, for the pith of the precept lies very much in the two "alls" which are in the text—"always for all things." We are to give thanks *always*. To give thanks sometimes is easy enough; any mill will grind when the wind blows. Brethren, we scarcely need exhorting to do this when the wine and oil increase, for we cannot help it. There are glad days when, if we did not thank God, we would be something worse than fallen men, and would be only fit to be compared with devils. Anyone can give God thanks when the harvests are plentiful, the stalls full of fat cattle and the meadows covered with increasing herds. When the fig tree blossoms, and the fruit is in the vines, when the labor of the olive fails not, and the fields yield abundance of meat, then it is but natural to give thanks. When health enjoys life, and wealth adorns it, who will not say, "I thank God"? When the wind blows soft on the merchant's cheek, and wafts home his fleets of treasure, how can he do other than say that God is good? But, to give thanks to God always is another matter. To bless the Lord in all winds and weathers, and praise Him for losses and pains—this is a work of quite another character.

"O," you say, "we cannot be always praising God with our lips." I have already said that, and explained that vocal thanksgiving is not essential. Perhaps the most doubtful form of praising God is that which is performed by the tongue, and the most sure and truthful way of giving thanks is that which is found in the actions of common life. But we are to be always praising God under some shape or other—the heart is always to be full of gratitude. At all times of the day we should be grateful—our first waking thought should be, "Bless the Lord." Our last, before we drop to sleep, should be, "Praise be the God of love, who gives a pillow for my weary head." At all times of life we should give thanks; in youth we should praise God for godly parents, and for early grace; in our mid-life we should give thanks for strength, for household joys and for the experience of the divine loving kindness. And certainly, in those mature days, when the head, like the golden grain, bows down with ripeness, the aged saint should commence the employment of heaven, and should be always giving thanks. We should give God thanks when our wealth increases and also when it melts away, when it flows in and when it ebbs out. We must bless Him in success and also in disaster. We must give Him thanks when health departs; we must give Him thanks when, by gradual decay, the tabernacle falls about our ears; we must give Him thanks in those expiring moments when the sigh of earth is hushed by the song of heaven.

It is easy to stand here and tell you this, but I have not always found it easy to practice the duty. I confess this to my shame. When suffering extreme pain some time ago, a brother in Christ said to me, "Have you thanked God for this?" I replied that I desired to be patient and would be thankful to recover. "Ah, but," he said, "'In everything give thanks', not after it is over, but while you are still in it, and perhaps, when you are enabled to give thanks for the severe pain, it will cease." I believe that there was much force in that good advice. It may have sounded rather strange at the time. Yet if there is grace in our hearts, we acknowledge the correctness of it. We struggle after the holy joy of heart which it depicts, and at last, by God's grace, are able to attain to it, so as to give thanks unto God unceasingly. We shall never come to a time in which we shall say, "I will thank God no more." No. No. A thousand times NO. We could sooner cease to live than cease to give thanks. This solemn determination enables believers to play the man right gloriously. Was not it grand on Job's part to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord," even when he had torn his mantle, and shaved his head for grief? Was not it noble on the part of Paul and Silas, when they were thrust into the inner dungeon, to sing praises there? None of us knows how foul the air was in an inner Roman dungeon; how full of fever the dismal vault, how dank the dripping walls—how foul the stony floor. Yet, here were two poor creatures that had been beaten till their backs were bleeding. They were fastened in the stocks, probably made to lie on their backs upon the floor, but at midnight they sang praises unto God so loudly that the prisoners heard them. This, it is, to praise God aright—to bless Him in the dead of night, to bless Him with bleeding backs, to bless Him with feet in the stocks! Oh, to feel that nothing in this life, and nothing in death, shall make us cease to bless the Lord while thought and being last! This is grace indeed!

The text next tells us the *why* of our gratitude—"Giving thanks always *for all things* unto God." "For all things"—for whatever may happen to us. For the things which are of greatest moment we should always be grateful; for the new birth, for pardon of sin, for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, for all covenant mercies, for all the blessings of the cross and of the crown. Dear friends, a Christian has infinite cause for gratitude. When I first looked to Christ and was lightened, I thought that if I never received another mercy except that one of being delivered from my load of guilt, I would praise God if He would but let me, forever and ever. To have the feet taken out of the miry clay, and to feel them set on the rock of ages is a subject for eternal gratitude. But you have not received one spiritual mercy only, beloved brethren—nor two, nor twenty—you have had them strewn along your path in richest profusion. The stars above are not more numerous nor are the sands beneath more innumerable. Every hour, yes, every moment has brought a favor upon its wings. Look downward and give thanks, for you are saved from hell. Look on the right hand and give thanks, for you are enriched with gracious gifts. Look on the left hand and give thanks, for you are shielded from deadly ills. Look above you and give thanks, for heaven awaits you.

Nor is it alone for great and eternal benefits, but even for minor and temporary benefits we ought to give thanks. There ought not to be brought into the house a loaf of bread without thanksgiving. Nor should we cast a coal upon the fire without gratitude. We eat like dogs if we sit down to our meals without devoutly blessing God. We live like serpents if we never rise to devout recognition of the Lord's kindness. We ought not to put on our garments without adoring God, or take them off to rest in our beds without praising Him. Each breath of air should inspire us with thanks, and the blood in our veins should circulate gratitude throughout our system. O, how sacred would our temporal mercies be to us, if we were always thanking God for them! Instead of that, we too often complain because we have not more. We have a position which, in God's sight, is the best for us. We could not have been better off than we are now, all things being considered—eternal things as well as present things, and yet we murmur and groan as though God had dealt harshly with us. The worst of all is that sometimes the poorest are the most thankful. Those dear souls that are always sick, and never have a waking moment free from pain, are often the happiest and most grateful. While persons with wealth, health, strength, and surrounded by every comfort, are often of such a crooked disposition, that they complain they know not why, and are most disagreeable companions. God save you, who are His saints, from ever falling into a murmuring spirit; it is clean contrary to what God can approve of. Give thanks always for all things. Whenever the salt is put on the table, let us see in it a lesson to us to season our conversation with thanks, of which salt we cannot use too much.

We ought also to thank God for the mercies which we do not see, as well as for those which are evident. We receive, perhaps, ten times as many mercies which escape our notice as those which we observe—mercies which fly by night on soft wings and bless us while we sleep. You have heard, perhaps, of a Puritan who met his son, each one of them traveling some 10 or 12 miles to meet the other. And the son said to his father, "Father, I am thankful to God for a very remarkable providence which I have had on my journey here. My horse has stumbled three times with me, and yet I am unhurt." The Puritan replied, "My dear Son, I have to thank God for an equally remarkable providence on my way to you. For my horse did not once stumble all the way." If we happen to be in an accident by railway, we feel so grateful that our limbs are not broken, but should we not be thankful when there is no accident? Is not that the better thing of the two? If you were to fall into poverty, and someone was to restore you to your former position in trade, you would be very grateful. Should you not be grateful that you have not fallen into poverty? Bless God for His unknown benefits. Extol Him for favors which you do not see, always giving thanks to God for all things.

Still, this is easy—the difficult point is to give thanks to Him for the bitter things, for the disguised blessings, for the love tokens which come to us from Him in black envelopes. For those benefits which travel to us *via crucis*, by the way of the cross, which are generally the most heavily laden wagons that ever come from our Father's country. We are to give thanks for the dark things, the cutting things, and the things which

plague and vex us, and disquiet our spirits, for these are among the "all things" for which we ought to praise and bless God. Doubtless, if our eyes were opened, like those of Elijah's servant, we should see our trials to be among our choicest treasures. If we exercise the farseeing eyes of faith, and not the dim eyes of sense, we shall discover that nothing can be more fatal to us than to be without affliction, and that nothing is more beneficial to us than to be tried as with fire. Therefore we will glory in tribulations also. We will bless and magnify the name of the Lord, that He leads us through the wilderness, that He may prove us, and that He may fit us for dwelling by-and-by in the promised land. "Giving thanks always for all things." I should like to be towards God of the mind that John Bradford was towards Queen Mary. When reviled as a rebel, that saint and martyr said, "I have no quarrel with the queen. If she releases me I will thank her; if she imprisons me I will thank her; if she burns me I will thank her." We should say of the Lord, "Let Him do what seems good to Him, if He will give us health, we will thank Him, if He will send us sickness, we will thank Him. If He indulges us with prosperity or if He tries us with affliction, if the Holy Spirit will but enable us, we will never cease to praise the Lord as long as we live." Augustine tells us that the early saints, when they met each other would never separate without saying, "Deo gratias! Thanks be to God." Frequently their conversation would be about the persecutions which raged against them, but they finished their conversation with, "Deo gratias!" Sometimes they had to tell of dear brothers and sisters devoured by the beasts in the amphitheatre, but even then they said, "Deo gratias!" Frequently they mourned the uprise of heresy, but this did not make them rob the Lord of His, "Deo gratias." So should it be with us all the day long. The motto of the Christian should be, "Deo gratias!" "Giving thanks always for all things."

But the text has another word which is important—to *whom* is this gratitude to be rendered? "Giving thanks for all things *to God the Father."* To God. To man we are bound to render thanks in proportion as he benefits us. God does not require that in order to be grateful to Him, we should be ungrateful to our fellow men. To keep the first table it is never necessary to break the second. Gratitude to parents and friends is but gratitude to God if it is properly rendered with a view to the highest benefactor. To neglect the lower would be to spoil the higher gratitude. Yet we should never end with gratitude to men; that were to thank the clouds for rain instead of blessing the Lord who sends both clouds and showers. Remember, if you have benefactors, God inclined their hearts towards you—give thanks to God, for He is good and does good. Give thanks to God. Let not your gratitude stop short of the source from which the streams of mercy come.

Think of the Lord, also, under the relation which the text sets before you—namely as the Father—as your Father. Remember that God is the Creator. It is He who made us, and not we. As the Father, He is the Sustainer and Preserver of men; as the Father He has elected His people, for it is the Father who has chosen His people in Christ Jesus; and as the Father, He is the Progenitor of the spiritual seed, for He has begotten us, again, unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

dead. Think of God the Father in those various capacities, and you will have so many reasons for giving thanks always to Him. Never give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ in such a way as to dishonor the Father. You owe much to Jesus, but Jesus did not make the Father gracious to you since, "The Father Himself loves you," Jesus is the gift of His Father's love, and not the cause of it. Bless the Father, then, and give honor and praise unto Him who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. There is an old Jewish tradition that when God had made this world, and the six days' work was over, He called the angels to behold it, and it was so very beautiful that they sang for joy. Then the Lord asked them what they thought of this work of His hands. One of them replied that it was so vast and so perfect that there should be created a clear, loud, melodious voice which should fill all the quarters of the world with its sweet sound, and both by day and night, offer thanksgiving to the Creator for His incomparable blessings. We ought to be of the same mind as the angel—not that there is a defect in creation, but that everywhere in creation intelligent beings should be that voice of ceaseless song which the angel desired.

Once more, in describing this duty the text tells us *how* to give thanks, namely, *"in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Now here we have directions to present our praises always through the Mediator, Jesus, our Great High Priest, who stands between us and God. We are to put our thanks into His sacred hands, that He may present them before the Father with something of His own, "not to our loss," even with His precious merit which shall sweeten all. But the text means more than that; we are to give thanks to the Father *in the name* of Jesus, that is because Jesus bids us to do so, and we are commanded and commissioned by Christ. We have His example as well as His precept for blessing God for all things. I think the text means more than this—we are to give thanks to God in the name of Jesus as though we did it in Jesus' stead. As though we stood where Jesus once stood when He said on earth, "I thank You, O Father." You Christian people are sent into the world as Christ was sent into the world. Christ's office was to glorify God, and such is your office for His sake, and in His name. Think—how would Jesus have given thanks? How would He have praised God? In what sort of spirit would the ever adorable Son, whose meat and drink it was to serve His Father, have praised God? After that fashion and in that same way you are to give thanks unto God and the Father. It is a high position for a poor son of man to occupy, but if the Lord has called you to it, by His grace be not slack in the performance of the heavenly service.

The day will come when we shall fulfill our text in the widest sense. Then we shall give thanks to God at the winding up of the drama of human history for everything that has happened—from the fall, even to the destruction of the wicked. We may not be able to do so now. Our eyes see the gigantic evil, and do not see the overruling good which, like a boundless sea, rolls over all. The dreadful mysteries of evil make us tremble as we think of them, but the day will come when, with the Lord Jesus, we will not only bless God for electing love, but will even say, "I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hid these things from

the wise and prudent." The day will come when even the darkest side of the divine decrees and the most profound depths of the divine action shall cause us to adore with gratitude. And then that which can least be understood in providence shall no longer be the subject of awe-struck wonder, but of unspeakable delight. We shall trace the line of perfection along the course of the divine decrees, and though the way of the Lord may have seemed to us to be inscrutable, we shall then adore Him for that wondrous display of all His attributes—justice, love, truth, faithfulness, omnipotence—which shall blaze forth with tenfold splendor. In heaven we shall give thanks unto God always for *all* things, without exception, and throughout eternity we shall magnify His holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us do it as best we can today, God's Spirit helping us. Thus I have expounded the duty itself.

II. Now, briefly, let me speak to you upon THE SPIRITUAL PREREQUISITES which are necessary for the performance of this very pleasant work. And let it be solemnly remembered that no man can give thanks always to God through Jesus Christ till he has *a new heart*. The old heart is an ungrateful one, and even if a man should try with an unrenewed nature to give thanks to God, it would be like the impossible supposition of the dead struggling to make themselves alive, which cannot be. The old heart is a putrid fountain, it cannot send forth sweet streams; it is opposed to God, and it cannot bless Him in a way that He can accept. Looking at this fair and lovely duty, I would say to all who wish to practice it, "You must be born-again." Unless you are made new creatures in Christ Jesus, you can never give thanks to God always for all things.

And next, I would remind you that in order to perform this duty aright a man *must have a sense of God*. To give thanks to God aright, a man must believe that there is a God. He must go further than that, he must feel that God is the author of the good things which he receives and, to give thanks always, he must advance yet further and believe that even in seeming evil, love is at work. He must also come to believe in God as present to hear his thanks, or he will soon tire of presenting them. "You God see me" must be printed on the new-born heart, or else there will be no constant giving of thanks to God. Let me ask you, dear friend, you believe in God, and you do well, but have you done better than the devils who also believe in God? They tremble—have you gone as far as that? There are some who have not. Devils cannot, however, love God and give Him thanks; have you gone beyond the trembling of a devil up to the giving thanks, and the adoration of a truly loving heir of heaven? Answer that question—is God as real to you as your wife or child? Is He as real as yourself? He must be so, and you must know Him to be always present with you, or else you will never continue praising Him.

A man, who gives thanks to God always, for all things, must have *a sense of complete reconciliation to God.* You cannot bless God till you have heard Him say, "I have blotted out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your transgressions." Lean and false are the thanks which come from an unforgiven heart. A soul condemned for its unbelief is not a soul that can be accepted for its gratitude—it cannot be condemned for

one thing, and accepted for another. As I came here, this morning, I was thinking very joyfully of another morning many years ago, which was, as to snow and cold, precisely like it. I remember when the family to which I belonged felt unable to go up to the house of God, for the snow was deep, and falling heavily as it is now. I, also, was unable to go up to the place of worship where our household usually attended, and by reason of the snow, was drifted into the little Methodist chapel where I heard of Jesus, and found peace with God. I have learned to bless His name since then—but before that, though I could have sung as others sing; there was no giving thanks unto God by Jesus Christ in my heart. I wondered, as I came along, whether God might not lead to this place someone whom He would bring to Himself this morning—to whom this cold day should become as memorable as that day of snow was to me. That morning in that Methodist Chapel there was a good work done, for though there were but few of us, one at least was called, and that one God has made the spiritual parent of many thousands of His children. I am surprised to find this place so full today, it is clear proof that you love to hear the gospel, and it encourages me to hope that there may be one here whom God shall make eminently useful when He has saved him. This we shall be sure of—whoever it may be, if he is reconciled to God by the death of God's dear Son, he will give thanks to God indeed, and of a truth. If nobody else does so, he or she will from this day forward sing—

"I will praise You every day
Now Your anger's turned away!
Comfortable thoughts arise
From the bleeding sacrifice."

We cannot give thanks to God through Jesus Christ unless we have *accepted the Mediator!* All the thanks commanded in the text are to come up to God *through Jesus Christ.* If we reject Him, or if we associate Him as a Mediator with somebody else, we have gone contrary to God's way, and we cannot praise God. Virgins, and saints, and martyrs must never be made rivals to Jesus Christ.

To praise God, even the Father, does it not strike you that we must *feel the spirit of adoption?* Who could praise a person as father whom he does not recognize as father? But he who feels, "Yes, I am the Lord's child, erring though I am, and my heart says, 'Abba,'" he can praise God indeed.

To the fullest performance of this duty there must be *a subordination of ourselves to the will of God.* We must not desire to have our own way; we must be content to say, "Not my will, but Yours be done." I cannot give thanks to God always for all things till my old self is put down. While self rules, the hungry horseleech is in the heart, and that is fatal to gratitude. Self and discontent are mother and child. But when you say in your heart, "I am perfectly resigned to the will of God, my will consents to His will," then shall your praise be as the continual sacrifice, and your thanksgiving shall rise before Him as incense.

III. I only want your attention a few minutes more while I speak upon THE EMINENT EXCELLENCES of continually giving thanks to God, even the Father.

And the first excellence is, *it honors God.* A thankful spirit glorifies the Most High. "Whoever offers praise, glorifies Me," says the Lord. We might have imagined that whether we grumbled or complained it would make no difference to God. It would be of no consequence to any one of us what might be the opinion of a little community of ants about us, but God is infinitely more superior to us than we are to ants! He considers that our praising and blessing Him renders glory to His name. Let us render it to Him, then, without stint. There is no higher commendation for any course of action, or for any virtue to a Christian, than to tell him that it will honor God. Will it dishonor God? He will shrink from it though mines of gold should tempt him. Will it honor God? The believer rushes forward to it though floods and flames lie in his way. A grateful spirit is a blessed and yet a cheap way of honoring God, for it brings to us its own return. Like mercy, it is "twice blessed." It blesses us in the giving, and honors God in the receiving. Let the Christian see to it that he abounds in it. Obedience to our text will tend to *check us from sin*—"Giving thanks always for all things." Very well, then, there are some places that we must not enter, for it would be blasphemous to be giving thanks there. There are some things which I must not do, for I could not give God thanks for them. Suppose I have ground down the poor—how can I give God thanks for the miserable shillings which are the blood of these men? Suppose I have gained my living by an evil trade—how can I give thanks to God for the gold as I hear it chink in my bag? Suppose every day my prosperity brings misery to others—how can I give thanks for it? To give thanks for the fruit of sin were practically to blaspheme the thrice Holy God. O, no! If the Christian is always to give thanks, he must always be where he can give thanks—and if he is to give God thanks for all things, he must not touch that which he cannot give God thanks for. I must never grasp the fruit of covetousness, the gain of dishonesty, the profit of Sabbath-breaking, and the result of oppression—for if I do, I have that for which I may weep and howl before God, but certainly not that for which I can give Him thanks. Brethren, I say that if we looked well to our text, it would, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, restrain us from sin.

But one of the truest excellences of a spirit of perpetual thanksgiving is this, that *it calms us when we are glad, and it cheers us when we are sorrowful*—a double benefit; it allays the feverish heat at the same time that it mitigates the rigorous cold. If a man is rich, and God has given him a thankful spirit, he cannot be too rich. If he will give thanks to God, he may be worth millions, and they will never hurt him. On the other hand, if a man has learned to give thanks to God, and he becomes poor, he cannot be too poor; he will be able to bear up under the severest poverty. The rich man should learn to find God in all things; the poor man should learn to find all things in God—and there is not much difference when you come to the bottom of these two causes. One child of God will be as grateful and as happy, as blessed and as rejoicing as another, if he is but satisfied to still give God thanks. There is no overcoming a man who has climbed into this spirit. "I will banish you," said a persecutor of the saints. "But you cannot do that," the saint said, "for I am at home

everywhere where Christ is." "I shall take away all your property," he said. "But I have none," said the other, "and if I had any, you could not take away Christ from me, and as long as He is left, I shall be rich." "I will take away your good name," cried the persecutor. "That is gone already," said the Christian, "and I count it joy to be counted the offscouring of all things for Christ's sake." "But I will put you in prison." "You may do as you please, but I shall be always free, for where Christ is, there is liberty." "But I shall take away your life," said he. "Yes, well," said the other, "then I shall be in heaven which is the truest life, so that you cannot hurt me." This was a brave defiance to throw down at the feet of the foe. It is not in the power of the enemy to injure the men of God when once self is dethroned, and the heart has learned to be resigned to the will of God. O, you are great, you are strong, you are rich, and you are mighty when you have bowed yourselves to the will of the Most High! Stoop that you may conquer! Bow that you may triumph! Yield that you may get the mastery. It is when we are nothing that we are everything—when we are weak that we are strong, it is when we have utterly become annihilated as to self, and God is all in all, it is then that we are filled with all the fullness of God. May the Holy Spirit conduct us into this spirit of perpetual thankfulness.

One thing I am sure of, that the more we have of this, *the more useful we shall assuredly become*. Nothing has had a greater effect upon the minds of thoughtless men than the continued thankfulness of true Christians. There are sick beds which have been more fruitful in conversions than pulpits. I have known women confined to their chambers by the space of 20 years whose remarkable cheerfulness of spirit has been the talk of the entire district. And many there have been who have called to see poor Sarah in her cottage, knowing that she has scarcely been a single day without distressing pain, and have heard her voice, and looked into that dear smiling face, and have learned the reality of godliness. The bedridden saint has been a power throughout all the district and many have turned to God, saying, "What is this which enables the Christian to give thanks always, to God?" Beloved, our crusty tempers and sour faces will never be evangelists. They may become messengers of Satan, but they will never become helpers of the gospel. To labor to make other people happy is one of the grand things a Christian should always try to do. In little things we ought not to be forever worrying, fidgeting, finding little difficulties, and spying out faults in others. I believe that to a faulty man everybody is faulty; but there are better people in the world than you have dreamed of, sir, and when you are better, you will find them out. If you were always grateful to God, you would thank Him that people are as good as they are. If you would be thankful when you meet, even, with bad people—thankful that they are not worse than they are, and try to get hold of the best points in them, and not their worst points, you would be much more likely to gain your purpose, if your purpose is to glorify God by doing them good. If you want to catch flies, try honey—they will be more readily caught with that than with vinegar—at least if they are human flies. Put into your speech, love, rather than bitterness, and you will prevail, but there are times when you must speak with all the stern-

ness of an Elijah. There are proper seasons when there must be no holding back of the most terrible truths. But for all that, let the general current of your life, the natural outflow of your entire being be thankfulness to God which makes you loving towards men. I am sure in this way, when you come to speak of Jesus, you will get a more attentive ear, and when you tell your experience, you will recommend the gospel by your own conversation.

Beloved, I pray the Lord will give us a thankful spirit always, and when we talk to each other, let it not be our habit as it is ordinarily with Englishmen—to complain of this and of that, but let us thank God and testify of His Goodness. I have heard that farmers are greatly given to grumbling. Well, if they are more apt at complaining than trades people are, they are very far gone in it, for generally wherever I go, I hear that trade is bad—it always has been ever since I have been in London, and commerce has been constantly going to ruin. I have known some who have lost money every month and yet are richer every year. How is this? Had not we better change our way of talking, and dwell not upon our miseries but our mercies? Let us speak much of what God has given rather than of that which He has in love withheld from us. Let us bless Him rather than speak ill of our neighbors, or complain of our circumstances.

But alas, there are some to whom I speak who will never undertake this duty, till, as I have already said, they have new hearts and right spirits, and have become reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. Now, to you, this one word—you are guilty and must be punished unless you find forgiveness. There is before you this morning, an altar of sacrifice in the person of Jesus Christ. There are four horns on the altar, looking all ways, and whoever touches the horns of this altar shall live, and live forever. Jesus Christ is the great altar of sacrifice; a touch of Him at this moment will save you. It is the whole gospel. Believe, trust, and live, for, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God"—whoever trusts in Christ shall be saved. Come to the altar, where His blood was spilt. Come, now, and lay your hands upon its horn—you can but perish there. No, I must correct myself—you *cannot* perish there—you will perish anywhere else! Come, then, and rest in Jesus, and the Lord bless you for His dear name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EPHESIANS 5:1-21.

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THE MONSTER DRAGGED TO LIGHT
NO. 1095

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 9, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceedingly sinful." Romans 7:13.

"Philosophers have measured mountains
Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states, and kings,
Walked with a staff to heaven, and traced fountains:
But there are two vast, spacious things,
The which to measure it does more behoove:
Yet few there are that sound them—Sin and Love."

SO sang George Herbert, that sweet and saintly poet, and of one of those "two vast, spacious things" we are about to speak this morning—namely, sin. May the Holy Spirit direct us in thought and speech while into the very center of our subject we plunge at once, keeping to the words of our text.

I. Our first point to consider this morning shall be that TO MANY MEN SIN DOES NOT APPEAR SIN. Yes, and in all men in their natural blindness there is an ignorance of what sin is. It needs the power of the divine omnipotence, the voice of that same Majesty, which said, "Let there be light," and there was light to illuminate the human mind, or else it will remain in darkness as to much of its own actual sin, and the deep and deadly evil which belongs to it. Man, with wretched perverseness of misconception, abides content in a wrong idea of it; his deeds are evil, and he will not come to the light lest he should know more concerning that evil than he wishes to know. Moreover, such is the power of self-esteem that though sin abounds in the sinner he will not readily be brought to feel or confess its existence. There are men in this world, steeped up to the throat in iniquity, who never dream that they have committed anything worse than little faults. There are those whose souls are saturated with it till they are like the wool that has been lying in the scarlet dye; and yet they conceive themselves as white as snow. This is due in part to that dullness of conscience which is the result of the fall. Though I have heard 10,000 times that *conscience* is the deputy of God in the soul of man, I have never been able to subscribe to that dogma. It is no such thing. In many persons conscience is perverted, in others only a fragment of it remains, and in all it is fallible and subject to aberrations. Conscience is in all men a thing of degrees dependent upon education, example, and previous character; it is an eye of the soul, but it is frequently partly blind and weak, and always needs light from above, or else

it does but mock the soul. Conscience is a faculty of the mind, which, like every other, has suffered serious damage through our natural depravity, and it is by no means perfect. It is only the understanding acting upon moral subjects, and upon such matters it often puts bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, darkness for light, and light for darkness. Therefore it is that men's sins do not appear to them to be sin. In all probability there is not one, even among renewed men, who fully knows the evil of sin, nor will there be until in heaven we shall be perfect; and then, when we shall see the perfection of divine holiness, we shall understand how black a thing was sin. Men who have lived underground all their lives do not know how dark the mine is, nor can they know it until they stand in the blaze of a summer's sun!

In a great measure, our inability to see sin arises from the exceedingly deceitfulness both of sin and of the human heart. Sin assumes the brightest forms even as Satan attires himself as an angel of light. Such a thing as iniquity walking abroad in its own nakedness is seldom seen; like Jezebel it attires its head, and paints its face. And indeed, the heart loves to have it so, and is eager to be deceived. We will, if we can, extenuate our faults. We are all very quick-sighted to perceive something, which, if it does not quite excuse our fault, at all events prevents its being placed in the first-class of atrocities. Sometimes we will not understand the commandment; we are *willing* not to know its force and severity; it is too keen and sharp, and we try to blunt its edge, if we can find a milder meaning for it we are glad to do so. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"—therefore it invents a thousand falsehoods. As the deceivableness of sin is very great, so that it adorns itself with the colors of righteousness, and makes men believe that they are pleasing God when they are offending Him, so is man an eager self-deceiver, and like the fool in Solomon's Proverbs, he readily follows the flatterer!

In most men, their not seeing sin to be sin arises from their ignorance of the spirituality of the law. Men read the ten commandments and they suppose them to mean nothing more than the superficial sense. If they read, for instance, "You shall do no murder," straightway they say, "I have never broken that law." But they forget that he who hates his brother is a murderer, and that unrighteous anger is a distinct violation of the command. If I willfully do anything which tends to destroy or shorten life, either my own or my neighbor's, I am breaking the commandment. A man finds it written, "You shall not commit adultery." "Well, well," he says, "I am clear *there."* Straightway he plumes himself upon the supposition that he is chastity itself! But if he is given to understand that the command touches the heart, and that a licentious *look* is adultery, and that even a *desire* to do that which is evil condemns the soul, then straightway he sees things in a very different light, and sees that to be sin which had never troubled him before! Commonly—yes, *universally*—until the Spirit of God comes into the soul, there is a total ignorance as to what the law means. Men say with a light heart, "Lord,

have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law." But if they did but know it, they would say, "Lord, have mercy upon us, and cleanse us of our innumerable infractions of a law which we cannot keep, and which must forever condemn us as long as we abide under its power."

Thus you see a few of the reasons why sin does not appear in its true light to the unconverted, but cheats impenitent and self-righteous minds. This is one of the most deplorable results of sin. It injures us most by taking from us the capacity to know how much we are injured. It undermines the man's constitution, and yet leads him to boast of unfailing health; it makes him a beggar, and tells him he is rich; it strips him, and makes him glory in his fancied robes. In this it resembles slavery which by degrees eats into the soul, and makes a man content in his chains. Bondage at length degrades a man so that at last he forgets the misery of slavery, the dignity of freedom, and is unable to strike the blow when a happy hour offers him the chance of liberty. Sin, like the deadly frost of the northern regions, benumbs its victim before it slays him. Man is so diseased that he fancies his disease to be *health,* and judges healthy men to be under wild delusions. He loves the enemy which destroys him. He warms at his bosom the viper whose fangs cause his death. The unhappiest thing that can happen to a man is for him to be sinful and to judge his sinfulness to be righteousness. The Papist advances to his altar, and bows before a piece of bread; but he does not feel that he is committing idolatry—no, he believes that he is acting in a praiseworthy manner. The persecutor hounded his fellow creatures to prison and to death, but he thought he verily did God a service. You and I can see the idolatry of the Papist, and the murder committed by the persecutor, but the guilty persons do not see it. The passionate man imagines himself to be rightly indignant, the greedy man is proud of his own prudence, the unbeliever rejoices in his independence of mind; these are the aspects under which iniquity presents itself to the spiritually blind. *There* is the mischief of sin—that it throws out of gear the balances by which the soul discerns between good and evil. What horrible beings those must have been who could run down a vessel crowded with living souls, and then, while hearing them shriek and cry for help, could go steaming away from them, leaving them all to perish in the overwhelming waters!

To what a state of inhumanity must they have sunk to be able to do such a thing! The wreck of the vessel is hardly more dreadful than the wreck of the moral sense and common humanity in those who left the hundreds to die, when they might have saved them. To be able to stab a man would be horrible, but to be so bad that after stabbing him you felt no sense of wrong doing would be far worse; yet with every act of sin there goes a measure of heart-hardening, so that he who is capable of great crimes is usually incapable of knowing them to be such. With the ungodly this pestilential influence is very powerful, leading them to cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace, and to rebel against the most Holy God without fear or compunction. And, alas, since even in the saints there remains the old nature, even *they* are not altogether free

from the darkening power of sin, for I do not hesitate to say that we all unwittingly allow ourselves into practices which clearer light would show to be sins. Even the best of men have done this in the past. For instance, John Newton, in his trading for slaves in his early days, never seemed to have felt that there was any wrong in it; and Whitefield, in accepting slaves for his orphanage in Georgia, never raised or dreamed of raising the question as to whether slavery was in itself sinful. Perhaps advancing light will show that many of the habits and customs of our present civilization are essentially bad, and our grandchildren will wonder how we could have acted as we did. It may need centuries before the national conscience, or even the common Christian conscience, will be enlightened up to the true standard of right—and the individual may need many a chastisement and rebuke from the Lord before he has fully discerned between good and evil! O you demon, sin, you are proved to be sin with a vengeance, by thus deluding us. You do not only poison us, but make us imagine our poison to be medicine—you defile us and make us think ourselves the more beautiful—slay us and make us dream that we are enjoying life!

My brethren, before we can be restored to the holy image of Christ, which is the ultimatum of every Christian, we must be taught to know sin to be sin! And we must have a restoration of the tenderness of conscience which would have been ours had we never fallen. A measure of this discernment and tenderness of judgment is given to us at conversion—for conversion, apart from it—would be impossible. How can a man repent of that which he does not know to be sin? How shall he humble himself before God concerning that which he does not recognize to be evil in God's sight? He must have enlightenment. Sin must be made to appear as sin to him! Moreover, man will not renounce his self-righteousness till he sees his sinfulness. As long as he believes himself to be righteous, he will hug that righteousness, and stand before God with the Pharisee's cry, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men are!" As long as it is possible for us to swim on the bladders of our own righteousness, we will never take to the lifeboat of Christ's righteousness! We can only be driven to free grace by sheer stress of weather, and as long as our leaky boat of self-will only keeps us above the flood, we will hold to it. It is a miracle of grace to make a man see himself so as to loathe himself, and confess the impossibility of being saved by his own works. Yet till this is done, faith in Jesus is impossible, for no man will look to the righteousness of another while he is satisfied with his own righteousness; and everyone believes he has a righteousness of his own till he sees sin in its native hideousness! Unless sin is revealed to you as a boundless evil, whoever you may be, where God and Christ are, you can never come. You must be made to see that your heart reeks with evil—that your past life has been defiled with iniquity; and you must also be taught that this evil of yours is no trifle, but a monstrous and horrible thing. You must be made to loathe yourselves as in the presence of God, or else you never will fly to the atoning blood for cleansing. Unless sin is

seen to be sin, grace will never be seen to be grace, nor Jesus to be a Savior; and without this, salvation is impossible.

Here, then, we leave this important point—bearing witness again, that to the natural man sin does not appear as sin, and therefore, a work of grace must be worked in him to open his blind eyes, or he cannot be saved. These are no soft speeches and fair words, but hard truths—may the Holy Spirit lead many hearts to feel how sorrowfully true they are.

II. This leads us to our second consideration—WHERE SIN IS MOST CLEARLY SEEN, IT APPEARS TO BE SIN. Its most terrible aspect is its own natural self. Sin at its worst appears to be sin. Do I seem to repeat myself? Does this utterance sound like a mere platitude? Then I cannot help it, for the text puts it so, and I know you will not despise the text. But indeed, there is a depth of meaning in the expression, "Sin, that it might appear sin"—as if the apostle could find no other word so terribly descriptive of sin as its own name. He does not say, "Sin that it might appear like Satan." No, for sin is worse than the devil since it *made* the devil what he is. Satan as an existence is God's creature, and this sin never was; its origin and nature are altogether apart from God. Sin is even worse than hell, for it is the sting of that dreadful punishment. Anselm used to say that if hell were on one side, and sin on the other, he would rather leap into hell than willingly sin against God. Paul does not say, "Sin that it might appear madness." Truly it *is* moral insanity, but it is worse than that by far. It is so bad that there is no name for it but itself. One of our poets who wished to show how evil sin looks in the presence of redeeming love, could only say—

"When the wounds of Christ exploring,
Sin does like itself appear."

If you need an illustration of what is meant, we might find one in Judas. If you wanted to describe him, you might say he was a traitor, a thief, and a betrayer of innocent blood, but you would finish up by saying, "He was a Judas"—that gives you all in one; none could match *him* in villainy! If you wished a man to feel a horror of murder, you would not wish murder to appear to him as manslaughter, or as destruction of life, or as mere cruelty, but you would want it to appear as *murder*—you could use no stronger expression. So here, when the Lord turns the strong light of His eternal Spirit upon sin, and reveals it in all its hideousness and defilement, it appears to be not only moral discord, disorder, deformity, or corruption, but neither more nor less than sin. "Sin," Thomas Brooks says, "is the only thing that God abhors, it brought Christ to the cross, it damns souls, it shuts heaven, and it laid the foundations of hell."

There are persons who see sin as a misfortune, but this is far short of the true view, and indeed very wide of it. How commonly do we hear one sort of sinner called, "An unfortunate." This indicates a very lax morality. Truly it is a calamity to be a sinner, but it is much more than a calamity, and he who only sees sin as his misfortune has not seen it so as to be saved from it. Others have come to see sin as folly, and so far they see aright, for it is essentially folly, and every sinner is a fool! A fool is God's

own name for a sinner—commonly used throughout the book of Psalms. But for all that, sin is more than folly. It is not mere lack of wit or mistaken judgment, it is the knowing and willful choice of *evil*, and it has in it certain maliciousness against God which is far worse than mere stupidity. To see sin as folly is a good thing, but it is not a gracious thing, nor a saving thing. Some have seen certain sins to be crimes, and yet have not viewed them as sins. Our use of the word "crime" is significant. When an action hurts our fellow men, we call it a crime, when it only offends God, we style it a sin. If I were to call you criminals, you would be disgusted with me, but if I call you sinners, you will not be at all angry because to offend *man* is a thing you would not like to do, but to offend *God* is to many persons a small matter, scarcely worth a moment's thought. Human nature has become so perverted that if men know that they have broken human laws they are ashamed, but the breach of a command which only affects the Lord Himself causes them very little concern. If we were to steal, or lie, or knock another down, we would be ashamed of ourselves, and so we ought to be; but for all that, such shame would be no work of grace. Sin must appear to be sin against God—that is the point! We must say with David, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight." With the prodigal we must cry, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before You, and am no more worthy to be called Your son." That is the true view of it. May the Lord bring us to confess our transgressions after *that* sort.

And here lend me your ears a minute or two. Think how odious a thing sin is. Beloved, our offenses are committed against a law which is based upon right. It is holy and just and good—it is the best law which could be conceived! To break a bad law we may be more than excusable, but there can be no excuse for transgression when the commandment commends itself to every man's conscience. There is not one command in God's word which is harsh, arbitrary, or unnecessary. If we, ourselves, were perfect in holiness, infinitely wise, and had to write a law, we should have written just the law which God has given us. The law is just to our fellow men, and beneficial to us. When it forbids anything, it does but set up danger signals where real danger to us exists. The law of God is a kind of spiritual police to keep us out of harm's way; those who offend against it injure themselves. Sin is a false, mean, unrighteous thing, it does evil all round, and brings good to nobody. It has not one redeeming feature. It is evil; only evil, and that continually. It is a wicked, wanton, purposeless, useless rejection of that which is good and right in favor of that which is disgraceful and injurious.

We also ought to remember that the divine law is binding upon men because of the right and authority of the lawgiver. God has made us, ought we not to serve Him? Our existence is prolonged by His kindness, we could not live a moment without Him—should we not obey Him? God is superlatively good, He has never done us any harm, He has always designed our benefit, and has treated us with unbounded kindness. Why should we willfully insult Him by breaking laws which He had a right to

make, and which He has made for our good? Is it not shameful to do that which He hates when there can be nothing to gain thereby, and no reason for doing it? How I wish every heart here could hear that plaintive lamentation of the Lord—it is an amazing condescension that He should describe Himself as uttering it—"The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel does not know; My people do not consider." That other word of pleading is equally pathetic where the Lord expostulates and cries, "O, do not this abominable thing that I hate!"

After all His tenderness in which He has acted towards us, as a father to his child, we have turned against Him, and harbored His enemy! We have found our pleasure in grieving Him, and have called His commands burdens, and His service weariness. Shall we not repent of this? Can we continue to act so basely? This day, my God, I hate sin not because it damns me, but because it has done You wrong. To have grieved my God is the worst of grief to me. The heart renewed by grace feels a deep sympathy with God in the ungrateful treatment which He has received from us. It cries out, "How could I have offended Him? Why did I treat so gracious a God in so disgraceful a manner? He has done me good, and no evil, why have I slighted Him?" Had the Eternal been a tyrant, and had His laws been despotic, I could imagine some dignity in a revolt against Him; but seeing He is a Father full of gentleness and tenderness, whose loving kindnesses are beyond all count, sin against Him is exceedingly sinful. Sin is worse than bestial, for the beasts only return evil for evil, sin is devilish, for it returns evil for good. Sin is lifting our heel against our benefactor—it is base ingratitude, treason, causeless hate, spite against holiness, and a preference for that which is low and groveling. But where am I going? Sin is sin, and in *that word* we have said it all!

It would appear that Paul made the discovery of sin as sin through the light of one of the commandments. He gives us a little bit of his own biography which is most interesting to notice. He says, "I had not known lust except the law had said you shall not covet." It strikes me that when Paul was struck down from his horse on his way to Damascus, the first thought that came to him was, "This Jesus whom I have been persecuting, is, after all, the Messiah and Lord of all. Oh, horror of horrors, I have ignorantly warred against Him. He is Jesus the Savior who saves from sins, but what are my sins? Where have I offended against the law?" In his lonely blindness, his mind involuntarily ran over the ten commandments; and as he considered each one of them with his poor half-enlightened judgment, he cried to himself, "I have not broken that! I have not broken that!" But at last he came to that command, "You shall not covet," and in a moment, as though a lightning flash had cut in two the solid darkness of his spirit, he saw his sin, and confessed that he had been guilty of inordinate desires. He had not known lust if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." That discovery unveiled all the rest of his sins—the proud Pharisee became a humble penitent and he who thought himself blameless cried out, "I am the chief of sinners." I pray God by some means to let the same light of God stream into every soul here,

where as yet it has not penetrated. O my hearers, I beseech the Lord to let you see sin as sin, and so lead you to Jesus as the only Savior!

III. I shall need your best attention to the third point which is this—THE SINFULNESS OF SIN IS MOST CLEARLY SEEN IN ITS PERVERTING THE BEST OF THINGS TO DEADLY PURPOSES. So the text runs—"Sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good." It is evident that we are atrociously depraved since we make the worst conceivable use of the best things. Here is God's law which was ordained to life, for, "He that does these things shall live in them," is willfully disobeyed, and so sin turns the law into an instrument of death. It does worse. The sin that is in us, when it hears the commandment, straightway resolves to break it. It is a strangely wicked propensity of our nature, that there are many things which we should not care for otherwise, which we lust after at once, as soon as they are forbidden. Have you ever noticed, even in regard to human law, that when a thing is prohibited, persons long after it? I do not remember, in all the years I have lived in London, any cravings of the populace to hold meetings in Hyde Park till an attempt was made to keep them out—and then, straightway, all the railings were pulled down, and the ground was carried by storm. The park has been a field of battle ever since. Had liberty of speech in the park never been interfered with as it was, most unwisely, nobody would have cared to hold forth at the Reformer's tree or any other tree. They would have said, "What's the use of dragging up there all through the mud for miles, when we can meet more comfortably in a hall under cover," but because they must *not* do it, they resolve *to* do it! That is the way with our common nature, it kicks at restraint—if we must *not* do a thing, then we will *do* it! Even before she fell, our mother Eve felt drawn to the forbidden tree, and the impulse in her fallen sons and daughters is far more forcible! As by one common impulse we wander from the road appointed, and break hedges to leap into fields enclosed against us. Law to our depraved nature is but the signal for revolt. Sin is indeed a monster when it turns a preventive law of God into an incentive to rebellion. It discovers evil by the law, and then turns to it and cries, "Evil, you are my good."

This is far from being the only case in which good is turned to evil through our sin. I might mention many others. Very briefly then, how many there are who turn the abounding mercy of God, as proclaimed in the gospel, into a reason for further sin! The preacher delights to tell you, in God's name, that the Lord is a God ready to forgive, and willing to have mercy upon sinners, and that whoever believes in Jesus shall receive immediate pardon. What do men say, "O, if it is so easy to be forgiven, let us go on in sin! If faith is so simple a matter, let us put it off until some future time!" O, base and cruel argument! To infer greater sin from infinite love! What if I call it devilish reasoning—for so it is—to make of the very goodness of a gracious God a reason for continuing to offend! Is it so that the more God loves, the more will you hate? The better He is, the worse you will be? Shame! Shame!

Then again, there are individuals who have indulged in very great sin, and have very fortunately escaped from the natural consequences of that sin, and what do *they* gather from this forbearance on God's part? God has been very long-suffering and compassionate to them, and therefore, they defy Him again, and return presumptuously to their former habits. They dream that they have immunity to transgress, and even boast that God will never punish them, let them act as they may. Sin appears sin, indeed, when the long-suffering which should lead to repentance is regarded as a license for further offending. What a marvel that the Eternal does not crush His foes at once when they count His gentleness to be weakness, and make His mercy a ground for further disobedience!

Look again at thousands of prosperous sinners whose riches are their means of sinning. They have all that heart can wish, and instead of being doubly grateful to God, they are proud and thoughtless! They deny themselves none of the pleasures of sin. The blessings entrusted to them become their curses because they minister to their arrogance and worldliness. They war against God with weapons from His own armory! They are indulged by providence, and then they indulge their sins the more. Fullness of bread too often breeds contempt of God. Men are lifted up, and then look down upon religion, and speak loftily against the people of God, and even against the Lord Himself. With His meal in their mouths, they blaspheme their benefactor, and with the wealth which is the loan of His charity, they purchase the vile pleasures of iniquity. This is horrible, but it is so, that the more God gives to man, the more man hates His God, and he to whom God multiplies His mercies returns them by multiplying his transgressions! I remember in our Baptist martyrologies the story of one of the Baptists of Holland escaping from his persecutors. A river was frozen over, and the good man crossed it safely, but his enemy was of greater bulk, and the ice gave way under him. The Baptist, like the child of God he was, turned around and rescued his persecutor just as he was sinking beneath the ice to certain death. And what did the wretch do? As soon as ever he was safely on the shore, he seized the man who had saved his life, and dragged him off to prison, from which he was taken to be put to death! We marvel at such inhumanity! We are indignant at such base returns—but the returns which the ungodly make to God are far baser! I marvel, myself, as I talk to you; I marvel that I speak so calmly on so terribly humbling a theme! And remembering our past lives, and our long ingratitude to God, I marvel that we do not turn this place into one vast Bochim or place of weeping, and mingle our tears in a flood with expressions of deep shame and self-abhorrence for our dealings towards God.

The same evil is manifested when the Lord reveals His justice and utters threats. When a threatening sermon is delivered, you will hear men say, as they go out from hearing such a discourse, although the preacher has spoken most affectionately, "We will have no more of this hell-fire preaching! We are wearied and worried with these threats of judgment."—

"Your judgments, too, unmoved they hear,
Amazing thought! Which devils fear
Goodness and wrath in vain combine,
Their heart betrays no feeling sign."

Try the same man with God's tenderness and speak of God's love, and he will be hardened by it, for the gospel hardens some men, and becomes a savor of death unto death unto many. O sin, you are sin, indeed, to make the gospel of salvation a reason for deeper damnation!

When great judgments are abroad in the land, not a few of the ungodly become more insolent against God, and even rail at Him as a tyrant! The fire which ought to melt them only makes them harder. The terrors of God they defy, and like Pharaoh they demand, "Who is the Lord?"

We have known persons in adversity—very poor and very sick, who ought to have been led to God by their sorrow, but instead they have become careless of all religion, and cast off all fear of God. They have acted like Ahaz of whom it is written, "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz." The rod has not separated them from sin, but whipped them into a worse state. Their medicine has become their poison. The more the tree has been pruned, the less fruit it has yielded. Plowing has only made the field more barren. That which has often proved so great a blessing to believers has been utterly lost upon them. Why should they be smitten any more, they will revolt more and more?

One very singular instance of the heart's perversity is the fact that familiarity with death and the grave often hardens the heart, and none become more callous than grave-diggers, and those who carry dead men to their graves. Men sin openly when graves are open before them. It is possible to work among the dead, and yet to be as wild as the man possessed of a devil in our Lord's time who dwelt among the tombs. The Egyptians were accustomed to hold their riotous festivals in the presence of a corpse, not to sober their mirth, as some have said, but to make them the more wanton, gluttonous, and drunk because they should so soon die. Coffins and shrouds should be good sermons, but they seldom are so to those who see them every day. In times when cholera has raged, and in seasons when the pest, in the olden times, carried off its thousands, many men have not been at all softened, but have grown callous in the presence of God's grim messenger, and even jested at him. Hervey finds holy "meditations among the tombs," but unholy men are as far off from God in a churchyard as in a theater!

Another strange thing I have often noticed. As a proof of sin's power to gather poison from the most healthful flowers, I have observed that some transgress all the more because they have been placed under the happy restraints of godliness. Though trained to piety and virtue, they rush into the arms of vice as though it were their mother. As gnats fly at a candle as soon as ever they catch sight of it, so do these infatuated ones dash into evil. Young people who are placed in the providence of God where no temptations ever assail them, in the midst of holy and quiet homes where the very name of evil scarcely comes, will often fret and worry themselves

to get out into what they call, "life," and thrust their souls into the perils of bad company. The sons and daughters of Adam long to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their very preservation from temptation grows irksome to them; they loathe the fold and long for the wolf. They think themselves hardly done by that they have not been born in the midst of licentiousness and tutored in crime. Strange infatuation, and yet many a parent's heart has been broken by this freak of depravity, this reckless lust for evil. The younger son had the best of fathers, and yet he could never be quiet till he had gained his independence, and had brought himself to beggary in a far country by spending his living with harlots.

Observe another case. Men who live in times when zealous and holy Christians abound are often the worse for it. What effect has the zeal of Christians upon such? It excites them to malice. All the while the church is asleep, the world says, "Ah, we do not believe your religion, for you do not act as if you believed it yourselves." But the moment the church bestirs herself, the world cries, "They are a set of fanatics! Who can put up with their ravings? We could have believed their religion had it been brought to us with respectful sobriety, but accompanied by enthusiasm it is detestable." Nothing will please sinners but their sins, and if their sins could be made into virtues, they would fly to their virtues at once, so as to remain in opposition. Contrary to God man will go—his very nature is enmity against his Creator. The quaint poet with whose verse we commenced our sermon, has truly said—

"If God had laid all common, certainly
Man would have been the encloser: but since now
God has impaled us, on the contrary
Man breaks the fence, and every ground will plow.
O what were man, might he himself misplace!
Sure to be cross he would shift feet and face."

Sin is thus seen to be exceedingly sinful. That plant must possess great vitality which increases by being uprooted and cut down. That which lives by being killed is strangely full of force. That must be a very hard substance which is hardened by lying in the blast furnace, in the central heat of the fire, where iron melts and runs like wax. That must be a very terrible power which gathers strength from that which should restrain it, and rushes on the more violently in proportion as it is reined in. Sin kills men by that which was ordained to life. It makes heaven's gifts the stepping stones to hell! It uses the lamps of the temple to show the way to perdition, and makes the ark of the Lord, as in Uzzah's case, the messenger of death! Sin is that strange fire which burns the more fiercely for being dampened, finding fuel in the water which was intended to quench it. The Lord brings good out of evil, but sin brings evil out of good. It is a deadly evil—you judge how deadly! O that man knew its nature, and abhorred it with all their hearts! May the Eternal Spirit teach men to know aright this worst of ills that they may flee from it to Him who alone can deliver!

Now, what is all this about, and what is the drift of this sermon? Well, the drift of it is this. There is in us by nature a propensity to sin which we cannot conquer, and yet conquered it must be, or we can never enter heaven. Your resolutions to overcome sin are as feeble as though you should try to bind Leviathan with a thread, and lead him with a string. As well as hope to bind the tempest, and rein in the storm as to govern yourself by your own reservations as to sin. Nor is sin to be overcome by philosophy; it laughs at such a spider's web. Nor can it be prevented; nor will the soul be cleansed from it by any outward observances. Genuflections, penances, fasting, washing are all in vain. What, then, must be done? *We must be newly created.* We are too far gone for mending; *we must be made afresh!* And for cleansing, there is neither water beneath the skies nor any above them that can remove our stain. But there is a fountain filled with the blood of God's own Son. He who is washed there shall be made white. And there is an all-creating Holy Spirit who can fashion us anew in Christ Jesus into holiness. I would to God you all despaired of being saved except by a miracle of grace. I would to God you utterly despaired of being saved except by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. I would to God you were driven to look away from self, each one of you, to Him who on the bloody tree bore the wrath of God, for there is life in a *look* at Him, and whoever looks at Him shall be saved—saved from the power of sin, as well as its guilt. That which the bronze serpent took away was the burning poison in the veins of the men who had been bitten by the serpents. They were diseased with a deadly disease, and they looked, and they were healed. It was not filth that was taken from them—it was disease that was healed by their simple look. And so a *look* at Christ does not merely take away sin, but it heals the disease of sin—and, mark you, it is the *only* possible healing for the leprosy of iniquity. Faith in Jesus brings the Holy Spirit with His sacred weapons of invincible warfare into the field of the human heart—and *HE* overthrows the impregnable strongholds of sin, makes lust a captive, and slays the enmity of the heart. Sin, being made to appear sin, grace is made to appear grace—God's Holy Spirit gets the victory, and we are saved.

God grant that this may be the experience of us all. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 7.

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PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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DIVINE LOVE AND ITS GIFTS
NO. 1096

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 16, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which has loved us, and has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work."
2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17.

THE Thessalonians had been much disturbed by the predictions of different persons that the day of Christ was at hand. There always have been pretenders to prophetic knowledge, who have fixed dates for the end of the world, and by their fanaticism, have driven many into lunatic asylums and disturbed the peace of others; some of this band had worried the saints at Thessalonica. The Apostle, after beseeching them not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled by such follies, went on to beg them not to be deceived by forged letters or pretended prophets, and then prayed for them that they might possess abiding consolation, which would keep them calmly persevering in holiness. His prayer is singularly emphatic; he cries to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and to God, even our Father, to comfort their hearts, that by such consolations they may be so confirmed that nothing may cause them to decline from any holy enterprise or testimony. Perhaps, during their fright some of them had ceased from service, reckoning it vain to go on with anything when the world was so near its end; therefore, Paul would have them calmed in spirit that they might diligently persevere in their Christian course. That which frightens us from duty cannot be a good thing; true comfort establishes us in every good word and work.

It is an ill wind which blows no one any good. We owe to the needless alarms of the Thessalonians this prayer, which while it was useful for them, is also instructive for us, and I pray that while we look into it, we may be led into deep thoughts of the love of God, and not into thoughts only, but into a personal enjoyment of that love, so that this morning the love of God may be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us. To hear of the love of God is sweet—to believe it most precious—but to enjoy it is Paradise below the skies! May God grant us a taste this morning.

I shall first call your earnest attention to the *blessed fact* recorded in our text, that "our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, loved us." Then we will dwell upon the *past manifestations* of that love—"He has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace."

And then we shall dwell for a while upon *the prayer* which Paul based upon this love and its manifestation, "that God would comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work."

I. First, then, dear brethren, let me ask your hearts, as well as your minds, to consider THIS GLORIOUS FACT—"Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, has loved us." I cannot help repeating my frequent remark that the love of God is a theme more fit for the solitary contemplation of each person, than for public utterance or explanation. It is to be felt, but it never can be uttered. Who can speak of love? In what language shall we sing its sweetness? No other word, nor set of words, can utter its meaning. You may go round about, and make a long definition, but you have not defined it—and he who never felt his heart glow with it will remain an utter stranger to it, depict it as you may. Love must be felt in the heart; it cannot be learned from a dictionary. "God has loved us." I want you not so much to follow what I shall have to say upon that wonderful fact, as to try and think over this thought for yourselves. God has loved us. Drink into that truth. Take the word, lay it under your tongue, and let it dissolve like a wafer made with honey till it sweetens all your soul.

God has *loved* us? Let me remark that it does not say, "He pitied us." That would be true, for, "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him." Pity is one degree below love, and often leads to it, but it is not love—you may pity a person whom apart from his sufferings, you would heartily dislike. You cannot endure the man, yet you are sorrowful that he should be so pained. Nor does the text declare that God has had mercy upon us. I could comprehend that, yes, and bless God forever, because His mercy endures forever. It is, to my mind, quite understandable that the good and gracious God should be merciful towards His creatures—but it is a far greater thing that He should *love* them. Love is a feeling vastly more to be valued than mere mercy. Merciful is a man to his beast, but he does not love it! Merciful has many a man been to his enemies for whom he has had no degree of affection. But God does not merely pity us, and have mercy upon us, He *loves* us. Neither can this word be bartered for that of benevolence. There is an aspect under which God is love to all His creatures because He is benevolent, and wishes well towards all things that He has made. But Paul was not thinking of that when he said, "God has loved us, and given us everlasting consolation." A mother is not said to be benevolent towards her child, nor a husband coldly benevolent towards his bride; benevolence would be a poor, poor substitute for love! Love is as infinitely beyond benevolence as the gold of kings in value exceeds the stone of the quarry. We have frequently heard theologians declare that the love of God towards His elect is the love of complacency, and the statement, though perhaps true, is most frosty. One would not like to strike out the word, "love," and put in its place the word, "complacency." It would be like setting up a globe of ice in the place of the sun. Love glows with

sunlight—complacency has, at best, but cold moon-like beams. No, we must hold to the words, "has *loved* us." Truly, the Lord has complacency in His people as He sees them in Christ, but He has much more than that. He is benevolent towards His people, and towards all creatures, but He is much more than that towards us! He is merciful, He is pitiful, He is everything that is good, but He is more than that—He "has *loved* us." You know, mother, how you look upon that dear child of yours as you hold it in your arms. Why, it seems a part of you. You love it as you love yourself, and your thoughts of it do not differ from your thoughts about your own welfare—the child is intertwisted with your very being. Now God also has united us to Himself by cords of love, and bonds of affection, and He thinks of us as He thinks of Himself. I can express this, but I cannot explain it. Even now I feel much more inclined to sit down and weep for joy of heart that God could ever love me than to try and speak to you. He made the heavens, and I am less than the smallest speck—yet He loves me. It is His eternal arm that has held up the universe in all ages, and I am as a leaf of the forest, green a while, but soon to grow yellow and to be buried with my fellows, yet the Eternal *loves* me, and always will love me. With His great infinite heart He loves me! As a God He loves me, divinely loves me. It is a conquering thought; it utterly overcomes us, and crushes us with its weight of joy; it bows us to the ground, and casts us into a swoon of ecstasy when it is realized by the mind, "God, even our Father, has loved us."

Now, permit the other side of the thought to shine upon your minds. The marvel is not merely that God has loved, but that he has loved *us!* And we are so insignificant, so frail, so foolish, and let us add—for this increases the marvel—so sinful, and therefore so uncomely, so ungrateful, and therefore so provoking, so willfully obstinate in returning to old sins again, and so deserve to be abhorred and rejected! I can imagine the Lord's love to the apostles. We can sometimes think of His love to the early saints without any great wonder, and of His love to the patriarchs, and to the confessors, and the martyrs, and to some eminently holy men whose biographies have charmed us—but that our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself God, even our Father, should have loved *us* is a world of wonders! And if I put it into the singular number, and say, "Who loved *me* and gave Himself for *me,"* it shall ever stand first of all miracles to my soul's apprehension, that I should be the object of divine affection. Dear brothers and sisters, I leave this meditation with you, I cannot speak of it, I beseech you to baptize your souls into it, and to let this one thought overwhelm you this day—"God, even our Father, has loved us."

Let me carry your minds onward a little further. Remember that the eternal love of God is the great fountain and source from which proceed all the spiritual blessings which we enjoy. If you stand at the source of a great river like the Thames, you see nothing there but a tiny rivulet—the fact being that we do but by courtesy speak of that little brook as the

source of the river. It is only a very partial source. A great river derives its volume of water from a thousand streams, and is sustained by the whole of the watershed along which it flows. The imaginary fountainhead of a river is therefore but a small affair. But suppose the Thames had never borrowed from a single stream in its entire course, but welled up at once a full-grown river from one fountainhead? What a sight it would be! Now the mercy of God to us in Christ Jesus owes nothing to any other stream; it leaps in all its fullness from the infinite depths of the love of God to us, and if in contemplation you can travel to that great deep, profound and unfathomable, and see welling up all the floods of covenant grace, which afterwards flow on forever to all the chosen seed, you have before you that which angels to wonder. If it would be marvelous to see one river leap up from the earth full-grown, what would it be to gaze upon a vast spring from which all the rivers of the earth should at once come bubbling up, a thousand of them born at once? What a vision it would be! Who can conceive it! And yet the love of God is that fountain from which all the rivers of mercy which have ever gladdened our race—all the rivers of grace in time and of glory hereafter—take their rise. My soul, stand at that sacred fountainhead and adore and magnify forever and ever, "God, even our Father, who has loved us."

Now please notice the words of the text, for they are full of instruction. When speaking of this love, the apostle joins our Lord Jesus Christ Himself with, "God, even our Father." He honored the deity of Jesus by speaking of Him side by side, and on terms of equality with God the Father. But there is more here than this, for the words remind us that our Lord Jesus Christ and God, even our Father, act in holy concert in the matters which concern our welfare. Jesus Christ is the gift of the Father's love to us, but Jesus Himself loved His own, and laid down His life for His flock. It is true that the Son loves us, but the Father Himself loves us, too. The love of God does not come to us from one person of the blessed Trinity alone, but from all. We ought to make no distinctions by way of preference in the love of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. One love dwells in the breast of the one undivided Three. We must adore and bless our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, even our Father, with equal gratitude.

Still notice that Jesus Christ is here put first, and if the reason is requested, we find it in His mediatorial office. He is first to us in our experience. We began our dealings with heaven, not by going to the Father, but to His Son, Jesus Christ. Our Lord has truly said, "No man comes unto the Father but by Me." All attempts to get to commune with the Father, except through the Son, must be futile. Election by the Father is not first to us, though it stands forth in order of time; redemption by the Son is our starting point. Not at the throne of sovereignty, but at the cross of dying love, our spiritual life must date its birth. Look to Jesus first, even our Lord Jesus Christ, and then follow after the Father. I am sure every converted soul here knows that this is the truth, and I would exhort everyone who is seeking salvation, to take

care to observe God's order. And remember that the love of the Father will never be perceived by us, nor felt in our hearts, till first of all we go to Jesus Christ, who is the one mediator between God and man.

Note the words of the text again: the love of God to us gives to us the Lord Jesus to be our own Savior, friend, husband, and Lord. By grace we obtain possession of Jesus Christ; Christ is ours. Observe the Lord, *"Our* Lord Jesus Christ." The apostle might have written, *"The* Lord Jesus Christ," but when he was testifying of the great love of God, the article would not have sufficed—he must use a word of possession. Faith looks to Jesus and finds salvation in that look. Then she grows into assurance, and having used her eyes to look with, she next employs her hands to grasp with. She takes hold of Jesus and says: "He is all *my* Salvation, He is all *my* desire, and He is *my* Christ." And from then on assurance speaks not of *the* Lord Jesus Christ, but of *our* Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to drink into the love of God this morning from the silver pipe of this thought—Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal God, who is also a man like yourself, is yours, altogether yours. If you are believers in Him, He is from head to foot entirely yours! In all His offices, in all His attributes, in all that He is, in all that He has done, in all that He is doing, in all that He shall do, He is your Savior. Though you cannot take Him up in your arms as Simeon did, yet your faith can embrace Him with the same ecstasy, and feel that you have seen God's salvation. Behold what manner of love is revealed in this, that God should give His only Son to us. God commends His love to us by this unspeakable gift. Here love has reached its climax. Blessed be the love of God this morning and forevermore.

Observe that this love displays itself in another shape, for the text goes on to say, "And God, even our Father." He might have said, "God, even the Father." I have no doubt the text does refer to the Father as one person of the blessed Trinity, but it runs thus—"even *our* Father." A father! There is music in that word, but not to a fatherless child—to him it is full of sorrowful memories. Those who have never lost a father can scarcely know how precious a relation a father is. Indeed, a father who is a father is very dear! Do we not remember how we climbed his knees? Do we not remember the kisses we imprinted on his cheeks? Do we not recall with gratitude the chidings of his wisdom, and the gentle encouragements of his affection? We owe, ah, who shall tell how much we owe to our fathers according to the flesh—and when they are taken from us, we lament their loss, and feel that a great gap is made in our family circle. Listen, then, to these words, "Our Father, who is in heaven." Consider the grace contained in the Lord's deigning to take us into the relationship of children, and giving us with the relationship, the nature and the spirit of children, so that we say, "Abba, Father." Did you ever lie in bed with your limbs vexed with pains, and cry, "Father, pity Your child?" Did you ever look into the face of death, and as you thought you were about to depart, cry, "My Father, help me! Uphold me with Your

gracious hand, and bear me through the stream of death"? It is at such times that we realize the glory of the Fatherhood of God, and in our feebleness learn to cling to the divine strength, and catch at the divine love. It is most precious to think that God is our own Father! There, now, I cannot talk about it. Upon some themes it would be hard to be silent, but here it is hard to speak. I can but exclaim, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God!" And, having said that, what more remains?

Before I turn from this gracious and fruitful topic of the love of God, I beg you to notice that it is no new thing, no affair of yesterday. "Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, *has* loved us." He does not tell us when this love began, and he could not have done so had he tried. He has loved us; loved us when first we came to Him repenting; loved us when we were spending our living with harlots; loved us when we were at the swine trough; loved us when from head to foot we were one mass of defilement. O God, did You love me when I played the rebel? Did You love me when I could blaspheme Your name? What manner of love is this? Yes, and He loved us before we had a being. He loved us and redeemed us long before we existed. He loved us before this world had sprung out of nothingness. He loved us before the daystar first proclaimed the morning. He loved us before any of the angels had begun to cover their faces with their wings in reverent adoration. From everlasting, the Lord loved His people. Now, again I say, drink into this truth—feed on it. Expect us not to speak at length about it, but contemplate the fact—"Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, has loved us."

II. Now we shall turn to the second point which is THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THIS LOVE. They divide under two heads—"Everlasting consolation" and "good hope through grace."

First, God's love has given us everlasting consolation. The Lord found us wretched; when the arrows of conviction were sticking in our hearts, we were bleeding to death, and what we needed, first of all, was to have these wounds staunched. Therefore the Lord came to us with consolations. Do you remember the time when the blood of Jesus Christ flowed warm over your wounds, and made them cease to bleed? Have you forgotten the hour when you heard the voice of the Lord saying in the word, "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned," and you were enabled to see Jesus Christ as your substitute suffering in your place, and you knew that your sins were forgiven for His name's sake? You have not forgotten that, have you? Well, that was one of the everlasting consolations which He gave you in the time of your distress. Since that day you have had your sorrows, perhaps you have seldom been long without them, but consolation has always followed on the heels of tribulation, and your main consolation has continued to be where it was at the first—you still find the sweetest joy on earth to be looking to Jesus. When sin rebels, you put it down by the same grace which

overthrew it at the first. Conscience starts and accuses you, and you answer its accusations with that sweet word, "Jesus died for our transgressions, and rose again for our justification." The greatest delight of all is that this consolation is an everlasting one; other sources of comfort dry up; friends have called to visit you in times of distress, and have suggested pleasant thoughts that have whiled away a mournful hour, but your griefs have returned again, and the passing comfort has been of no further service to you. When a man sees that Jesus Christ took all his sins, and was punished for them, so that the man can never be punished again—when he understands that wondrous mystery of substitution—then he gets a consolation which serves him at all times and in all weathers. Whatever may occur to him, he flies to this refuge—and even though he may have fallen into great sin, he knows that the atonement was not made for sham sin, but for real sin, and he resorts again to that same fountain filled with blood where he was once washed, resting fully assured that it will be equal to the washing of him as long as he shall be capable of sin; "Everlasting consolation!" There are some here present who have tried this consolation for 40 or 50 years; dear brothers and sisters, I am sure you do not find it is any the weaker, but on the contrary, you understand more of its strength. You are happier today in falling back upon the love of God than you were, and at this moment you feel that in the absence of all other comforts, it would suffice you to know that everlasting consolation which is given you in Christ Jesus.

Let us run over, for a moment, some of our consolations. The first one is, as I have already said, that God has forgiven us all our transgressions because Jesus died in our place. The next consolation is that God loves us, and can never change in His love—

"Whom once He loves, He never leaves,
But loves them to the end."

Then we have the grand consolation that the promises of God do not depend upon our faithfulness for their fulfillment, but are all established and made yes and amen in Christ Jesus. We have this consolation—that our salvation does not depend upon ourselves. As we fell and were lost by the first Adam's unrighteousness, so we have risen and are saved through the second Adam's righteousness, beyond all risk and fear of perishing. We stand upon a firm foundation, not on the shifting sand of creature obedience and faithfulness, but upon the eternal rock of a work which Christ has completed, and over which He sang that joyous paean—"It is finished"—before He entered into His rest.

We have, also, this consolation, that all things work together for good for us who love God, and are the called according to His purpose. And again, this other consolation, that as long as Christ exists, we are safe, for He has said, "Because I live, you shall live also." We also have this consolation, that even though we shall sleep in the dust for a while, yet He has said it, "I will that they, also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." In fact, to tell you all the

consolations which God has given us would need many an hour! And fully to enjoy them will occupy your entire lives, for everlasting consolation is not to be spread out before you and done within the short space of a sermon. Thus much upon one of the first manifestations of divine love.

The next is, He has given us "good hope." Consolation for the present; hope for the future. "Good hope," the hope when days and years are past, we all shall meet in heaven; the hope that whatever the future may be, it is full of bliss for us; the hope of immortality for our souls, and of resurrection for our bodies, for when Christ shall come, we also, who sleep in Jesus, shall come with Him; the hope of reigning with Jesus Christ on earth in the days of His triumph, and reigning with Him forever and ever in endless happiness. This is our hope, a good hope, for it is based and founded on a good foundation. A fanatic's hope will pass away with the vapors which produced it, but the hope of the true believer is good, because it is founded in truth and in grace. "A good hope in grace," is the Greek. If I believed in my own merit, and based my hopes on them, I should be only self-deceived and blinded, for what merit have I? But if my hope is fixed alone in grace, and that is the sphere in which my consolation and hope are found, then, since God is assuredly gracious, since He has made a covenant of grace with all believers, since He has ratified the covenant by the gift of His own Son, and since He has sworn by His holiness, our hope founded on His grace is a good hope, and since God will be as good as His word, our hope in grace is good! Here stands the fact—it is written, "He who believes in the Lord Jesus has everlasting life." God has covenanted with man that he shall be saved eternally, and since God cannot lie, the believing man must and shall be saved. Why is it, do you think, that some believer's hopes flicker? It is because they get away from a hope in grace, and look towards themselves and their own merits.

"Oh," they say, "I have not prayed as I did; I do not feel as I did; therefore, my hope declines." Friend, was your hope founded on your prayers? Was your hope grounded in part upon your feelings? If so, it may well quiver and tremble. One of these days it will go down altogether, for the foundation is not able to bear its weight. But if my hope is fixed on this—that God has promised, and cannot change His promise, then I have a good foundation to build on. He will not alter the thing that has gone forth out of His mouth. He has said, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved," and He cannot change His own word. Therefore every believer has the promise of eternal life. "But," says one, "it surprises me to hear you talk so," Does it? It much more surprises me that I may so speak. It is marvelous to the last degree that God, even our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ should have given us such a hope as this. I never feel at all astonished at some people's hope when I find that it is this—the hope that if they behave themselves they will get to heaven—the hope that if they are faithful, God will be faithful.

Why, any simpleton might have imagined such a hope as that. But a divine revelation was needed to set before us the great hope of the gospel, and it needs grace-given faith to believe that God will not change or lie, and therefore, must save all those who have believed in His Son Jesus Christ. He cannot allow one of the sheep of Christ to perish, or His promise will be of no effect.

"If I believed that," says one, "it would cause me to lead a careless life." Perhaps it would, but it does not lead true believers to do so. On the contrary, we feel that if God loves us so, and deals so generously with us, and takes us right away from the whips of Sinai and the covenant of the law, and places us entirely under grace, we love Him as we never loved before. And because of His love, sin is hateful to us, and we shun it as a deadly thing! The law which you think would drive men to holiness has never done it, while the grace which you imagine would lead us to licentiousness, binds us with solemn bonds of consecration to serve our God 10 times more than before! Suppose someone were to tell my children that the continuance of my love to them will depend entirely upon their good behavior. My children would repel the suggestion with indignation. They would answer, "We know better! You speak falsely! Our father will always love us." Even so, the Lord's children know that their Father's love is immutable. For our transgressions, our heavenly Father will visit us with the rod, but never with the sword. He will be angry with us, and chide us, but He will love us just as much when He is angry as He did before. And as long as ever we are His sons—and that we always must be, for sonship is not a relationship which will ever change—so long will He love us. Do you think that children become disobedient because their relationship is unchangeable? I never heard of such a thing. They have many reasons for being disobedient within their own little wayward hearts, but no child disobeys his father because he always must be his father's child, or because his father loves him. I have heard of one child who said to another, "Come with me, John, and rob such an orchard; your father is so kind he will not beat you if you are found out." The little lad drew himself up, and said, "Do you think because my father is kind to me, that I will go and vex him?" This is the holy reasoning of love—it draws no license from grace, but rather feels the strong constraints of gratitude leading it to holiness. It may be that in unregenerate hearts the love of God, if it could come there, would be turned into an excuse for sin, but it is not so to us, my brethren. Since the grace of God has made us new creatures in Christ Jesus, the love of God constrains us not to sin, but to walk in holiness all our days. Blessed be His name, then, for we are not ashamed to rejoice that God, even our Father, has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope in grace.

III. The last thing is THE PRAYER flowing out of all this. The apostle prays, and we pray this morning, that God would comfort your hearts. This is not spoken of everybody, but of such as believe in the Lord Jesus.

It is of the utmost importance that your hearts should be comforted. Cheerfulness, habitual calm, peace of mind, content of spirit—these ought to be the very atmosphere you breathe, and Paul thinks it so important that he prays that God Himself, and Christ Himself, may comfort your hearts. I know you have many troubles—how very few are altogether without them! Some of you are very poor; others suffer heavy losses in business and exercises of soul, with much trial in the world, and in the church. I pray the good Lord comfort your hearts, speaking not to your ears only, but to your innermost nature. "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Why, surely, if you believe that God loves you, it ought to make your heart glad. And if He gives you everlasting consolation, you cannot be otherwise than happy. I remember well when I was under a sense of sin looking at a dog, and wishing I were such as he, that I might die without fear of judgment hereafter, for it seemed so awful a thing to live on forever as a sinner. But now, on the other hand, I have sometimes looked at the happiest animals, and I have said to myself, "Ah, but yonder poor creature does not know the love of God, and how thankful I am to God that He has given me the capacity to know Him. Why, if I could hear of an angel in heaven who did not know the love of God, I should pity him. There are kings and mighty emperors who know not the Lord's love and what poor, pitiable creatures they are. But as for you who rejoice in divine love, I would have you go into the darkest alley, if you are forced to live there, and undergo the most wearisome toil if that is your lot—yes, and go home to a persecuting husband, or a churlish father, and yet hear melodious music ringing in your hearts, for—"God, even our Father, which has loved us, has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." This is enough to make the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose.

The next part of the prayer is that the "Lord would establish us in every good word and work." I see that the most approved editions of the original have it, "in every good work and word," putting the best first. And the thought is this that God would make His people so happy that they would never have an inclination to leave off any good work or word. Depression of spirit often leads to slackness of hand. No doubt many, through sad hearts, have ceased to labor for Christ. A lack of gladness has restrained their activity. Now, the apostle would not have any one of us cease from serving God in good works, or in good words through a lack of consolation. Does God love you? Do you know it? How, then, can you cease from any good work? Did enemies abuse you for speaking the truth? Did you say it because you felt you loved God? Say it again! Say it again! Did you work in your class without success? Did you do it because God loved you, and you wanted to show that you loved Him? Go on, Brother! Go on, Sister! Success or no success! God loves you, and He has given you everlasting consolation, therefore be established in your good work. Have you been accustomed to sing His praises, and has the devil said, "Leave off! Leave off!"? Have you been accustomed to rebuke

sin, and to tell others about the Savior in your own poor way, and are you getting low in spirit? Do you doubt your own interest in Christ? Have you lost the comfort you once enjoyed? O, dear brother, sister, come back to the old original source of happiness—"Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which has loved us, and given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." After refreshing yourself with this blessed truth, you will return with renewed energy to good words and works, and continue in them steadfast, unmovable—till life's allotted service shall come to a close.

Now and then we become greatly disheartened about the condition of the church. I know I do. I see everywhere Popery spreading, or else rationalism—these rival evils are devouring our country. There is far too little prayerfulness, and too little gospel preaching; and at times one is apt to cry out, like Elijah, that no one is left who is faithful to Jehovah—all knees are bowed to Baal! We must not give way to these feelings, dear friends, for, "God, even the Father, has loved us." When the disciples were too much elated with their success, and came back to Jesus and said, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us," Jesus said, "Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." And today, when we are depressed with great anxieties, and come back to our Master, and say, "Lord, the devil is getting the upper hand over us," He repeats to us the same admonition, "Nevertheless do not be depressed about this, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven, and your Father has given you everlasting consolation and good hope through grace."

Establish your hearts, then, beloved brethren. Be "steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord." Things are not what they seem. Dark nights are but the prelude to bright days. The rain shall be followed by the clear shining. When truth retreats, she only retires to leap to a greater victory. Though each wave, as it comes up upon the shore, may die, and you may think that there is no progress, yet the tide is coming in—even Jehovah's tide of everlasting truth which shall cover all the earth. Be not discouraged! Go to your God. Get away, every man, every woman, from your circumstances, and from yourselves, and get to your Savior and your Shepherd. And there, like sheep in the pasture, lie down to feed, and then, like sheep obedient to the shepherd, rise up and follow Him where ever He goes. God bless you in this.

Perhaps while I have been preaching, some unconverted person here has been saying—"There is nothing for me." Do you remember, dear friend, what the Syro-Phoenician woman said? She was called a dog by the Savior, and that is what you think you are, but she said, "The dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table." Now, if I called myself a dog, would there be anything in this subject that I might dare to lay hold upon, because, like a crumb, it fell from the table? Yes. It seems to me there is. Evidently God deals with His own people in a way of grace, for it is said, He has *"given"* us—it is altogether of His free love, and it is

added, *"through Grace,"* or absolute favor. The consolations of the Lord are the gifts of mercy and love. Well, then, if He is gracious to one, why should He not be gracious to another? And if those who sit at His table were once unclean, filthy, and depraved, and yet the sovereign grace of God called them, and brought them into the banquet of love, why should it not light on me also? If it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy—why should He not show mercy to me, whoever I may be? Why not to me?

But is there a door through which I can come to the gracious Lord? Yes, there is, and it is the other crumb in the text, for it begins with, "our Lord Jesus Christ." My soul that is where you must begin this morning! There is the Lord Jesus Christ. I see Him hanging on the cross, bleeding for the sins of others, with hands stretched wide, that He may receive sinners to His heart. And that heart has a channel made down to it by the spear, that prayers and tears may find an easy way into His sympathies. Come, my soul, come now, and tell your case to Jesus. Fellow sinner, come and confess your sins to Jesus, and then throw yourself at His feet with this upon your heart and lips—"If I must perish, I will perish clinging to the cross, declaring to all men that my hope is stayed on Him whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for the sins of man." Sinner, you will never perish there. Go there at once and be safe. God help you for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
2 THESSALONIANS 2, 3.

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"Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not proper for us to see the king dishonored, therefore have we sent and informed the king."
Ezra 4:14.

THE facts of the case were these. Under Zerubbabel, the Jews, who had returned from Babylon, commenced to rebuild Jerusalem. There were in the land certain half-and-half persons, somewhat like the Samaritans, who were neither Jews nor Gentiles; and they asked at first that they might join in the building of Jerusalem. This was refused, the Jews determining to keep themselves pure from all association with the heathen or semi-heathen. So indignant were these people at this that they wrote Artaxerxes, the king, to tell him that he was very little aware of what was going on in Judea, for the Jews had always been from time immemorial a troublesome people, and now they were beginning to build their city again. And as soon as it was built they would, in all probability, revolt against King Artaxerxes, and give him much trouble, as their fathers had done to kings before him. Now, in writing that letter they showed themselves wise in their generation, for they told the king in the words of our text that they were moved by gratitude to write to him. It was false; but hypocrites often use the best of words and employ the best of sense to cover their deceit. They said that they themselves were sustained from the king's palace, and, therefore, they could not bear that the king should be dishonored; for this reason they had written to tell his majesty that the Jews were building this wall, and they trusted that for his own honor's sake and for his subjects' sake he would stop them.

Now let me take these words right out of those evil mouths, and put them into my own, and into yours. They will suit us well if we turn them to the great King of kings. We may truly say, "Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not proper for us to see the king dishonored, therefore have we sent and informed the king."

The text will enable me to speak on three points. First, here is *a fact acknowledged*—"We have maintenance from the king's palace." Here is, secondly, *a duty recognized*—"It was not proper for us to see the king dishonored." And, thirdly, here is *a course of action prescribed*—"Therefore have we sent and informed the king."

I. Now, beloved fellow believers, the words of our text may be used by us while we acknowledge a very gracious fact—WE HAVE MAINTENANCE FROM THE KING'S PALACE. How true this is of all God's people; in all respects, you will be abundantly ready to acknowledge. Both the upper and the nether springs from which we drink are fed by the eternal bounty of the great King. Up to now we have been supplied with food and raiment. Sometimes we may have been reduced to a pinch, no doubt, and the question has arisen, through the infirmity of our nature, and fermented with the irritability of our unbelief, "What shall we eat; what shall we drink, and with what shall we be clothed?" But we have dwelt in the land, and verily we have been fed, and I have no doubt that to many of you it has been peculiarly gratifying to receive the loaf, as it were, immediately from your Father's hands. You have known what poverty has meant, and then there has been to you a peculiar sweetness in the daily bread which in answer to prayer has been sent to you. Although we do not drink of the water from the rock, or find the manna lying at our tent door every morning, yet the providence of God produces for us quite the same results; we have been fed and satisfied, and at any rate, many of us, in looking back, can say, "My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." Therefore we have to now, even in temporal things, been made to feel that we have been maintained from the king's palace.

But it has been in spiritual things, beloved, that our continual experience of the king's bounty has been most notable. We have a new life, and therefore we have new needs, and new hunger, and a new thirst—and God has maintained us out of His own palace as to this new life of ours. O beloved, we have had great hunger at times, after heavenly things, and He has "Satisfied our mouth with good things," and our youth has been "Renewed like the eagles." We have had huge needs; bottomless deeps of need we have had. And yet, great God, the treasures of Your grace have been everlasting mines, deep as our helpless miseries were, and boundless as our sins. Why, sometimes we have been drawn aside from our steadfastness, and we have needed mighty grace to set us on our feet again, and to make us once more, "Strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"—and we have had it, have we not? We have sought it, and we have found it. Our shoes have been iron and brass, and as our days so has our strength been. Up till this moment we have found that underneath us are the everlasting arms. In looking back upon all the way wherein the Lord our God has led us, we can sing of the beginning of it, we can sing of the middle of it, and we believe we shall sing of the end of it—for all through we have been maintained out of the king's palace. This is matter of fact both as to things temporal and things spiritual.

Beloved, it is a great mercy that you and I have been maintained out of the king's palace as believers, because where else could we have been maintained? Where else, I ask you? As to spiritual things, to whom could we go but unto Him who has been so good to us? What empty wells ministers are if we look to them! If we look to their Master, "The rain also fills the pools," and we find that there is supply in the preached word for our consolation. But have you not often known what it is to find that even God's servant under whom you have been fed does not meet your case? He is meeting the case of hundreds of others, perhaps, but somehow he misses you—there is no food for your soul. Yes, and the books you once read with so much comfort appear to have lost their flavor, their aroma, and their sweet savor, and I may add, even the word of God itself, though it is unchanged, appears to be changed sometimes to you. But God, the God of Israel, your God, oh, how graciously has He still supplied you! "All my springs are in You," my God; and had they been elsewhere, they long ago would have failed. Who else could supply our needs but Jehovah? As the king of Israel said to the woman in the famine of Samaria, "If the Lord does not help you, how can I help you out of the barn-floor, or out of the winepress?" There is no help for the child of God if his heavenly Father should shut the granary door. If out of the king's palace there came no portions of meat in due season, we might lie down and die of despair. Who could hold us up but God? Who could guide us but God? Who could keep us from falling into hell but God? Who could from hour to hour supply our desperate needs but God? Is it not, then, right well for us—abundantly well—that we have had our maintenance from the king's palace?

While we turn over this very sweet thought, we may remember that our maintenance from the king's palace has cost His Majesty dearly. He has not fed us for nothing. We do not know what was the expenditure in gold every day of King Solomon to supply all his court with wine and oil, with meal and fine flower, with sheep and fat oxen, harts and roebucks, venison and fatted fowl; but we do know that Solomon's cost was nothing at all compared with the vast expense at which we are sustained by the munificence of God. It cost Him His own dear Son at the very first. We would not have begun to live if He had spared His Son, and kept Him back from us. But the choicest treasure in heaven, the Koh-i-noor of God's regalia, He was pleased to spend for our sakes that we might live. And ever since then we have been fed upon Jesus Christ Himself. No other food would be adequate to our necessities. His flesh is meat indeed; His blood is drink indeed. This is the most royal dainty conceivable, for a soul to feed upon the Son of God. And yet we have fed upon Him these many years. Let us bless and magnify our bounteous God, whose infinite favor has thus supplied our needs. And while He spares nothing for us,

but gives everything to us, let us not keep back anything from Him. With such a generous God, generosity seems to be so natural that it ought to be spontaneous. The highest—the most ardent—form of service would seem to be but a trifling recompense for the immense expense which the Lord has in supporting us these many years.

May I ask you to think over the kind of portion and maintenance you have had from the king's palace? Such thoughts will stir your gratitude. Beloved, we have had a bountiful supply. God has never stinted us. As the sun throws out his wealth of heat and light, and does not measure it by the consumption of men, but throws it broadcast over all worlds—even so does God flood the world with the sunlight of His goodness, and His saints are made to receive it in abundance. If you have ever been stinted, it is not by God; you have stinted yourself. Our receptive faculty may be small, but His giving disposition is abundant. Floods of mercy, oceans of love has He poured out for us. O, what a bountiful maintenance have we had! Enough and to spare! Our imagination could not have conceived greater wealth than is ours in the covenant of grace—for all things are yours—the gift of God. God being ours, the infinite is ours; the omniscient is ours; the omnipotent is ours. O, what a bountiful portion we have!

And we have had an unfailing portion. As there has been much of it, so, it has always come to us in due season. Times of need have come, but the needed supply has come too. If there is any believer here who has reason to testify against his God, let him do it. Have you ever rested on Him, and found Him failed you? Did you ever trust Him in vain? Are His promises false? Has He left you in the deep waters? When you passed through the fires, did the flames kindle upon you? Have you found your God a wilderness? Has He been barrenness in the day of your extremity? No, beloved, our God has been bountiful, and He has continued His bounty—not good by fits and starts, but ever gracious to us. I am desirous, if this were the proper place, to stop and tell what I know of this; but then, surely, many older saints here might interrupt me, and say, "Let me speak of it." I remember once trying to speak of the great goodness of God in the pulpit, when my venerable grandfather, who is now in heaven, was sitting behind me; he pulled my coattail, and bid me stop, for he thought he could talk upon that better than I could. And, indeed, he could, because of his deep experience of the faithfulness of the living God. It is a great delight and benefit to younger men to hear their gray-headed fathers and grandfathers stand up and say what they have known, and what they have proved of God's eternal goodness. But I think we can say, whether young or old, if we have known His name a few years—

"When trouble, like a gloomy cloud,

Has gathered thick and thundered loud,
He near my soul has always stood,
His loving kindness, oh, how good!"

He has been a faithful friend to us—we have been right well maintained from the king's table.

While the supply has thus been bountiful and continuous, it has ennobled us. For consider how great a thing it is, to be supported from a king's palace; but it is the greatest of all privileges to be living upon the bounty of the King of kings, and "Such honor have all the saints." Even the feeble Mephibosheths who are lame in their feet shall eat at the king's table. The Lord Jesus, the good Shepherd, makes all His little ones to be like the ewe lamb of the parable which was fed out of the man's own cup, and did lie in his bosom. Even those who are weakest and meanest have this high honor—to be supplied by royalty itself, with all that they need. Lift up your heads, you that hang them down. You poor desponding saints who think yourselves less than the least of all, you are, every one of you, king's sons; you are all gentlemen commoners upon the King of kings. Your diet is better than that of the angels. God will sooner let Gabriel starve than you—

"Never did angels taste above,
Redeeming grace and dying love"

Yet that is your daily bread, your morning meal, and evening feast. Be glad. Have you little of temporal good? Well, but your Father sends it to you. Do you mourn that you have so little spiritual good? Bless Him that you have any, for it is God who sends it to you. You would have had none if it were not for His infinite grace. Therefore praise Him for what you have, and confidently ask Him for more.

And there is reason for good cheer in this, dear friends, that we have such a soul-satisfying portion in God. A soul that gets what God gives him has quite as much as he can hold, and as much as he can need. He has got a portion that might well excite envy. If the world did but know how happy and blessed Christians are, they would count them up in the royal family, and they would envy them beyond all others. There is nothing in the worldling's estate to envy. The more he has, the worse it will be for him to leave it. His fine gardens, and lawns, and parks will make it hard to die. The greater his earthly honor, the worse will be his eternal dishonor. It must be to him a horrible thing to have had such a high flight, and then to have all the greater fall because of it. "Fret not yourself because of evildoers, neither be you envious because of the prosperity of the wicked." What, after all, becomes of him that prospers in his way? "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree; yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yes, I sought him, but he could not be found." The place that has known the ungodly and the lands they have called by their own name, soon become oblivious of their

memory. Their record has perished quickly, and they have gone back "To the vile dust from where they sprang." But you have eternity to be your heritage! You have heaven to be your portion! The few drops of gall that are in your cup today shall soon be rinsed out, and it shall be full of the nectar of celestial thrones. Be content, now, with your brown bread, and hard fare a little while, for you shall eat the delicacies of angels. Yes, and by faith you do even now feast upon the fat things full of marrow, and the wines on the lees well-refined, which your God sends to you from the king's palace. Let us rejoice, dear brethren, if any of us are downcast tonight, for our maintenance is from the king's palace, and what can we need more?—

"Father, I wait Your daily will.
You shall divide my portion still.
Grant me on earth what seems You best,
Till death and heaven reveal the rest."

Thus we acknowledge the fact with lively interest and devout gratitude—"We have maintenance from the king's palace."

II. Now, secondly, here is A DUTY RECOGNIZED—"It was not proper for us to see the king dishonored."

No doubt you will see the force of the argument without need of much explanation. It is good reasoning; if they were fed from the king's palace, it was not right that they should stand by and see the king dishonored. The reasoning comes home to us. If we are so favored—we, who are believers—with such a choice portion, it is not right for us to sit down and see our God dishonored. And here I will notice some things which dishonor God, and which we are bound not to put up with. By every sense of propriety we are bound not to see God dishonored by ourselves. It is well to begin at home. Are you doing anything that dishonors your God, believer—anything at home, anything in your daily avocation, anything in the way of conducting your business? Is there anything in your conversation, anything in your actions, anything in your reading, anything in your writing, anything in your speaking that dishonors God?

Seeing that you are fed from the king's table, I beseech you, let it not be said that the king got damage from you. If there is a traitor, let him be found somewhere else, but not among the Lord's own chosen. You are bought with blood; will you trample on that blood? The Crucified One died for you; will you crucify Him afresh, and put Him to an open shame? You will soon be where Jesus is. Would you blush to see His face, and to stand in His presence? What? And shall it ever be said that you bring dishonor upon Jesus? God has given you a portion above the angels, and will you fill the devils' mouths with laughter, and cause them to have a reason to glory against God? May that be far from you, my brother, my sister! The Lord grant us grace to feel that if we are main-

tained from the king's palace, it is not right for us to cause the king dishonor!

Perhaps that dishonor may come from those who dwell under our roof, and live in our own house. I charge you who are parents and masters, to see to this. Do not tolerate anything in those over whom you have control that would bring dishonor to God. Remember Eli; he did not restrain his sons, and they behaved shamefully. They were the minister's sons, and because they were not restrained, God overthrew Eli's house, and did such terrible things that the ears of him that hears might well tingle. Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." We cannot impart to our children new hearts, but we can see to it that there shall be nothing within our gates that is derogatory to the religion of Jesus Christ. I charge you, see to it. But you cannot control your children, you say. Then the Lord have mercy upon you! It is your business to do it, and you must do it, or else you will soon find they will control you. And no one knows what judgment will come from God upon those who allow sin in children and servants to go unrebuked. No, if we are maintained from the king's palace, let us not see the king dishonored.

Let the same holy jealousy animate us among those with whom we have influence—as for instance, among those who wish to be united with us in church fellowship. It is the duty of every church to try as far as it can, to guard the honor and dignity of King Jesus against unworthy persons who would intrude themselves into the congregation of the saints, of those who are called, chosen, and faithful. We are deceived, and always shall be, for the church never was infallible; but still let no negligence of our practice supplement the infirmity of our judgment. Because ungodly men will creep in unawares, we are not, therefore, to cooperate at their entrance. To allow persons to come to the communion table who do not even profess to be born-again, is a clear act of treason against the King of kings. To receive into our membership persons of unhallowed life, unchaste, unrighteous; of licentious life and lax doctrine, such as know not the truth as it is in Jesus, would be to betray the trust with which Christ has invested in us. That must not be, and every church member is bound to do his best to guard the church against that which would render her unclean in the sight of God. If you are maintained from the king's table, it is not proper that you should see the king dishonored.

We are under sacred obligations to maintain the statutes and testimonies of the Lord. And, oh, how the king is dishonored by the mutilation and misrepresentation of His word! Therefore, dear brethren, we are always bound to bear our protest against false doctrine. I am sometimes accused of saying sharp things. The charge does not come home to my conscience with very great power. If anybody said I spoke smooth things, I think it would oppress me a great deal more. As long as there are evils

in this world, God's ministers are bound to protest against them. That man who as he goes through the world, can say, "Hail, fellow, well met!" with everybody, and extol the modern Diana of charity—universal charity, false charity, charity towards the false—that man, when he comes to stand before his Maker, will find it hard to give his account. In these days, when nobody believes anything, when everybody has subscribed to the belief that black is white, and white is black, and colors are nothing at all but imaginary distinctions, it is time that somebody should believe something. And a little sharpness of speech might not only be excused, but commended if we had but men who spoke what they did know, and testified honestly to the truth which they had received. Everyone here, who is maintained from the king's palace, is bound to fight against every doctrine which insults the king. When I see a man pretending to be a priest, and assuming that he has power to forgive sins, and to dispense pardons and indulgences, I do my best to unmask the deceiver, and to speak against his imposition, less I might be accounted accessory to his crime, chargeable with his guilt, and be made partaker of his condemnation. Therefore, let every Englishman, let every Protestant, and above all, let every Christian denounce priestcraft of every sort, and in every church, whether among Romanists, Anglicans, or Dissenters. Down with it! There is only one Priest, and He is in heaven. And none of us have any power to offer any sacrifice for sin, or any power to absolve our fellow men. Whether you accuse us of being censorious or not, the profanity appalls us, the duplicity that is taken in by it amazes us, and the sincerity with which we love the gospel inflames us to make our protest heard. If we do not speak out about this crying perversion of the truth, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves!

Then there are some in these days who deny the divinity of Christ, and there can be no terms of peace between us and them. I remember a remark of a Unitarian doctor, which I thought eminently correct; he said of a certain Calvinist, who was accused of speaking sharply against Unitarians, "Quite right and so he ought, because if the Calvinist is right, the Unitarian is not a Christian at all; but if the Unitarian is right, the Calvinist is an idolater, because he worships one who is a man, and is not the Son of God." If what we hold is true, it is not possible that the man who denies the deity of Christ can be a Christian, nor can there be for him a hope of salvation. He deliberately refuses the only way of escape from the wrath to come. I can understand a man getting to heaven as a Roman Catholic, notwithstanding all his errors, because he believes in the divinity of Christ, and relies on the expiatory sacrifice of His death, with whatever superstitions his creed may be overlaid. But I cannot understand, nor do I believe, that any man will ever enter those pearly gates who, in doubting or discrediting the deity of our blessed Lord and Savior,

Jesus Christ, renounces the sheet-anchor of our most holy faith, and dares to face his maker without a Counselor, without an Advocate, without a plea for mercy! It is time we said so, and spoke out plainly. This is no theme for trifling. Courtesies are thrown away upon antagonists whose cause is treason. Nor are we the men who should practice reserve, for if we are maintained from the king's palace, we are cowards if we do not stand up for our king. Then there have been attacks made in modern times upon the doctrine of substitution. If the doctrine of substitution is not true, I am a lost man—therefore, tooth and nail, will I fight for it. No other hope beneath the skies have I, except in the expiatory substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ; if He did not suffer in my place, the just for the unjust, then flames of hell must be my portion. Therefore I can never give up that truth, for it is giving up my own salvation. But it has been revealed, and I cling to it with the most implicit credit. Do you tell me that "modern thought" assails it? How, and with what weapons, I ask? Is it with argument, with proof, or with any counter-suggestion? Oh, no, it is merely met with vague questions, idle quibbles, and impertinent sneers—a style of answer that affects much, though it affirms nothing. I pray you, brethren, wherever you are, defend this fundamental doctrine of our most holy faith—that the Lord Jesus Christ has laid down His life to make atonement for the sins of His people.

Or should we be confronted with any other form of false doctrine, or should we be haunted with any kind of skepticism—(skepticism! An anomalous thing, which is without form and void)—are we to stand with mealy mouths, and say, "Yes, brethren, you are of that opinion, and I am of the other"? No, for opinion is light as a bubble when judgment is pronounced by the supreme court from which there is no appeal. What do you think? Is there no fact? Is there no truth? Is the word of God, "Yes," and, "No"? Has it come to this, that it is to be shuffled like a pack of cards, or shaped like a nose of wax as every man may please? Oh, no! By the ever-living God there is truth somewhere, and that truth we will find out if we can, and, having found it, we will hold it fast. Let us, in the day of battle, use our standard—and if our arm is torn off, we hope the standard will not fall, but that others will be found to hold it up as there were in the brave days of yore—when our fathers burned at the stake for these things, or went to the galleys, or perished amidst the Alps sooner than the truth of God's own word should be without witnesses among the sons of man! Bear none of these things in your hearts with tolerance, but hold fast to the things which you have been taught, and hold them fast in faith and love to Christ Jesus.

Those who have their maintenance from the king's palace ought not to allow the Lord to be dishonored by a neglect of His ordinances. Brethren, I remind you who are believers; the Lord Jesus has given you only two

symbolic ordinances. Take care that you use them well. Follow Him in what He did, when He said, "Thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness." Be baptized in His name. Follow Him to the communion table. He said, "This do you, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." Be obedient, I pray you, to His gracious word, and allow not the king's precept to be trifled with.

Again, if we are, indeed, His courtiers, let us take care that He is not dishonored by a general decline of His church. When churches go to sleep; when the work of God is done deceitfully—for to do it formally is to do it deceitfully; when there is no life in the prayer meeting; when there are no holy enterprises afloat for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom, then the world says, "That is your church! What a sleepy set these saints are!" O let not the king be thus dishonored. Brethren bestir yourselves! May this church never settle upon its lees, or fall into slumber as it grows older. May God grant it may grow more earnest! May there be always here regiments of stalwart men who shall fight for King Jesus, and not be ashamed, and may the church be full of life and vigor till Christ Himself shall come. When we sleep with our fathers, may there be others found better than we are to maintain the cause and crown rights of King Jesus.

And oh, dear friends! How can we tolerate it that so many should dishonor Christ by rejecting His gospel? We cannot prevent their doing so, but we can weep for them. We can pray for them. We can plead for them. We can make it uncomfortable for them to reflect that believers love them, and yet they do not love the Savior. If you are fed from the king's palace, it is not right that you see, with dry eyes, the king dishonored. If you hear a man swearing in the streets, mourn and lament it. If you see the Sunday desecrated, grieve over it. If you behold drunkenness, do not laugh at it. If you hear lascivious songs, do not smile at them. Everything that is evil should be painful to a believer, and it ought to be an incessant sorrow to us that souls are perishing.—

"Did Christ over sinners weep,
And shall our cheeks be dry?"

Privileged as you are, beloved; you ought to love your Master so that the slightest word against Him should provoke your spirit to holy jealousy.

III. Our last point is this—A COURSE OF ACTION PURSUED—"Therefore," says the text, "have we sent and informed the king." How shall we do that? Doubtless we act as it well becomes us, when we go and tell the Lord all about it. "Inform the king!"—but does He not know? Are not all things open to Him from whom no secrets are hid? Ah, yes, but when Hezekiah received Rabshakeh's blasphemous letter, he took it and spread it before the Lord. It is a holy exercise of the saints to report to the Lord the sins and the sorrows they observe among the people—the

griefs they feel, and the grievances they complain of—to spread before Him the blasphemies they have heard, and appeal to Him concerning the menaces with which they are threatened. Yes, you may report to the Lord the false doctrine that is preached, and the foul sophistry that is printed in these days. Such plain statements might become mighty pleas with God that He should arise, assert His cause, and do His own work. Lord, You know that this day the deity of your Son has been insulted; the inspiration of Your word has been denied; the power of Your Holy Spirit has been ridiculed, Your eternal love has been denied, Your infinitely blessed sovereignty has been scoffed at. The atoning blood has been made a subject of contempt. Arise, O God; plead Your own cause! Behold, all over the world men are mad upon their idols! They give themselves to falsehoods and to lies. O God of truth, arise and avenge Yourself! Have You not said, "Ah, I will ease Me of My adversaries"? Do this, then. Give glory to whom glory is due, and let not the name of Jesus be forever cast out as evil by ungodly men. This ought to be the constant pleading of the church—"Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?" O, it ought to be. Day and night cry about all this. The sin of this London; oh, if we felt it, it would weigh us down; the drunkenness of London; the lust of London; the oppression of London; the wickedness of every shape that reeks, as from a dunghill, from this great city—O God, will You always bear it? Will You not rise and change all this? Will You not give power to Your gospel, that a gracious reformation may be made? Tell the Lord about it! Inform the king!

After those people had informed the king, they took care to plead with him. As I have already told you, they made him aware that the city of Jerusalem was a very troublesome city, and therefore it ought not to be rebuilt. Plead with God; plead with God; plead with God! That praying is poor shift that is not made up of pleading. "Bring forth your reasons," says the Lord. Bring forth your strong arguments. O, what prayers were those of John Knox, when he seemed to say to God, "Save Scotland for this reason—for that reason—for another reason—for yet one more reason"—the number of his motives still multiplying with the fervor of his heart! So did he labor with God as though he pleaded for his life, and would not let Him go until he had gained his suit for Scotland. Why, Scotland's knowledge of the truth is due, doubtless, beyond everything else to John Knox's prayers, which even now are ringing in heaven. He, "Being dead, yet speaks." O, for men of that caliber and that mind in this country, thus to plead for London! O, what a gem would London be in Christ's crown! If Christ had but London, surely out of this great city, which is the very heart of the world in many respects, there would go streaming forth rivers of health, and life, and blessing to the utmost ends

of the earth. Spread London's case, then, before God and plead with the Most High.

And when you have done it, do not go away and make your prayers into a lie by contrary actions, or by refraining from any action at all. He, who prays hard, must work hard, for no man prays sincerely who is not prepared to use every effort to obtain that which he asks of God. We must put our shoulder to the wheel while we pray for strength to put it in motion. All success depends upon God; yet He uses instruments, but He will not use instruments that are useless and unfitted to the work. "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward; not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who has made us able ministers"—therefore let us be up, and be stirring, for if we are maintained from the king's palace, it is not proper that we see the king dishonored, but it is due to Him that we should seek His glory.

Now, I would that every one of you knew what it was to be maintained from the king's palace, but alas! There are some here that have never eaten the king's bread, and will be banished from the king's presence if they die as they are. But, O, remember, the king is always ready to receive His rebel subjects, and He is a God ready to pardon. "Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and you perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little." "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." That is the way of reconciliation—to put your trust in Him; and if you do put your trust in His dear Son, you are reconciled to Him. You shall be maintained out of His palace, and then, I trust, you will live to His glory. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
PSALM 119:49-64.

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A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 23, 1873,
By C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And praise the name of the Lord your God,
that has dealt wondrously with you."
Joel 2:26.

IN the case which is particularly mentioned in this chapter, the nation of Israel had very grievously gone astray, and therefore they were visited by a very remarkable chastisement. An unusual plague of locusts devoured all the fruit of the field, and the people were vexed with a sore famine. The day of the Lord was very terrible, and none of them could abide it. The prophet Joel was commissioned to exhort them to repentance; and if, indeed, they listened to his earnest entreaties their later history was bright with mercy. By God's good hand upon them, they were brought to repentance—they wept and cried to God. And then the same God, who with His left hand had been wondrous in chastisement, was, with His right hand, equally wonderful in blessing and enriching them. He loaded their floors with wheat, and made their vats to overflow with wine and oil, and restored unto them the years which the locust had eaten, so that they ate in plenty and were satisfied and praised the name of the Lord, who had dealt wondrously with them. He dealt with then by way of wonders when He smote them and by way of wonders when He returned to them in His mercy.

It was no unusual thing for the nation of Israel to meet with wonders. They were cradled in prodigies, they grew up amid miracles, they dwelt among marvels; the history of the favored tribes is a long list of miracles. Do you not remember how the Lord brought them out of Egypt with a high hand, and with an outstretched arm? What marvelous things He did among the sons of Ham, and what wonders He worked in the fields of Zoan? By wonders they were led out of Egypt, and brought through the Red Sea, upon whose shore they sang triumphantly, "Who is like unto You O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Their course in the great howling wilderness for 40 years was a march of wonders. When the manna dropped from heaven, and the water leaped from the rock, the Lord dealt wondrously with them. There was not a single day of the forty years which did not open and close with wonders—the day was shaded by the cloudy pillar, and the night glowed with the light of the fiery cloud. Nor when the desert journey was over did God's wonders cease. The river was divided before them. What ailed you, O Jordan, that you were driven back? They entered into their land, and began its conquest by a wonder, for the walls

of Jericho fell flat to the ground, and they continued its conquest by the same marvelous power. For mighty kings fled before them, and the sun and the moon stood still while they smote the hostile armies! When they had driven out the Canaanites, and were established in the land of promise, they sinned greatly, but what wonders of deliverance God worked for them when they cried to Him in their trouble! You have but to remember the names of Gideon, and of Barak, of Jephtha, and of Samson, and you see before you wonder after wonder! The Lord dealt wondrously with them.

In all this the Israelites were a type of true believers, for with all His chosen ones, the Lord has dealt wondrously. We frequently hear the complaint that we live in an age of dullness, we have no adventures now, and events are few. Happy are we that it is so, for it has been well said—"Blessed are the times which have no history." If peace and prosperity are commonplace, long may the commonplace continue! But indeed, no thoughtful man's life is uninteresting or barren of marvels. A life real and earnest cannot be devoid of memorable occurrences. He who thinks so must either be unspiritual, or he must be oblivious of his own inner history—he must be like the tribes in the wilderness, of whom it is written, "They forget the works of the Lord, and the wonders which He has showed them." Foolish people run to fiction for wonders, but gracious men can tell far greater wonders, upon which the words, "NO FICTION," might be written in capital letters. The wonders which we can speak of far surpass the inventions of imagination. When we recount them, we may appear unto men to dream, but in very truth no dreamer could dream after such a fashion. Speak of "Arabian Nights," English days and nights have far exceeded them in marvel. "God does great things past finding out, and wonders without number." I have seen a volume entitled, "The World of Wonders," and another named, "Ten Thousand Wonderful Things." The believer is within himself a world of wonders, and his life reveals 10,000 wonderful things. Mysteries, riddles, paradoxes, and miracles make up Christian experience. God has dealt wondrously with us. Of these wonders I shall try and speak at this time, according to that precept of David—"Talk you of all His wondrous works," and I shall dwell upon them after the following manner: first, we shall testify that *God's dealings toward us have been full of wonder, and lead us to praise Him as Jehovah, our God;* and secondly, we shall remark that because of this, *we ought to look for wonders in the future,* and if I may speak so paradoxically, it should not be unusual for us to see wonders. And, then, thirdly, we shall close by observing that *in a future state, we shall yet more clearly see that Jehovah has dealt wondrously with us.*

I. THE LORD'S DEALINGS WITH US UP TILL NOW HAVE BEEN FULL OF WONDER, AND LEAD US TO PRAISE HIM. Let us speak of what we know, and have tasted and handled. The Lord has dealt wonderfully *toward* us. Begin at the beginning. It was no small wonder that He should love us before the earth was. There were many other things to exercise Jehovah's thought besides thinking upon man—"What is man, that You

are mindful of him?" And if He must think of man, there were many kinds of thoughts that the Lord might have had towards man besides thoughts of love. Yet the Lord was mindful of us, and though we are poor and needy, the Lord thinks upon us. "How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God; how great is the sum of them!" Why were they thoughts of love? Admiring gratitude gives us the only reply. And if they must be thoughts of love, yet it is a wonder of wonders that they should be thoughts of love to me! Each Christian will feel it to be so in his own personal case—"Why did divine love settle itself upon me?" Well might we say of our God what David said of Jonathan, "Your love to me was wonderful." The song of the Virgin may be upon each one of our lips, "He has put down the mighty from their seat, and has exalted them of low degree." He has thought of us who were inconsiderable, while the great ones of the earth have been passed by. Eternal love in its sovereignty is a marvel, and comes from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.

That divine love should have continued faithful notwithstanding our unworthiness of it; and the provocations by which we have tried it, is another wonder. The immutability of His counsel calls for adoring wonder. Has there been a day since we have been responsible for our actions in which we have not tested the faithfulness of God by our transgressions? The children of Israel for forty years provoked God in the wilderness; were they not most sadly the prototypes of ourselves? Yet never, never has the Lord paused or changed in His love. As it is said of our blessed Redeemer, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." And so is it true that the "Father Himself loves you," and rests in His love.

If the divine love is, in itself, a wonder, brethren, it is equally a wonder that, in consequence of this love, God should enter into covenant with us. He has promised us a thousand mercies, and He has engaged Himself to the performance of those promises in a remarkable way which increases the consolation of the promise, for He has given us His oath—"I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn unto David, My servant." Now, by David is meant the Lord Jesus Christ, and God has entered into covenant with us in the person of the Son of David. A covenant ordered in all things and sure, confirmed by His oath, and sealed by blood, by which He has bound Himself, by His own word and oath, that in blessing, He will bless us, and glorify His Son in us. Behold and wonder—the Infinite enters into covenant with the finite; the Holy engages Himself to sinners. We may well sit before the Lord as David did, rapt in astonishment and then say from our heart of hearts, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that You have brought me up to now?"

It is equally wonderful that a part of the covenant should run thus—"I will be a Father unto them, and they shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord God Almighty." If God wanted sons, beside the Only-begotten, He might have chosen yon bright seraphs that outshine the sun. Why did He look here, upon this ant hill, to elect a seed out of such

ants as we are? Why did He come down in the person of His Son to make a match with our frail humanity? O, matchless grace, that God should adopt for His children those who were heirs of wrath, even as others. Behold, of these stones He has not only raised up children unto Abraham, but unto Himself also—"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

Beloved, let us admire and wonder, that being His sons and daughters, the Lord should stake His honor upon the bringing of us securely to heaven, for in the covenant He has pledged all His attributes for His people's security. He cannot be a glorious God unless His people ultimately are a glorified people. He cannot be true unless His people are kept to the end, for He has pledged His honor for their safety. Jesus has said, "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." Yes, the Lord Himself has declared that, "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; they shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." Heaven and earth shall pass away, but God's word shall not fail; sun and moon shall cease their shining, but He will not alter the thing which has gone forth from His lips. Has He said, and shall He not do it? Has He spoken, and shall He not make it good?

By shifting the kaleidoscope, we shall get another view of the same matchless wonders. The Lord has acted wondrously *for* us. Having loved us, and covenanted with us, He gave us His Only-begotten Son to be born in our nature, and in that nature, to suffer even unto death! I will not attempt to show you that this is a wonder. I believe that the angels, though they have known of the incarnation nearly these 1,900 years, have never ceased from astonishment for one single moment. That God, the Word, should be made flesh, and should dwell among us, and that He at last should bleed and die, excels everything that is wonderful besides. That Jesus Christ, the King of kings, should be a Servant of servants! That He who wrapped the earth in the swaddling bands of ocean, and spread upon the firmament its vesture of blue should gird Himself with a towel, and wash His disciples' feet, is beyond measure, a wonder! Yet this sacred office He is virtually fulfilling every day in His perpetual intercession for His people, and in all His acts of love towards them; this is indeed dealing wondrously with us.

In the gift of the Lord Jesus, we have obtained pardon, justification, sanctification and eternal life, all of which contain a mine of wonders. Perhaps to penitent hearts the chief of all these is the forgiveness of sin, and of such sins as ours—

"Great God of wonders!
All Your ways
Are matchless, God-like, and divine!
But the fair glories of Your grace
More God-like and unrivalled shine!
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?
In wonder lost, with trembling joy

We take the pardon of our God;
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye;
A pardon bought with Jesus' blood;
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?"

Having given us His Son, the Lord has also, in Him, given us all things. I put these things into words, and sum them up, but indeed, there is an ocean of thought in every syllable I utter, for the Lord has given us this world, and worlds to come. He has given us earth and heaven! He has given us time and eternity! "All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Believer, there is nothing in providence but what is yours, for, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose." That which looks like evil is good to you, and the good has a goodness in it which you do not yet perceive—an inner core of excellent mercy which will be opened up for you in due time through the abounding wisdom of God. Walk now abroad like Abraham of old, and lift up your eyes to the north and to the south, and to the east and to the west, for all this has God given you in giving you His Son. He has dealt wondrously with us in this respect. He has made the angels to be our servitors, glad to wait upon us, and to bear us up in their hands lest we dash our feet against a stone. Making the angels to be our servants, He has made the angels' home to be our home, only He has brightened it with special glory for us. It is not written that many mansions are prepared especially for angels, but Jesus our Lord has gone before to prepare a place for us, made ready especially for our delight. Has He not said it—"I go to prepare a place for you?" To crown all, He has not given us merely the angels of heaven, and heaven itself, and Jesus to prepare a place for us, but He has given us Himself to be our God, for, "The Lord is my portion, says my soul," and He has confirmed it—"I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Thus has He dealt wondrously with us.

Beloved, I shall now ask you to look at your own experience a little, you that know the Lord, when I remind you that the Lord has worked wonders *in* us. A little while ago we were dead; He made us live. We were loathsome lepers, and He made us whole; we were blind, and He gave us sight; we were lame, and He made us leap; we were prisoners, and He set us free; we were condemned, and He justified us by His grace. Marvelous were the changes which He worked in us, we marveled while we felt them. We were amazed to feel the hardness of our heart removed. Years ago, nothing could move us, neither terrors nor love could stir us, but the Lord came and smote us as Moses smote the rock, and straightway the waters of penitence gushed out—no, the rock itself became a standing pool. What a change the grace of God makes in the matter of repentance. The very man, who was like adamant one day, becomes like wax the next; and he who never cared for God, nor wept for sin, loathes and abhors himself in the deepest and most humble contrition! Then, blessed be God, another wonderful change comes over him, for the man whom you saw broken in heart for sin, unable to derive a grain of comfort from

anything around him, all of a sudden believes on the name of Jesus as it is brought home with power to his soul by the Holy Spirit. And straightway he wipes his eyes, and his mourning is turned to dancing. He becomes supremely happy through faith, and breaks forth with such songs as this—

"I will praise You every day,
Now Your anger's turned away!
Comfortable thoughts arise,
From the bleeding sacrifice."

Have not your souls, at times, been as hard and cold as marble, and yet all of a sudden they have dissolved as ice melts in the sun? Has not your soul been tossed up and down like the Atlantic in a rage, and yet been suddenly made smooth as a "molten mirror" by God's wondrous hands? Your experience within you, I am sure, is a verification of the statement that Jehovah your "God has dealt wondrously with you." What wonderful conflicts our souls have known! What wonderful victories we have won through divine grace! Immortal sins, as they seemed to be, have received their deadly wound; unconquerable lusts have been made to bite the dust. Our victories shall never be forgotten, but the crown of them shall be put upon the head of Him who enabled us to be more than conquerors. And what wonderful Revelations God has granted to us. Has He not full often poured a flood of His light upon a truth we saw but dimly before, and made our spirit leap for joy? He has opened our eyes to behold wondrous things out of His law. Why, I bear witness that sometimes when my Lord Jesus Christ has been revealed in my soul, I have been unable to collect my thoughts of joy, much less to put them into language that should make them intelligible to other people. For the glory and the beauty are transcendent, and the love and the fellowship of Christ are transporting, ecstatic, ravishing—they bear the soul away. These wonders of revelation bring with them wonders of consolation. Have we not seen Christians dying full of life? Have we not seen them sinking in body, but soaring in soul—sick, weak, feeble, panting for their breath, and yet full of glory, ready to burst with the new wine of the kingdom that has been poured into their frail vessels? Have we not heard some of them sing between their groans such songs as only God's sweet love could have taught them? The angels could sing no sweeter songs, and assuredly they know no sweeter themes!

Yes, beloved, our inner experience has been full of wonders. We have committed terrible sins, and suffered awful sorrows, but we have received wonderful pardons, and enjoyed wonderful raptures. We have passed through bloody fights, but we have gained wonderful victories. Black has been our darkness, but we have seen marvelous light. Coleridge has said, "That in wonder all philosophy begins, in wonder it ends, and wonder fills the inner space." Truly I may say the same of all vital godliness. Another has said that, "The wise man only wonders once in his life, but that always." The same may be affirmed of the man made wise unto salvation. It may be true that our first wonder is born of igno-

rance, and at any rate, much of ignorance mingles surprise with it; but certainly, afterwards, our wonder becomes the parent of adoration. We wonder when we grow in grace, not because we do not know, but we wonder at what we do know of amazing love and grace. Our little children look up to the stars, and think them little pinholes in the sky and they say—

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are."

But when the astronomer fits his glass to his eye, and peers upon those mighty orbs, he says with greater truth—

"How I wonder what you are!"

Man's wonder grows with his knowledge. As he wades into the river of wisdom, he is less and less able to keep the foothold of calm reason, and is more and more liable to be lifted up and carried off his feet by the current. It is so with Christian experience—the more we know of God, the more wonderful His dealings to us appear.

Now, beloved, I must ask you, once again, to consider that as the Lord has dealt wondrously towards us, wondrously for us, and wondrously in us, so He has also dealt wondrously *by* us. What a field of battle, what a throne of victory the person of a poor child of God often becomes! Why, in this narrow plot of human clay, this little Isle of Man, this United Kingdom of soul and body, the powers of heaven and hell have mustered all their armies on many a day for conflict. And God and His grace and truth have fought with Satan in our hearts, and, blessed be God, on that battlefield God has won many a victory over the allied armies of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In the plains of Mansoul, Michael and his angels have fought against the dragon and his angels; and the old dragon has been defeated and led captive. We have been garrisoned against besieging sins, delivered by force of heavenly arms from the power of our corruptions, and brought forth by sovereign grace to delight in the Lord our God. When we get to heaven, we shall be "Men wondered at," set for signs and wonders forever, immortal witnesses of boundless grace. We shall publish abroad, in the celestial streets, the "deeds of infinite love," to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places should be made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Will they not—the angels—say to one another, "Here are men and women who were tempted in a thousand ways, who carried about with them bodies of sin and death, who were tried with all sorts of afflictions, and passed through much tribulation, but look what they are! Look how God has triumphed in them. Look how He has defeated the evil one, and overcome the powers of evil, for these tempted ones have come through great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. There is not one in whom God has been defeated; there is not one in whom the eternal purpose has failed; there is not one in whom electing love has been baffled; there is not one in whom the power of Christ's blood has been ineffectual; there is not one

unto whom the Spirit came without winning a complete victory. Let us praise our God anew and sing, 'Worthy is the Lamb.'"

Our God has also worked wondrously by some of us, fulfilling His promise, "The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits." His strength has been perfect in our weakness. There are some among us, whose lips have fed many, and yet they confess themselves to be emptiness itself; their word has brought life to the dead, yet in themselves they have no might. They have scattered the king's enemies although they are by nature weak as water. God's ministers are but trumpets of rams' horns, yet when God has blown through them, the blast has made the walls of Jericho to rock, and reel, and even fall to the ground. They are but lamps enclosed in earthen pitchers, and yet by them Midian has been routed. Glory be to the name of Jehovah our God for this.

Thus you see God has done wondrously *by* us. Praise Him! Praise Him! Shall we pause and sing a psalm of praise now? Our time would fail for that, but, O, you people, praise Him! O you that know His wonders, praise Him! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed out of the hand of the enemy. Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and bless the name of the Lord—"You shall bless Jehovah your God, for He has dealt wondrously with you."—

"Let the redeemed of the Lord
The wonders of His grace record;
How great His works! How kind His ways!
Let every tongue pronounce His praise!"

II. Our second and practical point is this—THEREFORE WE OUGHT TO EXPECT WONDERS. I shall but be able to give hints here. Do you labor this morning, any of you, under a horrible sense of your sinfulness? Do you seem to yourselves to be the blackest of all unpardoned souls, the nearest to being damned, of all living beings? Do you think that it would be the greatest wonder that was ever worked since the world began if you were saved? Dear brothers and sisters, I have a most precious thought to drop into your ear, may the Holy Spirit drop it into your heart: "The Lord is a God of wonders: He only does wondrous things." He delights to find in our sin and misery, room and opportunity for wonders of grace. Cast yourself upon the mercy of our matchless God, and He will make you as much a wonder of grace as you have been a wonder of sin. Possibly some are saying, "I do not feel my sin as I should; I wish I did; I feel stupid and insensible; if I feel anything, it is only a sort of regret that I do not feel at all." My dear brothers and sisters, you will be a wonder, too, if God quickens you, and makes you tender of heart. In you, too, He finds room for grace. He quickens the dead. He kills, and makes alive, He wounds and He heals. Cry to the Lord to make you sensitive through His wounding and killing work. If your heart is cold as ice, ask Him to melt it, for it is written, "He sends out His word and melts them." Is it not promised in His own covenant, "I will take away the stony heart out of

your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh?" The Lord of love delights to work these transformations.

Do you feel dreadfully depressed in spirit? Have you been long so? Are you one of those who mourn without the light of the sun? Would it not be a great marvel if you should become one of the happiest of God's people? It would. Therefore I believe you will be, for God delights to work wonders. Out of the innermost prison, He can bring His servants. He made Paul and Silas sing in the inner dungeon, and then he brought them out. He can make you sing now, and bring you out into clear full liberty and that on a sudden and today—"The Lord looses the prisoners; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises them that He bowed down." The prisoners of the Lord shall not be prisoners forever. There is a jail delivery coming, and they shall leap for joy.

Are you lying at death's door? Do you cry like Heman, "My soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near unto the grave"? Perhaps you are sick in body, possibly you are distracted in mind, and you are ready to die, and therefore you think that it is all over with you. What a desperate case yours seems! It would be a wonderful thing if you should yet obtain light and comfort, would it not? Again, let me remind you that if it would be wonderful, it is all the more probable with the Lord. He is full of compassion, and He delights in mercy. The Lord heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds. Wonderful are His ways of consoling His mourners; great is His wisdom and prudence in devising ways to bring back His banished ones. Therefore, ascribe you greatness unto our God, and look for much mercy. Believe in God for boundless loving-kindnesses. If I preached a little Christ for little sinners, some of you would be wise to go somewhere else. But since I have divine warrant for preaching a great Savior for great sinners, who is able to help us through great difficulties, and to overcome great sins—why, He is the very Savior for you. O, bless Him, and love Him, trust Him, and He will work wonders in your spirit. Possibly I speak this morning to one who has desperately backslidden. It is years ago since you knew the truth, and you have, by your sins, fastened upon your soul fetters of iron. Well, the Lord whom you have grieved is full of compassion, and can take those fetters off. Yes, He can break the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. Wonders of deliverance can the Lord work for His imprisoned children.

"Ah," cries another, "but my case is merely a commonplace one. There is nothing remarkable about me." My dear friend, would not it be a wonderful thing if God were to save such a commonplace and insignificant person as you are? Well, rest in Him, trust in Him, and there shall be wonderful works worked for you also; you shall be one of the men wondered at, in whom God's grace shall be fully revealed.

Let me say in one word, if there is anything about any of you, beloved, at this time which seems to render your salvation difficult, and even impossible. If there is anything in your case that renders it hopeless and desperate, whether it is in your temporals or your spirituals, I would rec-

ommend you go with your case to the God of wonders. And see whether or not He does not, before long, make you say, "The Lord has dealt wondrously with me." To sinners who believe in Jesus, salvation is promised, and they shall have it. And to saints who trust in the Lord, deliverance is promised, and delivered they must be. God will work 10,000 wonders, and He will never allow His promise to fall to the ground.

I would earnestly remind all God's servants that we ought to expect wonderful answers to prayer, and we should pray as if we expected the God of wonders to hear us. We ought to expect, in times of trouble, to see wonderful deliverances. If we seem quite shut up, we should then be sure of escaping, for it would be a wonder if we did, and therefore God will work it. We have grounds for expecting wonderful consolations if we are about to endure great troubles. We should look for wonderful joys between here and heaven. We ought to be on our watchtower looking for wonderful discoveries of Christ's beauties and His love. In fact we should always be looking for wonders, and should wonder if wonders do not happen.

In the church we are permitted to expect wonders. We are too much in the habit of going to the assembly for worship, and sitting down and hearing sermons, and if half-a-dozen are converted we are astonished. But we ought to expect thousands to be converted! If the church ever has faith enough to expect great things, she will see great things. When the church falls upon dark times, and error mars her beauty, we may expect God to work wonders to purify and exalt her. In the darkest medieval times God found His witnesses and when the light of God threatened to die out, then Luther came—a man raised up of God; and a train of glorious men followed behind him. Never tremble, never despair, never be afraid. "The God of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." Why, brethren, we worship the God of wonders, "Who only does wondrous things." We have a Savior of wonders. Is not His name called The Wonderful? And did not Stephen say of Him, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by signs and wonders"? Then the Holy Spirit also works wonders. He came at first with rushing wind, and cloven tongues, and miraculous gifts, and even now His wonders have not ceased. They have only become spiritual, instead of physical, but the Spirit of God is working mightily. I bear my own personal witness that God has worked wonders for us, far beyond all human ability, wonders which we could not perform; no, wonders that we did not deserve. What is more, He has worked wonders that we could not have expected. And what is more, wonders that we could not have imagined. What is more, wonders which even now that they have happened we cannot comprehend. And I may add, wonders which throughout eternity we shall never be able to praise God sufficiently, even though we spend our whole existence in wondering and adoring the wonder-working God! "How great are His signs! How mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion from generation to generation."

III. Our last remark is this, that IN THE FUTURE STATE THESE WONDERS WILL BECOME MANIFEST TO US. If we were to read our Bibles attentively, we would be astonished to find how much there is about heaven in them, and how, after all, it is not true that we have mere gleams and glimpses. Studiously investigated, the word of God tells us wondrous things concerning the world to come. Beloved, we shall, in the better land, wonder more than we do here, for we shall there understand far more than we do now, and shall have clearer views and wider prospects. Our present capacities are narrow; there is scant room within our mind for great things. But in yon bright world, the veil shall be taken off, and we shall know even as we are known, seeing no more in part, and through a glass darkly; in the heavenly mansions our growing knowledge will excite in us increasing wonder, and we shall sing, there, the praise of Him who has dealt wondrously with us. I believe the poet was right when he said—

"And sing with wonder and surprise
Your loving-kindness in the skies."

In the abodes of endless bliss we shall see what we escaped; we shall look down from Abraham's bosom, and see the sinner afar off in torment! It will be a dreadful sight, but O, with what hearts of gratitude shall we bless redeeming love, knowing, each one of us, that were it not for divine grace that fate so desperate had been ours. In the heaven of perfect holiness we shall know the true character of sin. When we shall see the brightness of God's glory, and the splendor of His holiness, sin will appear in all its hideousness, and we shall adore that matchless mercy which pardoned us. And we shall bless the precious blood which cleansed us though we had been defiled with such pollution. We think we praise God for forgiving our iniquities, and no doubt we do, in some measure, but compared with the blessing that saints in heaven render to God for deliverance from sin, our praise is as nothing. We do not know sin as they know it; we do not understand its blackness as they perceive it.

Up in heaven, too, we shall see our life as a whole, and we shall see God's dealings with us on earth as a whole. A great many matters which now appear mysterious and complex concerning which we can only walk by faith, for our reason is baffled, will be so clear to us as to excite joyous songs in heaven. "Now I see why I was laid aside when I wanted to be busy in God's work. Now I see why that dear child, whom I hoped to have had spared to me as a stay for my old age, was taken away. Now I understand why my business was allowed to fail. Now I comprehend why that foul mouth was allowed to be opened against me. Now I comprehend why I was assailed with inward fears, and was allowed to go tremblingly all my days." Such will be our confessions when the day dawns, and the shadows flee away. Then we shall say and sing—"He has dealt wondrously with us." We shall feel that the best was done for us that even Eternal Wisdom could devise, and we shall bless the name of the Lord.

Reflect a moment, dear friends and see further reasons for everlasting wondering. In heaven we shall see what God has lifted us up to be. We talk of being sons of God. Did we ever realize that? We speak of Heaven being ours—but do we know what we mean by that language? Truly, "It does not yet appear what we shall be," neither has eye seen nor ear heard the things which God has prepared for them who love Him. When we shall stand on the sea of glass, and hear the harpers, and join their endless music; when we shall see Him who laid down His life for us—yes, see Him as He is; when we shall behold the Lamb of God, who by His bowing to death, lifted us up from our deadly fall—when we shall see Him, who by stripping Himself of His royalties robed us with splendor—we shall be amazed, astounded, and overwhelmed with wonder!

Above all, when we shall see God Himself, what will be our wonder! When our minds shall be able to behold the Infinite Jehovah, and hear His voice, when we shall be brought to speak with God familiarly, and bow before that throne whose brightness today would blind us, if we could gaze upon it; when we shall know Him who fills all in all; I will not say we shall be amazed to think He loved us, there is no need to say that. I will not say we shall be filled with astonishment to think He ever saved us, I need not say that. But that He should permit us to be His sons and daughters, and should, at such an expense, bring us to dwell with Him forever, and make us partakers of His own nature, one with His own Son—this will plunge us in adoring wonder forever, and we shall, "Praise the name of Jehovah our God, who has dealt wondrously with us."

I beg you to begin the music here. I long, myself, to spend my time perpetually in adoring the God of wonders! I want, brethren that we should rise above the spirit of discontent, the spirit that finds fault and mourns, and moans, and laments, and makes Massahs and Meribahs by which to provoke the Lord our God. Let it not be said of us, "They soon forget His wonders," but let us go on singing unto Him, "Who only does wondrous things," speaking to one another of all His wondrous works, and in our souls, day by day, and hour by hour admiring our God, world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON— JOEL 2.

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THE MAN OF SORROWS
NO. 1099

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 2, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."
Isaiah 53:3.

POSSIBLY a murmur will pass round the congregation, "This is a dreary subject and a mournful theme." But, O beloved, it is not so, for great as were the woes of our Redeemer, they are all over now, and are to be looked back upon with sacred triumph. However severe the struggle, the victory has been won, the laboring vessel was severely tossed by the waves, but she has now entered into the desired haven. Our Savior is no longer in Gethsemane agonizing, or upon the cross dying. The crown of thorns has been replaced by many crowns of .sovereignty. The nails and the spear have given way to the scepter. Nor is this all, for though the suffering is ended, the blessed results never end. We may remember the travail, for the Man Child is born into the world. The sowing in tears is followed by a reaping in joy. The bruising of the heel of the woman's seed is well recompensed by the breaking of the serpent's head. It is pleasant to hear of battles fought when a decisive victory has ended war and established peace. So that the double reflection that all the work of suffering is finished by the Redeemer, and that, from now on, He beholds the success of all His labors, we shall rejoice even while we enter into fellowship with His sufferings.

Let it never be forgotten that the subject of the sorrows of the Savior has proven to be more efficacious for comfort to mourners than any other theme in the compass of revelation, or out of it. Even the glories of Christ afford no such consolation to afflicted spirits as the sufferings of Christ. Christ is in all attitudes the consolation of Israel, but He is most so as the man of sorrows. Troubled spirits turn not so much to Bethlehem as to Calvary; they prefer Gethsemane to Nazareth. The afflicted do not so much look for comfort in Christ as He will come a second time in splendor of state, as to Christ as He came the first time, a weary Man, and full of woes. The passion flower yields us the best perfume; the tree of the cross bleeds the most healing balm. Like in this case cures like, for there is no remedy for sorrow beneath the sun like the sorrows of Immanuel. As Aaron's rod swallowed up all the other rods, so the griefs of Jesus make our griefs disappear. Thus you see that in the black soil of our subject, light is sown for the righteous; light which springs up for those who sit in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death. Let us go, then, without reluctance to the house of mourning, and commune with "The Chief Mourner," who above all others could say, "I am the man that has seen affliction."

We will not stray from our text this morning, but keep to it so closely as even to dwell upon each one of its words. The words shall give us our divisions—"A man;" "A man of sorrows;" "Acquainted with grief."

I. "A man." There is no novelty to anyone here present in the doctrine of the real and actual manhood of the Lord Jesus Christ, but although there is nothing novel in it, there is everything important in it; therefore, let us hear it again. This is one of those gospel church bells which must be rung every Sunday. This is one of those provisions of the Lord's household, which, like bread and salt, should be put upon the table at every spiritual meal. This is the manna which must fall every day round about the camp. We can never meditate too much upon Christ's blessed person as God and as man. Let us reflect that He who is here called a man was certainly "very God of very God." "A man," and "a man of sorrows," and yet at the same time, "God over all, blessed forever." He who was "despised and rejected of men" was beloved and adored by angels. And He, from whom men hid their faces in contempt, was worshipped by cherubim and seraphim. This is the great mystery of godliness. God was "manifest in the flesh." He who was God, and was in the beginning with God, was made flesh and dwelt among us. The Highest stooped to become the lowest; the Greatest took His place among the least. Strange, and needing all our faith to grasp it, yet it is true that He who sat upon the well of Sychar, and said, "Give Me to drink," was none other than He who dug the channels of the ocean, and poured into them the floods. Son of Mary, You are also Son of Jehovah! Man of the substance of Your mother, You are also essential Deity! We worship You this day in spirit and in truth!

Remembering that Jesus Christ is God, it now behooves us to remember that His manhood was none the less real and substantial. It differed from our own humanity in the absence of sin, but it differed in no other respect. It is idle to speculate upon a heavenly manhood, as some have done, who have, by their very attempt at accuracy, been borne down by whirlpools of error. It is enough for us to know that the Lord was born of a woman, wrapped in swaddling bands, laid in a manger, and needed to be nursed by His mother as any other little child. He grew in stature like any other human being, and as a man we know that He ate and drank, that He hungered and thirsted, rejoiced and sorrowed. His body could be touched and handled, wounded, and made to bleed. He was no phantom, but a man of flesh and blood even as we are. He was a man needing sleep, requiring food, and subject to pain, and a man who, in the end yielded up His life to death. There may have been some distinction between His body and ours, for inasmuch as it was never defiled by sin, it was not capable of corruption. Otherwise in body and in soul, the Lord Jesus was perfect man after the order of our manhood, "Made in the likeness of sinful flesh," and we must think of Him under that aspect. Our temptation is to regard the Lord's humanity as something quite different from our own. We are apt to spiritualize it away, and not to think of Him as really bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. All this is akin to grievous error; we may fancy that we are honoring Christ by such con-

ceptions, but Christ is never honored by that which is not true. He was a man, a real man, a man of our race, the Son of Man. Indeed, He was a representative man, the second Adam—"As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same." "He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."

Now this condescending participation in our nature brings the Lord Jesus very near to us in relationship. Inasmuch as He was man, though also God, He was, according to Hebrew law, our *goel*—our kinsman, next of kin. Now it was according to the law that if an inheritance had been lost, it was the right of the next of kin to redeem it. Our Lord Jesus exercised His legal right—seeing us sold into bondage, and our inheritance taken from us, He came forward to redeem both us and all our lost estate. A blessed thing it was for us that we had such a kinsman. When Ruth went to glean in the fields of Boaz, it was the most gracious circumstance in her life that Boaz turned out to be her next of kin. And we who have gleaned in the fields of mercy praise the Lord that His only begotten Son is the next of kin to us, our brother, born for adversity. It would not have been consistent with divine justice for any other substitution to have been accepted for us, except that of a man. Man sinned, and man must make reparation for the injury done to the divine honor. The breach of the law was caused by man, and by man must it be repaired; man had transgressed, man must be punished. It was not in the power of an angel to have said, "I will suffer for man"—for angelic sufferings would have made no amends for human sins. But the man, the matchless man, being the representative man, and of right by kinship allowed to redeem, stepped in, suffered what was due, made amends to injured justice, and thereby set us free! Glory be unto His blessed name!

And now, beloved, since the Lord thus saw in Christ's manhood a suitableness to become our Redeemer, I trust that many here who have been under bondage to Satan, will see in that same human nature an attraction leading them to approach Him. Sinner, you have not to come to an absolute God; you are not bid to draw near to the consuming fire. You might well tremble to approach Him whom you have so grievously offended. But there is a man ordained to mediate between you and God, and if you would come to God, you must come through Him—the man Christ Jesus. God out of Christ is terrible out of His holy places; He will by no means spare the guilty—but look at yonder Son of Man!—

"His hand no thunder bears,
No terror clothes His brow;
No bolts to drive your guilty souls
To fiercer flames below!"

He is a man with hands full of blessing, eyes wet with tears of pity, lips overflowing with love, and a heart melting with tenderness. See you not the gash in His side? Through that wound there is a highway to His heart, and he who needs His compassion may soon excite it. O sinners, the way to the Savior's heart is open, and penitent seekers shall never be denied! Why should the most despairing be afraid to approach the Savior? He has deigned to assume the character of the Lamb of God—I have

never known even a little child who was afraid of a lamb. The most timorous will approach a lamb, and Jesus used this argument when He said to every laboring and heavy-laden one, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."

I know you feel yourselves sad and trembling, but need you tremble in *His* presence? If you are weak, your weakness will touch His sympathy, and your mournful inability will be an argument with His boundless mercy. If I were sick and might have my choice where I would lie, with a view to healing, I would say, "Place me where the best and kindest physician upon earth can see me. Put me where a man with great skill and equal tenderness will have me always beneath his eyes. I shall not long groan there in vain; if he can heal me he will." Sinner, place yourself, by an act of faith, beneath the cross of Jesus! Look up to Him, and say, "Blessed Physician, You whose wounds for me can heal me, whose death for me can make me live, look down upon me! You are man; You know what man suffers. You are man; will You let a man sink down to hell who cries to You for help? You are a man, and You can save, and will You let a poor unworthy one who longs for Your mercy be driven into hopeless misery while he cries to You to let Your merits save him?" Oh, you guilty ones, have faith that you can reach the heart of Jesus. Sinner, fly to Jesus without fear! He waits to save! It is His office to receive sinners, and reconcile them to God. Be thankful that you have not to go to God at the first, and as you are, but you are invited to come to Jesus Christ, and through Him to the Father! May the Holy Spirit lead you to devout meditation upon the humility of our Lord, and so may you find the door of life, the portal of peace, the gate of heaven!

Then let me add, before I leave this point, that every child of God ought also to be comforted by the fact that our Redeemer is one of our own race. Seeing that He was made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest; and He was tempted in all points, like as we are, that He might be able to succor them who are tempted. The sympathy of Jesus is the next most precious thing to His sacrifice. I stood by the bedside of a Christian brother the other day, and he remarked, "I feel thankful to God that our Lord took our sicknesses." "Of course," said he, "the grand thing was that He took our sins, but next to that, I, as a sufferer, feel grateful that He also took our sicknesses." Personally, I also bear witness that it has been to me, in seasons of great pain, superlatively comfortable to know that in every pang which racks His people, the Lord Jesus has a fellow feeling. We are not alone, for one like unto the Son of man walks the furnace with us. The clouds which float over our sky, have aforetime darkened the heavens for Him, also—

"He knows what temptations mean,
For He has felt the same."

How completely it takes the bitterness out of grief to know that it once was suffered by Jesus. The Macedonian soldiers, it is said, made long forced marches which seemed to be beyond the power of mortal endurance, but the reason for their untiring energy lay in Alexander's presence. He was accustomed to walk with them, and bear the same fatigue.

If the king himself had been carried like a Persian monarch in a palanquin in the midst of easy, luxurious state, the soldiers would soon have grown tired. But when they looked upon the king of men himself, hungering when they hungered, thirsting when they thirsted, often putting aside the cup of water offered to him, and passing it to a fellow soldier who looked more faint than himself, they could not dream of grumbling. Why, every Macedonian felt that he could endure any fatigue if Alexander could. This day, assuredly, we can bear poverty, slander, contempt, or bodily pain—death itself—because Jesus Christ our Lord has borne it. By His humiliation it shall become pleasure to be abased for His sake! By the spit that ran down His cheeks, it shall become a fair thing to be made a mockery for Him! By the buffeting and the blindfolding it shall become an honor to be disgraced, and by the cross it shall become life itself, to surrender life for the sake of such a cause, and so precious a Master! May the man of sorrows now appear to us, and enable us to bear our sorrows cheerfully. If there is consolation anywhere, surely it is to be found in the delightful presence of the Crucified—"A *man* shall be a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest."

II. We must pass on to dwell for a while upon the next words, "A MAN OF SORROWS." The expression is intended to be very emphatic. It is not, "A sorrowful man," but, "A man of sorrows," as if He was made up of sorrows, and they were constituent elements of His being. Some are men of pleasure, others men of wealth, but He was "A man of sorrows." He and sorrow might have changed names. He, who saw Him, saw sorrow, and he who would see sorrow, must look on Him. "Behold, and see," He says, "if there was ever sorrow like unto My sorrow which was done unto Me."

Our Lord is called the man of sorrows for *peculiarity,* for this was His peculiar token and special mark. We might well call Him, "A man of holiness," for there was no fault in Him; or "A man of labors," for He did His Father's business earnestly; or, "A man of eloquence," for never man spoke like this man. We might right fittingly call Him in the language of our hymn, "The man of love," for never was there greater love than glowed in His heart. Still, conspicuous as all these, and many other excellences were, yet had we gazed upon Christ, and been asked afterwards what was the most striking peculiarity in Him, we should have said His sorrows. The various parts of His character were so singularly harmonious that no one quality predominated so as to become a leading feature. In His moral portrait, the eyes are perfect, but so is the mouth; the cheeks are as beds of spices, but the lips are as lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.

In Peter you see enthusiasm exaggerated at times into presumption, and in John, love for his Lord would call fire from heaven on his foes. Deficiencies and exaggerations exist everywhere but in Jesus. He is the perfect man, a whole man, and the holy one of Israel. But there was a peculiarity, and it lay in the fact that "His visage was so marked more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men," through the excessive griefs which continually passed over His spirit. Tears were His insignia, and the cross His shield. He was the warrior in black armor, and not

as now, the rider upon the white horse. He was the lord of grief, the prince of pain, the emperor of anguish, a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."—

"Oh, king of grief! (A title strange, yet true,
To You of all kings only due),
Oh, king of wounds!
How shall I grieve for Thee,
Who in all grief prevents me?"

Is not the title, "man of sorrows," given to our Lord by way of *eminence?* He was not only sorrowful, but pre-eminent among the sorrowful. All men have a burden to bear, but His was heaviest of all. Who is there of our race that is quite free from sorrows? Search the whole earth through, and the thorn and thistle will be found everywhere, and these have wounded everyone born of woman. High in the lofty places of the earth there is sorrow, for the royal widow weeps her lord. Down in the cottage where we fancy that nothing but content can reign, a thousand bitter tears are shed over dire poverty and cruel oppression. In the sunniest climates the serpent creeps among the flowers; in the most fertile regions poisons flourish as well as wholesome herbs. Everywhere, "Men must work and women must weep." There is sorrow on the sea, and sadness on the land. But in this common lot, the "first-born among many brethren" has more than a double portion, His cup is bitterer; His baptism is deeper than the rest of the family. Common sufferers must give place, for none can match with Him in woe. Ordinary mourners may be content to tear their garments, but He is torn in His affliction; they sip at sorrow's bowl, but He drains it dry. He who was the most obedient Son smarted most under the rod when He was stricken of God and afflicted! No other of the smitten ones have sweat great drops of blood, or in the same bitterness of anguish, cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me."

The reasons for this superior sorrow may be found in the fact that with His sorrow there was no mixture of sin. Sin deserves sorrow, but it also blunts the edge of grief by rendering the soul untender and unsympathetic. We do not start at sin as Jesus did; we do not tremble at the sinner's doom as Jesus would. His was a perfect nature which, because it knew no sin, was not in its element amid sorrow, but was like a land bird driven out to sea by the gale. To the robber, jail is his home, and the prison fare is the meat to which he is accustomed. But to an innocent man a prison is misery, and everything about it is strange and foreign. Our Lord's pure nature was peculiarly sensitive of any contact with sin. We, alas, by the fall have lost much of that feeling. In proportion as we are sanctified, sin becomes the source of wretchedness to us. Jesus, being perfect, every sin pained Him much more than it would any of us. I have no doubt there are many persons in the world who could live merrily in the haunts of vice—could hear blasphemy without horror, view lust without disgust, and look on robbery or murder without abhorrence. But to many of us, an hour's familiarity with such abominations would be the severest punishment. A sentence in which the name of Jesus is blasphemed is torture to us of the most exquisite kind. The very mention of

the shameful deeds of vice seizes us with horror. To live with the wicked would be a sufficient hell to the righteous. David's prayer is full of agony where he cries, "Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men." But the perfect Jesus, what a grief the sight of sin must have caused Him! Our hands grow rough with toiling and our hearts with sinning—but our Lord was, as it were, like a man whose flesh was all one quivering wound; He was delicately sensitive of every touch of sin. We go through thorn brakes and briars of sin because we are clothed with indifference, but imagine a naked man, compelled to traverse a forest of briars—such was the Savior as to His moral sensitiveness. He could see sin where we cannot see it, and feel its heinousness as we cannot feel it. There was, therefore, more to grieve Him, and He was more capable of being grieved.

Side by side with His painful sensitiveness of the evil of sin was His gracious tenderness towards the sorrows of others. If we could know and enter into all the griefs of this congregation, it is probable that we would be of all men, most miserable. There are heartbreaks in this house this morning, which, could they find a tongue, would fill our heart with agony. We hear of poverty here, we see disease there, we observe bereavement, and we mark distress. We note the fact that men are passing into the grave, and (ah, far more bitter grief), descending into hell. But, somehow or other, either these become such common things that they do not stir us, or else we gradually harden to them. The Savior was always moved to sympathy with another's griefs, for His love was always at flood-tide. All men's sorrows were His sorrows. His heart was so large that it was inevitable that He should become "a man of sorrows."

We remember that besides this, our Savior had a peculiar relationship to sin. He was not merely afflicted with the sight of it, and saddened by perceiving its effects on others, but sin was actually laid upon Him, and He was numbered with the transgressors. And therefore He was called to bear the terrible blows of divine justice, and suffered unknown, immeasurable agonies. His Godhead strengthened Him to suffer, else mere manhood had failed. The wrath whose power no man knows spent itself on Him—"It pleased the Father to bruise Him, He has put Him to grief." Behold the man, and marvel how vain it would be to seek His equal sorrow.

The title of "man of sorrows," was also given to our Lord to indicate the *constancy* of His afflictions. He changed His place of abode, but He always lodged with sorrow. Sorrow wove His swaddling bands, and sorrow His winding sheet. Born in a stable, sorrow received Him, and only on the cross at His last breath did sorrow part with Him. His disciples might forsake Him, but His sorrow would not leave Him. He was often alone without a man, but never alone without a grief. From the hour of His baptism in Jordan, to the time of His baptism in the pains of death, He always wore the sable robe, and was "a man of sorrows."

He was also "a man of sorrows," for the *variety* of His woes. He was a Man not of *sorrow* only, but of *"sorrows."* All the sufferings of the body and of the soul were known to Him. The sorrows of the man who actively struggles to obey; the sorrows of the man who sits still, and passively

endures; the sorrows of the lofty He knew, for He was the King of Israel. The sorrows of the poor He knew, for He "had not where to lay His head." Sorrows relative, and sorrows personal, sorrows mental, and sorrows spiritual, sorrows of all kinds and degrees assailed Him. Affliction emptied his quiver upon Him, making His heart the target for all conceivable woes. Let us think a minute or two of some of those sufferings.

Our Lord was a man of sorrows as to His poverty. Oh, you who are in need, your need is not so abject as His—He had not where to lay His head, but you have at least some humble roof to shelter you. No one denies you a cup of water, but He sat upon the well at Samaria, and said, "I thirst." We read more than once that He hungered. His toil was so great that He was constantly weary, and we read of one occasion where they took Him, "even as He was," into the boat—too faint was He to reach the boat Himself, but they carried Him as He was, and laid Him down near the helm to sleep. But He had not much time for slumber, for they woke Him, saying, "Master, do You not care that we perish?" A hard life was His, with nothing of earthly comfort to make that life endurable.

Remember, you who lament around the open grave, or weep in memory of graves newly filled—our Savior knew the heart-rending of bereavement. Jesus wept as He stood at the tomb of Lazarus.

Perhaps the bitterest of His sorrows were those which were connected with His gracious work. He came as the Messiah sent of God on a mission of love, and men rejected His claims. When He went to His own city where He had been brought up, and announced Himself, they would have cast Him headlong from the brow of the hill. It is a hard thing to come on an errand of selfless love, and then to meet with such ingratitude as this. Nor did they stop at cold rejection; they then proceeded to derision and to ridicule. There was no name of contempt which they did not pour upon Him. No, it was not merely contempt, but they proceeded to lies, slander, and blasphemy. He was a drunk, they said—hear this, you angels, and be astonished! Yes, a wine-bibber did they call the blessed Prince of Life! They said He was in league with Beelzebub, and had a devil, and was mad—whereas He had come to destroy the works of the devil!! They charged Him with every crime which their malice could suggest. There was not a word He spoke but they would twist it; not a doctrine but what they would misrepresent it. He could not speak but what they would find in His words some occasion against Him. And all the while He was doing nothing but seeking their advantage in all ways. When He was earnest against their vices, it was out of pity for their souls. If He condemned their sins, it was because their sins would destroy them. But His zeal against sin was always tempered with His love for the souls of men. Was there ever man so full of good-will to others who received such disgraceful treatment from those He longed to serve?

As He proceeded in His life, His sorrows multiplied. He preached, and when men's hearts were hard, and they would not believe what He said, "He was grieved for the hardness of their hearts." He went about doing good and for His good works they took up stones to stone Him. Alas, they stoned His heart when they could not injure His body. He pleaded with

them, and plaintively declared His love, and received, instead thereof, a remorseless and fiendish hatred. Slighted love has griefs of peculiar poignancy—many have died of hearts broken by ingratitude. Such love as the love of Jesus could not, for the sake of those it loved, bear to be slighted. It pined within itself because men did not know their own mercies, and rejected their own Salvation. His sorrow was not that men injured Him, but that they destroyed themselves. This it was that pulled up the floodgates of His soul, and made His eyes overflow with tears—"O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not." The lament is not for His own humiliation, but for their suicidal rejection of His grace. These were among the sorrows that He bore.

But surely He found some solace with the few companions whom He had gathered around Him. He did, but for all that He must have found as much sorrow as solace in their company. They were dull scholars, they learned slowly; what they did learn they forgot; what they remembered they did not practice and what they practiced at one time, they belied at another. They were miserable comforters for the man of sorrows. His was a lonely life; I mean that even when He was with His followers He was alone. He said to them once, "Could you not watch with Me one hour," but, indeed, He might have said the same to them all the hours of their lives, for even if they sympathized with Him to the utmost of their capacity, they could not enter into such griefs as His. A father in a house with many little children about him cannot tell his babes his griefs; if he did they would not comprehend him. What do they know of his anxious business transactions, or his crushing losses? Poor little things, their father does not wish they should be able to sympathize with him; he looks down upon them, and rejoices that their toys will comfort them, and that their little prattle will not be broken in upon by his great griefs. The Savior, from the very dignity of His nature, must suffer alone. The mountainside with Christ upon it seems to me to be a suggestive symbol of His earthly life. His great soul lived in vast solitudes, sublime and terrible, and there, amid a midnight of trouble, His spirit communed with the Father, no one being able to accompany Him into the dark glens and gloomy ravines of His unique experience. Of all His life's warfare, He might have said in some senses, "Of the people there was none with Me" and at the last it became literally true, for they all forsook Him—one denied Him, and another betrayed Him, so that He trod the winepress alone.

In the last crowning sorrows of His life, there came upon Him the penal inflictions from God—the punishment of our sin which was upon Him. He was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane by God's officers before the officers of the Jews had come near to Him. There on the ground He knelt and wrestled till the bloody sweat poured from every pore and His soul was "exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." You have read the story of your Master's woes, and know how He was hurried from bar to bar, and treated with mingled scorn and cruelty before each judgment seat. When they had taken Him to Herod and to Pilate, and almost mur-

dered Him with scourging, they brought Him forth and said, "Ecce Homo"—"Behold the man." Their malice was not satisfied; they must go further, and nail Him to His cross, and mock Him while fever parched His mouth and made Him feel as if His body were dissolved to dust. He cries out, "I thirst," and is mocked with vinegar. You know the rest, but I would have you best remember that the sharpest scourging and severest griefs were all within—while the hand of God bruised Him, and the iron rod of justice broke Him, as it were, upon the wheel.

He was fitly named a "man of sorrows!" I feel as if I have no utterance, as if my tongue were tied while trying to speak upon this subject. I cannot find goodly words worthy of my theme, yet I know that embellishments of language would degrade rather than adorn the agonies of my Lord. There let the cross stand sublime in its simplicity! It needs no decoration. If I had wreaths of choicest flowers to hang about it, I would gladly place them there, and if instead of garlands of flowers, each flower could be a priceless gem, I would consider that the cross deserved the whole. But as I have none of these, I rejoice that the cross, alone, in its naked simplicity, needs nothing from mortal speech. Turn to your bleeding Savior, O my hearers. Continue gazing upon Him, and find in the "man of sorrows" your Lord and your God

III. And now the last word is, He was "ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF." With grief He had an *intimate* acquaintance. He did not know merely what it was in others, but it came home to Him. We have read of grief. We have sympathized with grief; we have sometimes felt grief—but the Lord felt it more intensely than other men in His innermost soul. He, beyond us all, was conversant with this black letter lore. He knew the secret of the heart which refuses to be comforted. He had sat at grief's table, eaten of grief's black bread, and dipped His morsel in her vinegar. By the waters of Sarah He dwelt and knew right well the bitter well. He and grief were bosom friends.

It was a *continuous* acquaintance. He did not call at grief's house, sometimes, to take a tonic by the way. Neither did He sip, now and then, of the wormwood and the gall, but the quassia cup was always in His hand, ashes were always mingled with His bread. Not only forty days in the wilderness did Jesus fast; the world was always a wilderness to Him, and His life was one long Lent. I do not say that He was not, after all, a happy man, for down deep in His soul, benevolence always supplied a living spring of joy to Him. There was a joy into which we are one day to enter—the "joy of our Lord"—the "joy set before Him" for which "He endured the cross, despising the shame." But that does not at all take away from the fact that His acquaintance with grief was continuous and intimate beyond that of any man who ever lived. It was, indeed, a *growing* acquaintance with grief, for each step took Him deeper down into the grim shades of sorrow. As there is a progress in the teaching of Christ, and in the life of Christ, so is there in the griefs of Christ. The tempest lowered darker, and darker, and darker. His sun rose in a cloud, but it set in congregated horrors of heaped up night, till, in a moment, the clouds were suddenly torn in sunder, and as a loud voice proclaimed, "It

is finished," a glorious morning dawned where all expected an eternal night.

Remember, once more, that this acquaintance of Christ with Grief was a *voluntary* acquaintance for our sakes. He need never have known grief at all, and at any moment He might have said to grief, "Farewell!" He could have returned in an instant to the royalties of heaven, and to the bliss of the upper world, or even tarrying here He might have lived sublimely indifferent to the woes of mankind. But He would not—He remained to the end, out of His love to us—grief's acquaintance.

Now, then, what shall I say in conclusion, but just this: let us admire the superlative love of Jesus. O love, love, what have You done? What have You not done! You are omnipotent in suffering. Few of us can bear pain; perhaps fewer still of us can bear misrepresentation, slander, and ingratitude. These are horrible hornets which sting as with fire; men have been driven to madness by cruel scandals which have distilled from venomous tongues. Christ, throughout life, bore these and other sufferings. Let us love Him, as we think of how much He must have loved us. Will you try, this afternoon, before you come to the communion table, to get your souls saturated with the love of Christ? Soak them in His love all afternoon, till, like a sponge, you drink into your own selves the love of Jesus. And then come up tonight, as it were, to let that love flow out to Him again while you sit at His table, and partake of the emblems of His death and of His love. Admire the power of His love, and then pray that you may have a love somewhat akin to it in power. We sometimes wonder why the church of God grows so slowly, but I do not wonder when I remember what scant consecration to Christ there is in the church of God. Jesus was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," but many of His disciples who profess to be altogether His, are living for themselves. There are rich men who call themselves saints, and are thought to be so, whose treasures are hoarded for themselves and families. There are men of ability who believe that they are bought with Christ's blood, yet their ability is all spent on other things, and none upon their Lord. And let us come nearer home—here are we, what are we doing? Teaching in the school, are you? Are you doing it with all your heart for Jesus? Preaching in the street? Yes, but do you throw your soul into it for Him? Maybe you have to confess you are doing nothing—do not let this day conclude till you have begun to do something for your Lord. We are always talking about the church doing this, and doing that—what is the church? I believe there is a great deal too much said, both of bad and good, about that abstraction. The fact is, we are individuals. The church is only the aggregation of individuals, and if any good is to be done it must be performed by individuals. And if all individuals are idle, there is no church work done. There may be the semblance of it, but there is no real work done. Brothers and sisters, what are you doing for Jesus? I charge you by the nail-prints of His hands, unless you are a liar unto Him, labor for Him! I charge you by His wounded feet—run to His help! I charge you by the scar on His side—give Him your heart! I charge you by that sacred head once pierced with thorns—yield Him your thoughts! I charge you by

the shoulders which bore the scourges—bend your whole strength to His service! I charge you by Himself give Him yourself. I charge you by that left hand which has been under your head, and that right hand which has embraced you, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, by the beds of spices, and the banquets of love, render yourself, your heart, your soul, your strength to Him! Live in His service, and die in His service! Lay not down your harness, but work on as long as you shall live. While you live let this be your motto—"All for Jesus, all for Jesus; all for the man of sorrows, all for the man of sorrows!"

O you that love Him and fight for Him, you are summoned to the front. Hasten to the conflict, I pray you, and charge home for the "man of sorrows!" Make this your battle cry today! Slink not back like cowards! Flee not to your homes as lovers of ease! But press to the front for the "man of sorrows," like good men, and true. By the cross which bore Him, and by the heavy cross He bore; by His death agony, and by the agony of His life, I cry, "Forward, for the man of sorrows!" Write this word, "For the man of sorrows," on your own bodies, wherein you bear the marks of the Lord Jesus! Brand, if not in your flesh, yet in your souls, for from now on you are servants of the man of sorrows! Write this on your wealth, bind this inscription on all your possessions—"This belongs to the man of sorrows." Give your children to the "man of sorrows," as men of old consecrated their sons to patriotism, and to battle with their country's foes. Give up each hour to the "man of sorrows!" Learn, even, to eat and drink, and sleep for the "man of sorrows," doing all in His name. Live for Him, and be ready to die for Him, and the Lord accept you for the "man of sorrows' " sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 53.

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PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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GOOD NEWS FOR THE LOST
NO. 1100

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 9, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."
Luke 19:10.

THE promises of God are like stars, there is not one of them but has in its turn guided tempest-tossed souls to their desired haven. But as among the stars which stud the midnight sky there are constellations which above all others attract the mariner's gaze, and are helpful to the steersman, so there are certain passages in Scripture which have not only directed a few wise men to Jesus, but have been guiding stars to myriads of simple minds who have through their help found the port of peace. I could mention a number of texts this morning, which I might compare to the pointers of the Great Bear or to the Southern Cross, because they have directly pointed the penitent eye to Jesus, the pole star, and by looking to Him, sinners have found "the way, the truth, and the life." This text is one of the notable stars or rather its words form a wonderful constellation of divine love, a very Pleiades of mercy. The words and syllables seem to glisten to my eyes with a supernal splendor. I bless God for every letter of this thrice blessed text: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." But as stars are of small service when the sky is all clouded, or the air dense with fog, so it may be even such a bright gospel light as our text will not yield comfort to souls surrounded with the clinging mists of doubts and fears. In such times mariners cry for fair weather, and ask that they may be able to see the stars again. So let us pray the Holy Spirit to sweep away, with His divine wind the clouds of our unbelief, and enable each earnest eye in the light of God to see the light of peace. O that many awakened minds may find pardon and eternal life in the Savior this morning. God grant that in answer to the prayers now silently breathed by many, the blessing of salvation may come to this house.

I. There are four things I shall try to set forth this morning for the comfort of seeking sinners. The first is this—I would have all anxious hearts consider HOW THE OBJECTS OF MERCY ARE HERE DESCRIBED—"The Son of man is come to seek and to save *that which was lost."* I feel inexpressibly grateful for this description—*"that which was lost!"* There cannot be a case so bad as not to be comprehended in this word, "lost." I am quite unable to imagine the condition of any man of woman born so miserable as not to be contained within the circumference of these four letters—"lost." The man may have gone to a perfect extravagance of vice, he may have ruined himself body and soul, he may be upon the very verge of hell, and feel as if he were slipping into the pit—but this word descends to the lowest depth of his misery, for he is "lost."

Here and there upon our iron-bound coasts there are harbors of refuge, but, unfortunately, some of them are only available for large vessels at certain times of the tide. At high-water, a vessel of large tonnage may enter them and find security, but if the tide runs out strongly, even though the harbor is there, there is not enough water to enable vessels of great weight to enter. Behold, my text is a harbor of refuge available at all tides, and even at the lowest ebb, the biggest ships of heaviest tonnage may enter here. No matter, though the sinner should need a fathomless ocean of mercy to float in, there is depth enough for him here! If the wind is blowing horribly this morning, and the storms are out, and all the fiends out with the storms, yet if the tempest-tossed soul can but make sail for this divine harbor—there is no sandbar at the mouth, no shallow water in the channel, there is no fear of its being able to enter. This harbor's mouth is exceedingly deep in mercy, for the text speaks of, "that which was lost." Souls lost through sin and folly are sought and saved by the Son of man.

Let us consider how men are lost. We know, first, that they are lost by *nature*. However much men may rebel against the doctrine, it is a truth of inspiration that we are lost even when we are born, and that the word, "lost," has to do, not only with those who have gone into sin grossly and wickedly, but even with all mankind. Did you ever notice the other place where this text occurs? It is in the 18th chapter of Matthew, and the 11th verse, and it occurs there in a very significant relationship. Let me read you the words. Christ is speaking about little children, and He says, "Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost." The Lord had placed a little child in the midst of the disciples, and had declared that they must be converted and become as little children; and yet He uttered these words in that connection. From that passage it is clear that by nature little children are lost, and they owe their salvation to the Lord Jesus, when God is pleased to carry them to heaven in infancy. Jesus is come to seek and to save those who are lost by nature. And it is most certain that no man now perishes through Adam's sin only, and no man is cast into hell because of natural depravity alone—his own personal sin and unbelief cast him there.

A far more terrible matter for us, practically, is that we are, apart from divine grace, lost by our own *actions*. Our nature has revealed itself in our character; our inward inclinations have developed themselves in our conduct, and we have lost ourselves by our own acts and deeds. We have erred and strayed from God's ways willfully and wickedly like lost sheep, and now the word, "lost," belongs to us by our own overt acts, as well as through Adam's fall.

And in addition to that, we are lost because our actual sin and our natural depravity have co-worked to produce in us an *inability* to restore ourselves from our fallen condition. We are not only wanderers, but we have no will to come home. We are prodigal sons, but we never say, "I will arise, and go to my Father," until the grace of God puts it into our hearts to do so. We are like sheep which wander, and wander, and wan-

der, but will never, by any chance, return unless the Good Shepherd of souls shall seek us. If this world of ours could suddenly be left to itself, could forget the centripetal force which holds it in alliance with the sun, and could set out upon a fearful journey into the darkness of far-off space, if it should travel so far away that no longer could a single beam of light reach it from the sun, and it were altogether in darkness, it is quite certain that it could never find the sun again, for who could light a candle upon the earth wherewith we might search for the sun? The sun can only be seen by its own light. Where upon earth would be found the bands and cords with which to draw us back to the sun? The world could only be drawn by an influence from the sun itself—the central orb must give the motive power. So, when a soul wanders from God, it has no light in it with which to see God, and no force in it to draw God to itself. God must enlighten and draw the soul to Him. So that, in this threefold sense, we are lost by nature, by practice, and by an utter inability to find out our God, and to return to Him. Yet, terrible as this lost estate is, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

In addition to this, we are all lost by the *condemnation* which our sin has brought upon us. We are sometimes told by inaccurate talkers that we are in a state of probation. My brethren, nothing can be more unscriptural than such a statement. We have long ago been proved, and found wanting. Our probation is over. We are now, if unrenewed, in a state of condemnation. The trial is not now pending—it is over, and we are condemned already for our sins. The fearful sentence of condemnation hangs over every man here who has not believed in the Lord Jesus. The sinner is lost in that sense. It is but a matter of time, and that time in God's hands—and the condemned man will be taken out to execution, and the punishment of divine wrath will fall upon his guilty head. We are lost because we are under legal sentence, and are unable to escape from it. We cannot make atonement to God for the wrong we have done, nor avoid His righteous jurisdiction. No mortifications of the body, no lamentations of the spirit can wipe out a single sin—

"Could my tears forever flow;
Could my zeal no respite know:
All for sin could not atone,
Christ must save, and Christ, alone."

So that, being before the bar of God regarded as condemned criminals, unregenerate men are lost, indeed.

More than this, there are certain persons in the world who are lost in a more apparent sense than others are—I mean that they are lost to *society,* to respect, and perhaps to decency. That was the case with Zacchaeus, in connection with whom our text was spoken. I do not know what may have been his parentage. Possibly he was born of most reputable folk, but he showed a vicious mind, and he turned aside from the good old paths. He loved low company, and despised his father's seriousness. There was great grief in that household on his account. Zacchaeus was lost to his parents—they had hoped he would have been a credit to their name, but instead he was a dishonor. They trusted that he would be the staff of their old age, but now he was a scourge to them. They scarcely dared to whisper his name in any company, for he had joined

with the men of Belial, and mingled with the lewdest sort in the city. And by-and-by, as men go from bad to worse, Zacchaeus had taken up with the low and infamous trade of a tax-gatherer. He so pushed his way in it by his sharpness and hardness of heart, that he became chief of the odious band of the extortionate oppressors of the people. The Pharisees, of course, never looked at him—they passed him by as though he were a dog, while the ordinary people of Jericho, when he was out of hearing, cursed him. Had he not exacted upon one; had he not oppressed another? His very name had a ban set upon it. He was lost to society. But the Son of man sought him, and saved him, lost as he was. Society, to this day, has its rules, by the breach of which persons become outcasts. These rules are, some of them, commendable, but others are arbitrary, one-sided, cruel, and hypocritical. We have sometimes heard men of the world ridicule what they are pleased to call the hypocrisy of the Church, but we take leave to say that there is no hypocrisy as desperately hypocritical as the hypocrisy of the world. There occurred, not long ago, an instance of the world's relentless cruelty to those whom it is fashionable to brand with dishonor. A person, who had, perhaps, fallen into sin in her earlier days, was restored to a respectable position—she was received in society among the noblest, but all of a sudden, dastardly lips revealed a secret, and a sin committed far back was raked up against her. From that day the world put away the woman, never asking her if she had repented, or taking her after-conduct into consideration. The world is so pure, and chaste, and immaculate, that it shut out the erring one as if she had been a leper. Though itself reeking with foulest abominations, society feigns virtuousness as pure as the lily, and chaste as the snow. The world is cold, hard, and cruel towards a certain class of offenders. It receives into its embraces men who are, every inch of them, unclean—but a betrayed, deceived, broken-hearted woman, the world shakes off as if she were a viper. This is the society which boasts its gallantry! This is the just, fair-dealing world! It caresses its noble rakes, but casts off the most penitent among the betrayed! Ah, hypocritical, canting world! Ah, hollow, lying world, to pretend to a virtue which you do not know! Rail not at the inconsistencies of religious men while your own are so glaring! Cruel tyrants, learn mercy, and do justice, before you become a judge of the servants of the Lord.

Now, the Son of man is come to seek and to save those whom the world puts outside its camp. The world says, "No, shame on her." "We will not speak to her." But Christ Jesus says, "I have come to pardon her, and to restore her, and she shall love Me much because much has been forgiven her." There are other cases in which men, by their crimes, most justly place themselves outside the pale of society, and for the preservation of order they are separated from the company of honest men. Now even these should have a door of hope left to them, and a way of return. The cry, too often is, "Down with him! Down with him! He has sinned against his fellow men. Put him aside. What do we care what becomes of him?" But the Son of man who is infinitely pure and holy, has a genuine horror of sin so that He really hates it, and loathes it, yet does not loathe sinners, but has come to seek and to save them. The sweep of divine

compassion is not limited by the customs of mankind. The boundaries of Jesus' love are not to be fixed by Pharisaical self-righteousness! "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Putting all that we have said into a few words, we would thus speak: I may be addressing persons here who feel that they have broken God's laws, perhaps by no public means, or in any of the grosser vices, but they have broken the laws of God. They may feel that they have, and are sorrowing in their hearts because of it; they may also fear that they have sinned in such a way that it cannot be possible for them to be forgiven. At the same time, the hardness of their hearts astounds them. They feel themselves to be altogether bad, and that no good thing dwells within them, and so they despair of being saved. Beloved friends, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Does not the description suit *you?* Are you not among the lost? Well, then, you are among such as Jesus Christ came to save. And if perchance there should be one here who has fallen into the grosser vices, someone who has sullied his name, and degraded himself to the very lowest degree, I am bound not to restrict the text, and I do not desire to do so—"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." O you lost ones! O you ruined and destroyed ones! The Son of man is come to seek and to save you!

The Greek word here used for lost is a form of that word which has, by certain modern discoverers, been translated, "annihilated," with a view to buttressing their unscriptural theory of the annihilation of the wicked. It is one of those instances in which the absurdity of such an interpretation ought to be evident even to themselves. The Son of man has not come to seek and to save that which is annihilated—that would be rank nonsense. But the word *is* very forcible, and signifies a very terrible destruction, a ruin of the most solemn kind. To be lost is to be fallen altogether; to be destroyed as to all good, to be utterly undone, yet the Lord Jesus Christ is come to seek and to save such as are in this wretched plight. Why, this text sounds to me like the ringing of joyful Sunday bells which sometimes mariners have heard at sea. Ships are sometimes surrounded with a dense fog, and the mariners know not whether they are near the land or on the wide ocean. They lie becalmed with no stir in the air, no stir in the sea; the ship is like a lost thing without power of motion or knowledge of her whereabouts. And then suddenly the mariners have heard bells ringing on the blessed Sunday, and as the silver sounds have pierced the gloomy mist, the mariners have known that they were somewhere near Old England's happy shores. My text rings out most sweetly through the fogs of your soul's despair and doubt, and I trust the glad message— "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"—will reach you.

II. Now, let us turn to another point. There is very much of consolation in our text for the guilty, in the second place, if they notice HOW THE SAVIOR IS HERE DESCRIBED, "The *Son of man* is come to seek and to save that which was lost." As the Son of man He is come. And here note, first of all, *His Deity*. You say, "Deity—how is that? The text says 'The Son of *man.'*" Yes, and that is the point upon which I ground

my remark. No prophet or apostle needed to call himself by way of distinction the son of man. It would be ridiculous for any one of us to speak of himself emphatically as the son of man—it would be an affectation of condescension supremely absurd. Therefore, when we hear our Lord particularly and especially calling Himself by this name, we are compelled to think of it as contrasted with His higher nature, and we see a deep condescension in His choosing to be called the Son of man, when He might have been called the Son of God. O my Soul, He who is come to save you, is so plainly God that He sees reason to remind you that He is also the Son of man, lest you should doubt it. No angel's arm is stretched out for your help, but the arm of Him who created all worlds.

In speaking of Himself as the Son of man, our Lord shows us that He has come to us in a *condescending character.* Not in flames of fire has Jesus descended from heaven. Not in His chariot of wrath, girt with the sword of vengeance, does Jehovah Jesus come to men. He is come upon His errand of mercy as one who has lain upon a woman's breast, who has known weakness, suffering, and need. He is come as one who knows, by personal experience, the lowliness of your estate. Oh, sinner, is it not joy to know that the Son of God has come to save you as the Son of man? "The Son of man"—that describes also the *tenderness* of His character. A man can sympathize with a man. Jesus, the tender-hearted One, was full of sympathy, and in loving gentleness He is come to save sinners. He is no stern Rhadamanthus, no judge of severe countenance, no Draco with bloody edicts, but Jesus, the Man of Sorrows and the acquaintance of grief. It is as your brother, touched with a feeling of your infirmities that Jesus comes to you. He has, moreover, come in His *mediatorial character,* for, "There is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." He can put His hand upon you, and at the same time lay His hand upon God. He who bridges the gulf between the misery of fallen manhood, and the eternal dignity of the unsullied God is come to save the lost. What a joy this is!

And our Lord is come in His *representative character,* for He calls Himself the Son of man, as if to note that He is man for men, the representative man, the Son of man. He is come as the covenant substitute, representing man. He has suffered in our place, died in our place, paid our debts in our place, risen in our place, and gone to heaven as our forerunner. It is the Son of man who in all things has acted for men, who is, "Come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Now, it seems to me, dear friends, if the Spirit of God would only help poor troubled hearts to see it, that the wording of this part of my text, though very simple, is full of the richest consolation. Soul, what an attractive Savior you have to deal with! God is a consuming fire. You cannot, O guilty one, go to Him; but Jesus is your brother, your friend; He is the Friend of Sinners who received them, and ate with them. And He it is, great as He is, who is, "Come to seek and to save that which was lost." I tell you what I would have you do. Go to Him without fear or trembling before yon sun goes down and ends this day of His mercy; go and tell Him you have broken His Father's laws—tell Him that you are lost, and you need to be saved. Tell Him that He is a man, and appeal to His man-

ly heart, and to His brotherly sympathies. Pour out your broken heart at His feet—let your soul flow over in His presence—and I tell you He cannot cast you away! Though your prayers are feeble as the spark in the flax, He will not quench them. And though your heart is bruised like a reed, He will not break it. May the Holy Spirit bless you with a desire to go to God through Jesus Christ, and may He encourage you to do so by showing that Jesus is meek, and lowly of heart, gentle, and tender, and full of pity.

III. I pass on to our third point and that, also, is full of comfort, though I will only touch upon it. You who seek salvation should joyfully observe HOW OUR LORD'S PAST ACTION IS DESCRIBED—"The Son of man is come." Note, it is not, "shall come," but, "is come." His coming is a fact accomplished. We could not have said this before the days of Bethlehem's wondrous birth; we would have had to say the Son of man "will come," and then you would have needed extraordinary faith to believe that the Son of God would become the Son of man to save you. But He *"is* come." That part of the salvation of a sinner which is yet to be done is not at all so hard to be believed as that which the Lord has already accomplished. That Jesus Christ, after being incarnate, and after having suffered for sin, should pardon sinners for whom He has died, does not seem to me to be extraordinary—the extraordinary matter lies in this, that He should come from heaven, that He should be born in Bethlehem, that He should tarry here on earth, that He should go up to the cross, and down to the grave, and bear and suffer in the sinner's place—yet, our Lord has done all that. The greatest part of the work He has accomplished. Your salvation, if you believe in Jesus, is comparatively an easy matter—He has but to apply that which is already prepared, and hand over to your faith that which He has laid by in store.

The state of the case since Jesus has come may be illustrated thus: Certain of our fellow countrymen were the prisoners of the Emperor Theodore, in Abyssinia, and I will suppose myself among them. As a captive. I hear that the British Parliament is stirring in the direction of an expedition for my deliverance, and I feel some kind of comfort, but I am very anxious, for I know that amidst party strifes in the House of Commons many good measures are shipwrecked. Days and months pass wearily on, but at last I hear that Sir Robert Napier has landed with a delivering army. Now my heart leaps for joy. I am shut up within the walls of Hagdala, but in my dungeon I hear the sound of the British bugle, and I know that the deliverer is come. Now I am full of confidence, and am sure of liberty. If the general is already come, my rescue is certain. Mark well, then, O you prisoners of hope, that Jesus is come. Do you not hear it? The gospel bugle is sounding. Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! The captain of our salvation is come; He is at our dungeon gates! He has come to our rescue! He is come! He is come!

Jesus has come; and by His Holy Spirit He is still here, and we may depend upon it, that if He has actually come to the work, He means to go through with it, for He never draws back His hand. When He said He would save men, it was certain He would do so; but now He has come to do it, it is more than certain. Behold the Lord of glory has disrobed Him-

self for work; He has hung up His royal robes, and put on a workman's garb, a human toiler's garments. He means work, stern, persevering work. He has cast His azure mantle across the sky, and come down here to the city of David robed in mortal clay to wear the garment without seam. O, Sirs, He means to do His Father's business! He is in real earnest, be sure of that. He has come to do it, and means to accomplish His design of love. Besides, He is not like a foolish one who comes to His work and leaves His tools behind Him. Jesus would not come unprepared. The Son of man is an infinitely wise Savior, and you may depend upon it, having come with His Father's consent, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, He is come with everything that is needed to accomplish His purpose. He is come to do a work which He can do, and will do, and in which He will not be baffled though all the powers of earth and hell should contend with Him. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." My heart rejoices as I feel how sure it is that the lost ones will be saved. If we had heard the sons of the morning sing in solemn symphony, "God Himself has come to scatter the primeval darkness, to bring order out of chaos, and to create life in the earth which lies without form and void," we would have felt certain of the result. If God had come to create, He would create, and it would have been no matter of surprise to us to have seen the round earth glowing in the morning light, verdant with new-born vegetation, and populous with variety of life. We are sure that what God comes to do He will do.

In the night when Israel was pursued by the Egyptians, and overtaken at the sea, even at the Red Sea, it was a sign of victory when the Lord came to deliver His people. The pillar of cloud went to the rear, turning its black side on the foe, and its bright side on the chosen. God was come to smite Pharaoh, and to rebuke the proud tyrant. And oh, you might be sure He would do it—failure was out of the question. When, next morning, the placid deep swept over the angry armies, and all was peace where Pharaoh and his hosts had raged so furiously, and instead of the shouts of men-at-arms, were heard the sweet voices of damsels, singing, "Sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously," it was but natural it should be so, for if God came to avenge His Israel, who could stand before Him? The Son of man is *come* to save. Rejoice, you heavens, and be glad, O earth! He will do all His pleasure. Neither earth nor hell can stand against Him. Seeking, He will save, yes, He will save that which is lost. All glory be unto His name.

IV. The last point is to be this—there is much of deepest comfort in THE DESCRIPTION WHICH IS HERE GIVEN OF OUR LORD'S WORK. He is come "to seek and to save." The enterprise is one, but has two branches. I would have you first notice what our Lord has not come to do. He has not come to aid those who, in their own esteem are almost as good as they ought to be, to become a little better, and so to enter heaven by their own efforts. I believe that such is the general persuasion of mankind. If they were to put their beliefs into plain English, their notion is as nearly as possible what I have said. According to them you are to attend a place of worship regularly, say prayers, give to the poor, and be as good as you can; and then, inasmuch as there will be a little bit in which you

will be lacking, you are to trust to Jesus Christ to make up the rest. Now, mark my word, this is a gross and fatal delusion. There is not between the two covers of this Bible one single word of hope held out to any man who believes in that manner—no, but there is the solemn utterance that Christ has not come to save people of that sort at all, for thus it is written—"The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." As many who rely on the works of the law, are under the curse. If any of you are very good people, and have no sins, if you have done no wrong, and are nearly as good as you ought to be; if you only need just to say a little about the blood of Christ, Christ has not come to save such as you are. He has "come to seek and to save that which was lost." If you are not lost, you have no part nor lot in this matter.

Moreover, the Lord Jesus has not come to aid us in self-sufficient endeavors to save ourselves. I wonder how Christian people can sing that verse—

"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify;
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky."

It might suit a Jew at the foot of Sinai, but a Christian should have none of it. If we have to save our own souls, it is all over with us. What! Can we fit our souls for the sky! We, save our own souls! Why, this is the clean opposite of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The theory of some is that there is much natural goodness in men, and they have only to work it out, and gradually improve themselves into a state of grace. No, sir, you are on the wrong track. Do you know what the very first ceremony of the Christian religion? "Yes," you say, "baptism." So it is. And what is baptism? "Buried with Christ in baptism." Who are buried, then? Living people? No! Dead people? The very first lesson of the gospel, after believing in Christ, is that you are, before the law, dead, through having been crucified with Christ, and therefore you must be buried. There is no improving your old nature, mending it up, and beautifying it into perfection—the thing is hopeless, and it must die and be buried. The Scripture does not say, "You must be improved." "You must be born-again"—that is quite another thing. You must be made new creatures in Christ Jesus. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." A new creation is needed—not an improvement of the old creature. What does the apostle say?—"The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not reconciled to God, neither, indeed, can be." There he ends it—"Neither, indeed, can be." It is all over with the flesh, for corruption has seized upon it. This the believer accepts as fact, "Because," says the apostle, "we thus judge, that if One died for all, then all died." The death of Jesus, as a punishment for sin, was *our* death, and we died in Him. So that we now live as new men, and risen men, and not as though the old life had been improved into something better. The old nature is put into the place of death, and then the man receives life in Christ—that is how we are saved—not by improving ourselves into something better, but by being newly created by the divine power of the Holy Spirit. "Very discouraging," says one. Yes! And such discouragement is much needed now-a-days. If I

saw a man trying to climb to the top of a mountain by a path which was quite impassable, and full of dangers, I would be his true friend if I discouraged him from dashing himself to pieces. The way to heaven is not by our own works. You, who think that you can climb to heaven by the way of Sinai, should look to the flames that Moses saw—and sink and tremble, and despair. There is no road to God by the way of Sinai. There, at Calvary, is the way—all crimson with the Savior's blood. Salvation is ours through His atoning sacrifice—"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Now, having cleared away the rubbish, let us come to the truth. Jesus is come to *seek* the lost. He did that *personally*. There was a lost woman at Samaria, and Jesus said He must go through Samaria. There was a lost man at Jericho, and Jesus said He must abide in that man's house. What He did personally, He now does under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, in His *providence*. Sometimes providence takes away a child, lays a man on a bed of sickness, deprives him of his wealth; and all these trials are intended to bring him to Jesus. It is Jesus seeking him. It is an odd thing, my friend that you should be here this morning—you did not reckon upon being here; strange circumstances brought you. Suppose the Lord means to save you this morning? Then the providence which brought you to this spot is Jesus seeking you.

As our Lord seeks souls by His providence, He also seeks them by the *Word*. It is very wonderful how the Word of God will come home to people. It is a part of every preacher's business that is sent of God, so to preach that persons in the congregation may perceive that he speaks of them. What remarkable things have happened in our ministry and in the ministries of all who are sent of God. Why, they speak to people as if they knew them. Though they never saw them before, they tell their case and picture their state. God guides His servants, and gives them words that they never thought of till the time came to utter them, so that on the spur of the moment they pick out the character as well as if they had known the man from childhood. Thus Jesus seeks the sinner. If there is anything in this sermon which suits your case, dear friend, do not talk about what relation it may have to anybody else, but be sure Jesus is seeking *you.* You are a lost one; you have come here in such a condition of heart that you cannot deny your lost state? Jesus is seeking you. Look how the Lord served Zacchaeus. It seemed an odd thing that when the Lord was under the tree, He should look up and say, "Zacchaeus make haste and come down"; but Jesus does the same thing in the preaching of the gospel. He applies the word with power to individual consciences, and makes men perceive that He speaks of them. God has a message of love to their souls, and they are compelled to hear it—they cannot shut their ears to it—they must receive it, for *the Spirit of God* comes with it, and sends it home with power to their soul. That is Jesus seeking sinners.

But whom Jesus seeks He saves. That is the second part of it—"To seek and to save." And how is the saving done? That is done, first of all, by the complete pardon of all the sinner's sins. The very instant that a man trusts Christ with all his heart, the past is blotted out as if it had

never existed. All the sins he has ever committed in thought, in word, in deed, however crimson in color, go at once; they are sunk as in the sea, never to be found again. And this is done upon this one solitary condition—that the sinner believes in Jesus. And even that is not a condition, for He that bade him believe, enables him to believe, and gives him the faith which saves his soul.

Then the sinner is saved in another way. From the moment that a person believes in Jesus, his nature becomes different from what it was before; he receives a new heart; another influence takes possession of him; another love engrosses him. When a man is absorbed by some master-passion, what a different man he becomes. The passion for wealth will work marvels. We have known idle persons become very diligent, and profuse voluptuaries become even self-denying and mortifying to their flesh in their ambition to acquire riches. Now, God gives us another passion—the passion of gratitude to Christ, and love to the God that saved us, and that becomes a master-principle and rules the entire man. He who loved self now loves God, and lives for Him. And is that change possible to the most degraded? Yes, possible with God. If a man has committed every crime in the whole catalog of villainy, and his heart has become hard as the nether millstone, and his disposition altogether base, mean, groveling, sensual and devilish, the Spirit of God can turn that man, in a single moment, into a lover of that which is true and right and just! He can break his heart concerning the past, make him angry with himself for having lived as he has done, and can passionately inflame him with the desire to be perfectly holy. And that passion within the man can carry him on until he loves his fellow creatures as himself, and makes great sacrifices for them—and all for the sake of Jesus, that blessed, crucified Son of man, who came "to seek and to save that which was lost." We do not preach that Christ forgives men, and then lets them live as before; but we assert that the moment He gives the pardon of sin, He gives the new nature, too. The gospel hospital is not merely a place where lepers are harbored, but where lepers are healed— "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Brethren let us cry to Jesus this morning to save us. I will put myself down among the lost by nature and by practice. If there is no one else here that is lost by nature, I am such, and I bless my Lord that He is "come to seek and to save" me, a lost man. Brothers and sisters, some of you have known His love for many years. Did you not come at first to Him as lost ones? And will you not confess this morning, that were it not for His infinite mercy you would still be as lost as ever? What a mercy it is to know we are lost and to trust to Christ who saves the lost. What a blessing to be among the dead who died in Christ, whose life is a new life in Him—"For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Martin Luther speaks in his book on Galatians of cutting the devil's head off with his own sword—"There," says Martin to the devil, "you say I am a great sinner. I thank you for that, for Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and so I feel He came to save me." And if the devil says to any one of you this morning, "You are altogether lost," off with his head,

my brother, my sister—with his own sword, and this very day rejoice that, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Is there anyone here who is not lost, anyone in this congregation who does not need saving? Well, then, I cannot say, in God's name, a single word of consolation to you. You are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, so you say. But this is what the Lord says to you—"He has put down the mighty from their seat, and He has exalted them of low degree: He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty." That is the only gospel for you. But every poor, heavy-laden, troubled heart, and every soul that feels itself to be lost by nature has this gracious word—"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

The last word is this: Let us who are saved seek the lost ones. Jesus did it. O followers of Jesus, do likewise! Is there any work that you could undertake among the worst of people? Undertake it. Never be ashamed of mingling with the poorest of the poor, and the vilest of the vile, for Christ's sake. I always feel intense satisfaction at the remembrance of such useful members of our church as Brother Orsman, engaged as he is from day to day in the very worst part of London, in Golden Lane, seeking that which is lost. I hope there are many here imitating him. I know there are some. There is room for many more laborers in that department, to seek those that are lost—pre-eminently lost. You need not, however, go to Golden Lane, or Seven Dials—there are plenty of lost people around you; lost people who come to the Tabernacle, lost people who go to church, and lost people who go nowhere on Sunday. Go and seek them. If you are saved yourself, I beseech you by the blood that bought you, by the Christ who loved you, and by the Christ whom you love, go out this very day to seek and to save that which was lost. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE, SERMON—LUKE 19:1-27.

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AN OLD-FASHIONED CONVERSION
NO. 1101

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 16, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Lo, all these things works God oftentimes with man, To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living."
Job 33:29, 30.

SOME people are wonderfully enamored of anything that is old. An old coin, an old picture, an old book, or even a piece of antique rubbish they will almost worship. The jingle of a rusty medal is music to them, and "auld nick-nackets" are as precious as diamonds. It is wonderful what a little mold and a few worm-holes will do in the way of increasing values. I confess I do not very greatly share in the feeling, at least it is no craze of mine but, nevertheless, all things being equal, antiquity has its charms. Old, old stories of the days far past, when time was young, have a special interest; they are as windows which permit us to gaze down the dim aisles of ages long gone by—we look through them with mingled curiosity and awe. I am about, this morning, to speak to you concerning an old conversion. We shall rehearse an ancient story of the renewal and salvation of a soul. In our day we meet with professors who cry down everything of the present and cry up everything of the former days, which they call the good old times. Such persons talk much about old-fashioned conversions and hold in great admiration the lives of believers of the old school. I shall, this morning, introduce you to an old-fashioned conversion and explain the way in which men were brought to God not only hundreds, but thousands of years ago. I suppose that Elihu delivered this description of conversion about the time of Moses, or at the period when Israel was in Egypt, for almost general consent appropriates one of those dates to the Book of Job.

The record we shall read this morning, and study carefully, refers to the very, very oldest of times. Let this fact give additional interest to our meditation—and if it does I am sure that we shall not lack for earnest attention, for the subject is of great intrinsic value.

Kindly keep your Bibles open. We have already read the Chapter, but it will be necessary to refer to it verse by verse.

I. The matter in hand is to compare an old-fashioned conversion with those of the present time. And the first note we shall strike is this—it is quite certain from the description given in this 33rd chapter of Job that THE SUBJECTS OF CONVERSION WERE SIMILAR and men in the far gone ages were precisely like men in these times. The passage tells us nothing about the stature of men's' bodies, but as far as they were concerned spiritually, the photograph which Elihu took is the portrait of many of those who are brought to Jesus now. Reading the passage over, we find that men in those times needed converting, for they were deaf to

God's voice (v 14). They were obstinate in evil purposes (v 17) and puffed up with pride. They needed chastening to arouse them to thought and required sore distress to make them cry out for mercy (vv 19-22). They were very slow to say, "I have sinned," and were not at all inclined to prayer. Nothing but sharp discipline could bring them to their senses and even then they needed to be born-again. Men in those days were sinful and yet proud—sinful self and righteous self were both in power—it was one part of conversion to withdraw them from their purposes of sin and another part of their conversion to "hide pride" from them. Though they were sinful, they thought that they were righteous, and though they were condemned by the law of God they still entertained the fond hope that they should, by their own merits, obtain the favor of the Most High. They were then, as they are now, poor as poverty and yet proud of their wealth. They were Publicans in sin, and yet Pharisees in boasting.

It appears that in those days God was accustomed to speak to men and to be disregarded by them. We are told that God spoke "once, yes, twice," and men perceived Him not. Their presumptuous slumbers were too deep to be broken by the call of love. Samuel said, "Here am I, for You did call me," but they slept on in defiance of the Lord. O, how frequently does the Lord speak now to deaf ears! He calls and men refuse. He stretches out His hands and men do not regard Him. But they are desperately set upon their sins and sod in carnal security, therefore they do despite to His grace and ruin their own souls. In those ancient times, when a man was converted, the Lord Himself must turn him—omnipotence itself was necessary to divide man from his folly. God's speaking to the ear was not enough unless He followed it up with a powerful application to the heart. Man was too far gone to be healed by remedies less than divine—he was utterly past hope unless Almighty love would come to the rescue! Verily, the case is the same at this day and each man repeats his fellow. As the fish still bites at the bait, as the bird still flies into the snare, as the beast is still taken in the pit, so is man still the dupe of his sins and only the Lord can save him. Salvation was only worked by the gracious influences of God's Spirit in the days of Job—and it is only so accomplished at this present hour. Men were lost then as now! Men thought they were not lost then, and they are equally conceited now. Into the house of the divine Physician the same classes of persons enter as were welcomed and healed by Him ages ago. He has the same blind eyes and deaf ears to open—hearts still require to be transformed from stone to flesh—and leprosies to be exchanged for health by His Sovereign touch. The Spirit from the four winds breathed on a valley covered with dry bones in the days of the fathers and He comes forth, still, to work upon the like scene of death. Man has not outgrown his sins. As it was in the beginning it is now and so it ever will be while that which is born of the flesh is flesh. As were the sires such are their sons, and such will our sons be in their turn—so that the process of conversion needs to be the same—and "all these things God works oftentimes with man."

II. The second note we shall strike is this, that in those olden times THE WORKER OF CONVERSION WAS THE SAME—"all these things God

works." The whole process is by Elihu ascribed to God and every Christian can bear witness that the Lord is the great worker now. He turns us and we are turned. We read in verse fourteen that, at first, the Lord worked upon men by speaking to them, once, yes, twice—He also brought truth home to their minds and instructed them and so changed their purposes and humbled their hearts. In the same manner the Lord works now. Conversion is a change which concerns the mind, the affections, the spirit—it is not a physical manipulation as some foolish persons fancy—who appear to think that God converts men by force and turns them over as a man would roll a stone. The Lord operates upon men as men, not as blocks of wood! God speaks to them, instructs them, reveals truth to them, encourages them to hope and graciously influences them for good. Man is left free, for, "God speaks once, yes, twice, yet man perceives it not," and yet in God's own wise and suitable manner, he is at length led to cry, "I have sinned and perverted that which is right and it profited me not."

But in those times, as now, it was necessary that God should do more than speak to the outer ear. He, therefore, came still nearer and by His Holy Spirit led men to really hear what He spoke. He did not leave men to their wills; neither did He trust their conversion to the eloquence of preachers, or to the cogency of arguments. But He Himself came and opened men's ears and pressed the truth of God home upon their understandings and made it operative upon their entire nature. Man was so proud that no one else could humble him but God—and he was so willful, that no one could withdraw him from his purpose but the Lord, alone. But the Lord, in condescension, did the deed and made the man obedient and humble. Indeed, the Lord is described in this chapter as the main cause of all the work accomplished. Whereas a ransom was needed to deliver men from going down to the pit, it is the Lord's voice which cried, "I have found a ransom." Whereas, even when the ransom was found, men did not know it and would not receive it, it was God who sent a messenger, one of a thousand, to show unto man His uprightness and to proclaim the great provision made for restoring man to his primeval state. It is the Lord who delivers the soul from the pit, that man's life may see the light. In this chapter it is God that visits, that speaks, chastens, instructs, enlightens, consoles, renews and saves—from first to last. God works all in all. Salvation is of the Lord, it is not of man, neither by man. Neither is it of the will of man, nor of the flesh, nor of blood, nor of birth, but of the will of God. The purpose of God and the power of God work salvation from first to last. What a blessing this is for us, for, if salvation were of ourselves, who among us would be saved? But He has "laid help upon one that is mighty." God is also our strength and our song, for He Himself has become our salvation. He who has begun the good work will carry it on. Christ is the Alpha. Christ is the Omega. Christ is the "author and the finisher of our faith." So we have two points in this ancient conversion in which it was just like our own—the same men to be operated upon and the same God to work the miracles of grace.

III. The most interesting point to you will probably be the third—THE MEANS USED TO WORK CONVERSION IN THOSE DISTANT AGES WERE VERY MUCH THE SAME AS THOSE EMPLOYED NOW. There were differences in outward agencies, but the inward *modus operandi* was the same. There was a difference in the instruments, but the way of working was the same. Kindly turn to the chapter, at the fifteenth verse, you find there that God, first of all, spoke to men, but they regarded Him not, and then He spoke to them effectually by means of a dream—"In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, in slumbering upon the bed." Now, this was an extraordinary means of grace, seldom used now. In this the distant ages differ from the present. A dream, though it is, in itself, but the mirage of sleep, may be employed by God to arouse the mind towards eternal things. Dreams of death and judgment to come have frequently had a very alarming effect upon the conscience, while visions of celestial glory have impressed the heart with desires after infinite bliss. As Dryden says of some men—

"In sleep they fearful precipices tread
Or, shipwrecked, labor to some distant shore,"

so others have in their slumbers shivered at the gates of hell, or even been tossed upon its fiery waves—and the thoughts consequent upon such dreams have, by God's grace, occasionally been rendered permanently useful, though I fear it is not often so. In the days of Elihu, however, dreams were much more frequently the way in which God spoke, for there were few messengers from God to interpret His mind—no openly declared gospel and few assemblies for instruction by hearing the word. And what is more, there was then no written word of God. In those early times they had no inspired books at all, so that, lacking the Bible and lacking the frequent ministrations of God's servants, the Lord was pleased to supply their deficiencies by speaking to men in the visions of the night. I say again, we must not expect the Lord to return to the general use of so feeble an agency, now that He employs others which are far more effectual. It is much more profitable for you to have the word in your houses which you can read at all times and to have God's ministers to proclaim clearly the gospel of Jesus than it would be to be dependent upon visions of the night.

The means, therefore, outwardly, may have changed, but still, whether it is by the dream at night, or by the sermon on Sunday, the power is just the same—namely, in the word of God. God may speak to men in dreams and if so, He speaks to them nothing more and nothing different from what He speaks in the written word. If any come to you and say, "I have dreamed this or that," and it is not in the Scriptures, away with their dreams! If anything should occur in your own mind in vision which is not already revealed in the Book of God, put it away, it is an idle fancy not to be regarded. Woe to that man whose religion is the baseless fabric of dreams—he will one day wake up to find that nothing short of realities can save him. We have the more sure word of testimony unto which we do well if you take heed as unto a light that shines in a dark place. Conversions, then, in the old times, used to be by the word of God. It came in a different way, but it was the same word and the same truth. At this

time faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God—and at bottom that was precisely the way in which faith came to men in those distant periods.

Now, observe that in addition to the external coming of the word, it seems from the chapter before us in the sixteenth verse, that men were converted by having their ears opened by God. Alas, men's ears are still stopped up! An old Puritan has mentioned seven forms of what he calls, "ear stoppers," which need to be taken out of the human ear. They are frequently blocked up by ignorance—they know not the importance and value of the truth, and therefore they refuse to give earnest heed to it. Judging it to be an idle tale, they go their way to their farms and to their merchandise. Some ears are stopped up by unbelief—they have heard the glad tidings of salvation but they have not received it as an infallible revelation from heaven, a message backed by divine authority. Skepticism and philosophy, falsely so called, barricade Eargate against the assaults of Emmanuel's captains, so that even the great battering rams of the gospel prove powerless to force an entrance. "He could not do many mighty works then because of their unbelief!"Others ears are stopped up by impenitence—the hardness of the heart causes a deadness of the ear. You may discharge the great cannons of the law in the ears of some men, but they will not stir. The thunders of God startle the wild beasts of the wood but impenitence is not moved thereby. The gospel, itself, sounds upon such ears with no more effect than upon a marble statue—the groans of Calvary are nothing to them. Some ears are stopped by prejudice—they have made up their minds as to what the gospel ought to be and they will not hear it as it is. They have set up for themselves a standard of what the truth should be and that standard is a false one, for they have put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness. Prejudices against the preacher, or against the denomination are but forms of the same evil—they make men to be as Ulysses was when his ears were sealed with wax, for they are even as deaf men. The entrance into many ears is also effectually barred by the love of sin. He who loves vice will not hear of repentance—the lover of pleasure detests holy mourning. The licentious think holiness to be another name for slavery. The man who finds delight in sin is a deaf adder whom the wisest charmer cannot charm—the poison of asps is under his tongue and he cannot renounce his deadly hate of a gospel which rebukes his evil ways. It would be vain to teach cleanliness to the sow which wallows in the mire—it loves uncleanness and after uncleanness will it go. Some ears are stopped through pride—the plain, unflattering, humbling gospel of the sinner's Savior is not to their taste. The gospel for lost sinners, they think, is not addressed to them, for they are almost good enough and are by no means worthy of any great blame, or in danger of any great punishment. When they acknowledge their sinnership in words they feel it not in their hearts, therefore they hear not the truth in the love of it. If the gospel-pipe could be tuned to notes of flattery, to praise the dignity of man, they would attend to its music—but a gospel for vulgar sinners! How can their noble souls endure it? With their fine feathers all ruffled in disdain, they turn away in a rage. Alas, how many

ears are stopped through worldliness? If you stand in a street where the traffic is abundant—where the constant thunder of rumbling wheels creates a din—it would be difficult to preach so as to command an audience, for the abundant sound would prevent all hearing. And, to a great extent, the mass of mankind are just in that position as to the joyful sound of the gospel—the rumbling of the wheels of commerce, the noise of trade and the cries of competition, the whirl of cares and the riot of pleasures—all these drown the persuasive voice of heavenly love so that men hear no more of it than they would hear a pin fall in the midst of a hurricane at sea. Only when God unstops the ear is the still small voice of truth heard in the chambers of the heart.

Now it is clear to every thoughtful person that all these ear-stoppers existed in the olden times as well as now and therefore the same work of opening the passage to the heart was necessarily performed. Dreams did not convert sinners of the Patriarchal age, however vivid they might be. Nor did prophetic warnings by themselves arouse them—the hand of Him who created the ear was needed to cleanse and circumcise it before the truth could find admission.

Note the next sentence; He "seals their instruction." That was the means of conversion in the olden times. God brought the truth down upon the soul as you press a seal upon wax—you bear upon the seal to make the impression and even thus the power of God pressed home the word. Truth is heard by men, but they forget it unless the Holy Spirit takes the truth and puts it home and lays His force upon it and then it makes a stamp upon the conscience, upon the memory, and upon the entire manhood. Perhaps, also, by sealing here is meant confirming. A thing is sealed when it is established by testimony and witness—under hand and seal, as we say. Now the Holy Spirit has a way of making truth to become manifest to men and cogent upon their minds by bearing His witness with it, so that they cannot help feeling that it is true. He sets it in such a light that they cannot dispute it, but yield full consent to it, their conscience being overwhelmingly convinced.

Dear friends, I pray God the Holy Spirit in this sense to seal home the word we speak to each one of you, that from hearers you may grow into believers. I know you will remain hearers only, unless that sacred sealing shall take place, but let that come upon you and your soul will have the gospel stamped into its very texture, never more to be effaced. If the Spirit of God thus seals you, you will be sealed, indeed.

By sealing is also sometimes meant preserving and setting apart, as we seal up documents or treasures of great value that they may be secure. In this sense the gospel needs sealing up in our hearts. We forget what we hear till God the Holy Spirit seals it in the soul and then it is pondered and treasured up in the heart—it becomes to us a goodly pearl, a divine secret, a peculiar heritage. This sealing is a main point in conversion. What thousands of sermons many of you have heard, but the instruction has never been sealed to you and, therefore, you remain unsaved. I cannot bear to think of your unhappy case and I beseech those who love the Lord to pray that our discourses, or the sermons of someone else, or the Bible itself, may be sealed of the Lord upon these, my

unhappy hearers, that they may be converted and saved. O for the Lord's sealing hand upon men's hearts! Send, Lord, by whomever You will send, and by Your servant, also. Give the hearing ear and then engrave your gospel upon an understanding heart. You are able to do this and in faith we seek it at Your hands, O Lord God of our salvation. In this manner men were converted in the olden times; ears were opened and hearts were sealed.

It appears, also, that the Lord, in those days, employed providence as a help towards conversion—and that providence was often of a very gentle kind, for it preserved men from death. Read the eighteenth verse: "He keeps back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword." Many a man has had the current of his life entirely changed by an escape from imminent peril. Solemn thoughts have taken possession of his formerly careless mind and he has said to himself, "Has God preserved me from this danger? Then let me be grateful to Him. He must have had a purpose in my preservation. Let me find out what it is and thankfully endeavor to answer to it." Have any of you, my hearers, escaped from shipwreck? Is there one here who has escaped from an accident upon the iron way? Are you one of a handful who were snatched from between the very jaws of death? Have you risen up from a fever which laid you very low? Are you now almost the only survivor of a family, all the members of which, except yourself, have been taken away by consumption, or some other hereditary disease? Are you a remarkable monument of sparing mercy? Then, I pray you, let the long-suffering of God lead you to repentance, for it has led many before you and it is intended that it should do the same for you. Yield to the gentle pressure of loving-kindness, even as the flowers that yield their perfumes to the sunshine do not need to be crushed and bruised like Oriental spice beneath the pestle. Tenderly does the Lord call you to Himself, and says, "I have spared you from the grave. I have also kept your guilty soul from going down to hell. I have placed you, today, under the sound of the gospel. I am, by My servant, calling upon you to turn unto Me and live. Will you not hear Me? You are still on praying ground and pleading terms with Me—will you not consider all this?" Thus God speaks now by actions, which speak more loudly than words, and it seems that in the same way He was known to speak to men in the days gone by, so that providential circumstances were often the means of conversion.

But, further, it seems that, as Elihu puts it, sickness was a yet more effectual awakener in the common run of cases. Observe the nineteenth verse, "He is chastened, also, with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhors bread, and his soul dainty meat." Severe pain destroyed appetite and brought on extreme weariness and distaste of life—but all this was sent in mercy to fetch the wanderer home. Yes, men get space for thought when they are shut up in the chamber of sickness. While the mill-wheel went on and on and on, they could not hear God speak, but when its hum is hushed the warning voice sounds forth clearly. There in silence the patient tosses on the bed, wakeful at night and fearful by day. And then conscience lifts up its clamor and is heard—then, too, the Spirit of God seizes the opportunity

to speak to an awakened conscience—and He convicts the man of sin. How much some of us owe to a bed of sickness! I do not desire for any unconverted person here that he should be ill, but if that would be the way to make him think, repent and believe, I could earnestly pray for it. I believe the Lord has often preached to men in hospitals who never heard Him in churches or chapels. Fever and cholera have been heard by those whom ministers could not reach.

If we could banish pain and sickness from the world, it may be we should be robbing righteousness of two of her most impressive evangelists. What Jonah was to Nineveh, sickness has been to many a man! Like Elijah, also, it has cried in the soul, "Choose you this day that you will serve." Disease has been a grim orator for God and with an eloquence not to be resisted; it has made the hearts of men to bow before its message. If there are any here who have lately been thus afflicted, I would ask them whether God has blessed it to their souls. I earnestly pray that they may not be hardened by it, for in that case there is fear that God will say, "Why should you be smitten anymore, you will revolt more and more!" and He may add, "I will let them alone, they are given unto idols. I have smitten them till their whole head is sick and their whole heart is faint. I have made them to be so near death's door, that from the crown of the head even to the foot they are all wounds and bruises through the chastening of My rod. I will give them up, and no more will I deal with them in a way of grace." Great God have pity, still, and make Your chastisements effectual to their souls. Now, note well that we do not assert that all persons who are saved are awakened by sickness—far from it. All that we are now taught is that many are so aroused and that such was the case in the instance described by Elihu.

In addition to this sickness, the person whom God saved was even brought to be apprehensive of death; "Yes, his soul draws near unto the grave and his life to the destroyer." When a man is made to lie upon his bed on the brink of hell and look into another world, that sight may be sacredly blessed to him. O, it is no small thing to peer into eternity and to make out, amid the horrid gloom, no shape of hope but ghastly forms of hideous woe. To have behind one the memory of a misspent life, to have above one an angry God, to have within one the aches of the body and the pangs of remorse and to have beneath one the bottomless pit, yawning with its lurid fires—what can be worse? This side of hell what can be worse than the tortures of an awakened conscience? This has sometimes made men wake up from a life-slumber and compelled them to cry, "What must we do to be saved?" I wish that every man here, who has remained unmoved by gentler means, might have some such an experience. It was better for you to be saved so as by fire than not to be saved at all.

But, now, notice that all this did not lead the person into comfort. Although he was impressed by the dream and sickness, and so on, yet the ministry of some God-sent ambassador was needed. "If there is a messenger with him," that is a man sent of God—"an interpreter," one who can open up obscure things and translate God's mind into man's language—"one among a thousand," for a true preacher, expert in dealing

with souls, is a rare person "to show unto man his uprightness, then He is gracious unto him." God could save souls without ministers, but He does not often do it. He could bring men to Jesus without the call from the lips of His sent servants, but as a general rule, conversion in the olden times needed the messenger and the interpreter, and it needs them still—"How shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent?" I pray that many of you, dear brothers, who know the Lord, may become preachers to others. That you may be such successful messengers of mercy to poor broken hearts that you may be to them picked and choice men like one out of a thousand. I entreat you to pray for me, also, that I may have a share and a large share, in this blessed employment, and that to many, God may say through me, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom."

IV. Fourthly, and with too much brevity, THE OBJECTS AIMED AT IN THE OLD CONVERSIONS WERE JUST THE SAME as those that are aimed at now-a-days. Will you kindly look at the seventeenth verse? The first thing that God had to do with the man was to withdraw him from his purpose. He finds him set upon sin, upon rebellion, upon carnal pleasure, upon everything that is selfish, and worldly, and conversion turns him away from such evil purposes; it was so then, it is so now. This turning of an obstinate will towards God and holiness is, however, no easy matter—to stay the sun in his course, or reverse the marches of the moon would not be a harder task.

The next object of the divine work was to hide pride from man, for man will stick to self-righteousness as long as he can. Never does limpet adhere to its rock more firmly than a sinner to his own merits, although, indeed, he has none. Like the old Greek hero in the mythology, the natural man sits down upon the stone of self-esteem and Hercules, himself, cannot tear him from it. When he is vile even in outward character, he still fancies that there is some good thing in him and to that fancy he will tenaciously cling. So that it is a work of divine power, an effort of the august omnipotence of heaven—to get a man away from his innate and desperate pride.

Beloved, another great object of conversion is to lead man to a confession of his sin. Hence we find it said in the twenty-seventh verse, "He looks upon man, and if any say I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, He will deliver his soul from going into the pit." Man hates confession to his God; I mean humble, personal, hearty confession. He will go to a priest and answer all his filthy questions, but he will not confess to the Lord. He will gabble over words which he calls a "general confession," but true, heart-felt confession he shrinks from—he will not come to the publican's cry if he can help it. He will not say, frankly, from his heart, "I have sinned." He will not own or confess the perverseness of his nature and say, "I have perverted that which is right." Nor can you get him to admit the folly and stupidity of his sin, so as to say, "It profited me not." But conversion brings him to his knees. Conversion pulls up the floodgates of his soul and makes him pour out his confessions before the Most High. And when this is done,

then salvation has come to the man's soul, for God desires man to put himself into the place of condemnation in order that He may be able to say to him, "I forgive you freely." The Lord shuts us up to hopelessness and helplessness in order that He may come as a God of grace and display His abounding mercy. All our hope lies in Him and all other hopes are delusions. The great work in conversion is not to make people better, so that they may come to God on a good footing—it is to strip them completely and lay them low so that God may come to them when they are on a bad footing, or rather on no footing at all, but down in the dust at His feet. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost, but it needs God Himself to convince men that they are lost. And the Spirit's work of soul-humbling is just this—to get man to feel so diseased that he will accept the physician; to get him to feel so poor that he will accept the charity of heaven. To get him to know that he is so stripped that he will no longer be proud of his fig leaves, but will be willing to take the robe of righteousness which Christ has worked out. Conviction is sent to kill the man, to break him in pieces, to bury him, to let him know his own corruption—and all this as a preliminary to his quickening and restoration. We must see the bones in the valley to be dead and dry, or we shall not hear the voice out of the excellent glory, saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'You dry bones live!'" May God in His mercy teach us what all this means and may we all experience an old-fashioned conversion!

V. Fifthly, the process of conversion in days of yore exactly resembled that which is worked in us now as to ITS SHADES. The shadowy side wore the same somber hues as now. First of all, the man refused to hear. God spoke once, yes twice, and man regarded Him not—here was obstinate rebellion. His heart was as an adamant stone. How true is that today! Then came the chastening till the man's bones were made to ache and he was full of misery. It is often the same now. I acknowledge that I was brought to God by agony of soul. I have often said from this pulpit that no man ever steers his boat towards the port of peace till he is driven there by stress of weather. We never come to Christ till we feel we cannot do without Him. We must feel our poverty before we shall ever come and beg at the door of His mercy for help. The shades are the same, for the same imminence of danger which Elihu spoke of comes upon every sinner's consciousness, more or less, before he resorts to Jesus for refuge. The same bitter sense of sin still comes over men and the same wonder at their own folly in having continued in it. The same darkness still covers the sinner's pathway and the same inability to procure the light for him. The same need of light from above, the same need of help from Him who is mighty to save. If any of you are passing, just now, through great darkness of soul because you have not yet come to the light—and God is revealing yourselves to yourselves—be comforted, for the same dark road has been traversed by many of the saints before you and it is a safe pathway, leading to comfort in Jesus Christ.

VI. But now, sixthly, and very briefly, again, THE LIGHTS ARE THE SAME, even as the shades were the same. You will note in Elihu's description that the great source of all the light was this—"Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom." There is not a gleam of

light in the case till you come to that divine word—and is it not so now? Did you ever get any comfort for your troubled souls until you were led to see the ransom found by God in Jesus Christ? Did you ever know the value of the ransom for yourselves till God spoke it home to you—"Deliver *him* from going down to the pit, for *I* have found a ransom!" This is the central point of the sinner's hope—a bleeding Savior paying our ransom price in drops of blood—the dying Son of God achieving our redemption by His own death. Oh, dear souls, who are in the dark, if you want light, there is light nowhere but at the cross. Do not look within for light—the only benefit of looking within is to be more and more convinced that all is dark as midnight, apart front Jesus. Look within if you want to despair. But if you wish for hope, look yonder to Calvary's mountain, where the Son of God lays down His life that sinners may not die. Hear from heaven the voice which says, "I have found a ransom." That is the only reason why God delivers you—not because He has seen any good thing in you, but because He has found a ransom for you. Look where God looks and your comfort will begin.

Then this precious gospel being announced to the sinner, the comfort of it enters his soul in the exercise of prayer—"He shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto Him." O, you can pray when you get to the Cross! Our prayers, before we see Christ, are poor poor things, but when we get to Calvary and see the utmost ransom paid and the full atonement made, then prayer becomes the utterance of a child to a father and we feel quite sure it will speed.

Next, it appears that the soul obtains comfort because God gave it His righteousness—"For He will render unto man His righteousness." That righteousness which God expected God bestows! That righteousness which man ought to have worked out but could not, Christ works out, and God treats the believing man as if he were righteous, making him righteous in the righteousness of Christ. Here is another source of joy.

And then is the man led to a full confession of his sin. In the twenty-seventh verse the last cloud upon his spirit is blown away and he is at perfect peace. God was gracious to the man described by Elihu. God Himself became his light and his salvation and he came forth into joy and liberty. There is nothing more full of freshness and surprise than the joy of a new convert. Though thousands have felt it, yet each one, as he feels it, is amazed. I did really think, when God forgave me, that I was the most extraordinary instance of His Sovereign love that ever lived and that I should be bound even in heaven, itself, to tell to others how God's infinite mercy had pardoned, in my case, the biggest sinner that ever was forgiven. Now, every saved soul is led to feel just that and to exult and rejoice, and magnify the Lord with extreme surprise because of His goodness. It seems it was so in Job's day and it is so now. The old conversions are the conversions of the period—the shades are the same and the lights are the same.

VII. And last of all, which is the seventh point, THE RESULTS ARE THE SAME, for I think I hardly know a better description of the result of regeneration than that which is given in the twenty-fifth verse—"His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth."

He, who was an old wrinkled man in sin and looked yet older through his sorrow, becomes born-again! He starts upon a new career with a new life within him! The health which had departed from his soul comes back! The spring of spiritual juvenility wells up in him because God has begotten him afresh and made him a new creature—"Old things have passed away, behold all things are become new!"

And with this change comes back joy. See the twenty-sixth verse—"He shall see His face with joy; for He will render unto man His righteousness." And the thirtieth verse—"To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living." So that the new spirit finds itself in a new world in which it goes forth with joy and is led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills break forth before it into singing and all the trees of the forest do clap their hands. It was so then—it is just the same now. O that the same blessed thing may happen to many here present at this time!

I have endeavored to give a description of conversion, that you may see what it is to be renewed in heart, but I shall have failed of my intention unless many a knee shall be bent to God with this prayer, "O Spirit of God, renew my nature, change my heart. Make my flesh to be fresher than a child's. Make me a new creature in Christ Jesus." Time is passing—we are getting now almost one-fourth through another year and the year itself will soon fly away. I would speak to careless and thoughtless ones, again, and ask them, will it never be time to think upon these things? Will it never be time to consider your ways? Will it never be time to seek the Lord? You know not how near you are to the grave's brink. Do consider, I beseech you, and remember that the Lord waits to be gracious—that He delights in mercy and if you seek Him He will be found of you! And this great conversion and regeneration, of which we have spoken at such length, shall be yours, and you shall see the face of God with joy even as they did of old. The Lord grant it to you for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 32; JOB 33:14-30.

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PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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ROYAL HOMAGE
NO. 1102

A SERMON DELIVERED
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And cast their crowns before the throne."
Revelation 4:10.

THERE are a great many things we should like to know about heaven. Our curiosity has been excited full often to ask a vast number of questions, but after being excited it has never been gratified, for God's word has told us little about the details of that happy realm. I suppose the Lord thought it better to leave the future shrouded in mystery that we might think more of the common everyday duties of the life that now is. Therefore the revelation He has made directs our faith to Himself and to His dear Son, and does not distract our attention with descriptions of scene and circumstance into which our imagination would fondly rise. He has thus saved the details about the next world until we get there, to make surprises of them, so that heaven might be all the brighter because it so infinitely exceeds anything that we had conceived. We are not told, for instance, where heaven is. There have been very learned conjectures about certain stars and constellations which are supposed to be the center of all the celestial system, and therefore may be the center of the universe, and therefore, the place where the throne of God is absolutely located and the presence of God peculiarly revealed. When all is said, it is only, "it may be," and it is just as unlikely as it is likely. I regard such speculations as stargazing to be idle and unseemly, impertinent and unprofitable—a pure waste of time and perhaps worse. We are not told anything even about the social communion of heaven. We do know, or at least we think we have abundant reason for believing, that saints know each other—that they are not like men in a great mass, indistinct and undistinguishable—but that there is fellowship among the saints. We think that Abraham is Abraham, and Isaac is Isaac, and Jacob is Jacob—and the redeemed ones from among men sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as such, in the kingdom of God.

The New Jerusalem is said to have its streets, and streets imply intercourse, but there is little said about that—just an outline, as it were, such as an artist might make with charcoal—none of the filling up and the bright colors. We are told little of the food of heaven, or whether there is any—whether the bodies need food to feed on for their nourishment and nectarous draughts for their refreshment, albeit, when the manna

once dropped from heaven men did eat angels' food. And we are told little of the celebrations of heaven, whether the worship will be uniform, or whether there will be certain days joyous above the rest, high days, feasts and festivals, jubilees and glorious times of the unveiling of God's presence in sevenfold splendor when the harps shall pour forth more melodious tunes! Of all these things we should like to have known something, but our heads cannot hold much. One thing would have pushed out another. Passages like this we could not spare—"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Concerning such a sentence I will venture to say every single syllable in the verse is worth more than whole volumes about heaven might have been, though the Spirit of God might have inspired them—worth more for present and practical purpose to us who are yet among the sons of men. Are there any dear brethren who understand the Book of Revelation, the Book of Ezekiel and the Book of Daniel? I am pleased to hear it. But if the Lord will help me to understand Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, I shall be perfectly satisfied to go on preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, for I think I shall get up to them by-and-by, in their knowledge of prophecy and mystery, when I come into clearer light and see the Master face to face. Meanwhile, there are sinners to be saved. We must go about doing this soul-saving business in His name, with the simple means put before us in the gospels and epistles which we are enabled to understand by the Spirit of God through our own personal experience of the revealed truth.

Now, tonight, let us take a glimpse, just a glimpse, within the veil, such as our text affords us. We find the 24 elders, (who, without straining the passage, we might conceive to be and who doubtless are, the representatives of the church), sitting on their thrones before the august Majesty of God with crowns upon their heads and they are represented as casting those crowns before the throne of God.

From this sublime picture I gather two things—first, *that these representative men, representatives of the church of God, will all be crowned—they have crowned heads.* And secondly, *that they all cast their crowns before the throne*. When we have talked of these things, we will gather a few lessons of practical moment for this present life.

I. Brethren, THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN ARE ALL CROWNED. I say, "All," for these represent the whole. The 24 elders are represented as saying, "You have redeemed us out of every people, and language, and nation," so that they represent all. It may be that there are degrees in glory. It may be that there are none. I do not attempt to solve the question. But if there are, yet there is no degree below a crowned head in heaven. All the saints have their crowns—"A crown of life that fades not away" is the very lowest portion of the very least saint who is admitted into glory.

Now, how is it they come to be crowned? Our answer will be six fold.

They are all kings *Dei Gratia*. You know how our monarchs like to put it on their coins, *"Dei Gratia"*—"by the grace of God," though I don't know with what propriety—for on the whole they are about as graceless a lot of individuals as are to be found anywhere—kings and emperors and all hereditary rulers. If one were to take randomly half-a-dozen kings and half-a-dozen paupers, I think, in respect to moral character, the paupers would probably not have the most cause to blush. And I am sure there is a larger percentage of the poor on earth than of the richest among men who are heirs of the kingdom of heaven. But what they take for themselves as being by the grace of God, everyone in heaven may say of himself. Truly, they are all kings by the grace of God. Ah, ask them and they will tell you it was the sovereign will of God, alone, that set them apart—it was the Lord, their heavenly Father, who chose them from among the sons of men that they should be His sons and daughters. And it was the grace of God which first led them to know anything about reigning with Christ. Grace came and enlightened their understanding. Grace influenced their wills. Grace changed their affections. Grace made them to be heirs of heaven and they will tell you it was grace that kept them where grace brought them—that they did not merely begin in the spirit to be afterwards made perfect in the flesh—but that as grace was Alpha, it was Omega. The Spirit of God which worked in them mightily, made them diligent in every good word and work and willing to be and to do according to God's good pleasure. And every crowned head there will tell you that the very last act of faith, before he entered into fruition, was as much based upon grace and as much the fruit of grace as was the first act of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is not a king in heaven that has his crown on any other terms than this, "by the sovereign grace of God."

But, though it may seem astonishing, in the second place they are all kings by hereditary descent. "How?" you ask, "They were born in sin and shaped in iniquity. They are of the fallen Adam, heirs of eternal misery." That is so, but they have been born-again, and it is in their new nature that they are before the throne of God. They have been "begotten, again, unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." "Beloved, know you not that they are the sons of God," and though, "it does not yet appear what they shall be," yet they are truly God's sons, and therefore, when Christ shall appear they, also, will appear with Him in glory? There are none in heaven but God's sons. The angels, it is true, are there, and they are His ministering servants; but there are none of the human race there that are merely servants. They are all sons. Some were prodigal sons and some, at times, had got into the bad temper of the elder brother in the parable. But they are all sons and they are there because they are sons. They have come to their crown by inheritance, as much as any Prince of Wales ever succeeded in this country to his crown.

There is born in the image of God's Son a new and peculiar race with heaven as their inheritance—an inheritance which hell can never spoil. They are kings, then, by hereditary descent.

But, thirdly, they are kings by another right. They are kings by marriage alliance. There are some that come to royal dignity by being affianced and betrothed to kings. There is many a crowned head that would not have been so by descent, but has come to be so by being given in wedlock to a royal consort. Now the Church of God is the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and because Jesus is crowned, therefore He will have it that His church shall be crowned too. He gave her Himself—He gave her everything that He had—He relinquished heaven for her sake. He suffered on earth for her, bled on the cross for her, went into the grave for her and now He will make her partaker of all He has. As He took all her shame, so she shall take her share in all His glory. He went to the cross for her and she shall come to the crown with Him. Therefore are they before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple, because they are one with Jesus. Because He lives, they also live. And because He, as the only begotten Son, stands always in His Father's love, therefore do they stand in the same.

But fourthly (and you will think surely that all the rights in this world meet in these crowned heads, and so they do), they are kings by right of conquest and of victory. A crown should signify and did signify, in the olden times, struggling, battling and contending. The first crowns, I suppose, were given to those who were the strongest men and had fought best in the day of battle. Well, we have already said that the crowns in heaven are all the gifts of grace and yet at the same time it is true that those who have the crowns have fought for them—"These are they that came out of great tribulation." It was not that tribulation procured them their crowns, still it seems to be a rule—the usual rule in God's church—that those of His servants who are to be rewarded should work, and those who are to be crowned should fight. At any rate, if you and I suppose we shall get the crown without contending for it, we shall find ourselves mistaken. Canaan belonged to the Israelites—it was theirs by a covenant of salt—but they had to fight for it and dispute every inch with the Hittite and the Canaanite and the Jebusite; and so must we. We shall get to heaven by God's grace, but we must go on pilgrimage to get there. There is no chariot to carry us all along the road. We must foot it. We must climb the Hill of Difficulty and go down to the Valley of Humiliation. And he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved. Master Bunyan's picture of the bright spirits on the top of the palace who sang, "Come in! Come in! Eternal glory you shall win"—would not have been complete if he had not pictured the armed men at the bottom of the stairs who stood there to keep back any who sought to enter the house—

would not have been complete without the description of the man of the grave countenance. The man with the ink-horn said, "Set down your name," and when he had put down his name, he drew his sword and fought desperately until he seemed to die, yet by-and-by he was seen on the top of the palace for he had won the day—

"Lord, I must fight if I would reign,
Oh bear me safely through."

They are kings then, because they have fought with sin and with temptations. They are not crowned without having contended for the victory. And you know how sharply some of them have had to contend, even unto blood have they resisted, striving against sin. Yes, the brightest and fairest of them have had to bear the brunt of most fierce persecutions, fights with lions, to die at the stake, and through sufferings that cannot be told have they entered into rest.

Then, fifthly, the crowned heads in heaven have their crowns and their crowns befit them well, because of the nobility of their character. If honors were fairly distributed among men, we should not so often see the meanest spirit in the loftiest place. It is always one of the hardships of this life. Of this the wise man complained—that he had seen servants on horseback and masters walking in the mire—the great spirits in the world in rags and the mean spirits clothed in scarlet—the men that deserved well, lying at the gate licked by dogs and the men that deserved ill, faring sumptuously every day, and clothed in scarlet and choice linen. Now it is not so in heaven. There, in heaven, nobility is given to the noble and to the upright in character the reward of the righteous, for though it is not of debt, but of grace, yet the pure in heart shall see God and they that are undefiled in the way shall inherit the blessing. O how bright those spirits are that are crowned! The crowns do well demean them—they are without fault before the throne of God. There is no infirmity about their character or imperfection about their constitution. If you should dwell with them a thousand ages you would never hear them speak an idle word and if you could inspect their hearts with omniscient eyes you would not read therein one godless thought. They are sanctified perfectly, delivered from every taint of corruption and now they are like their Lord Himself in holiness of character. Well should they be crowned whose character has thus been made glorious by the work of the Spirit of God within them!

And, once more, they have another right to their crowns, because those crowns represent real possessions. There are little princes in this world whose principalities are about as large as ordinary kitchen gardens and they account themselves very great, indeed. The man of great esteem is like John R. in English history, who had not a foot of ground; the less the man's possessions, often the man's greater self-possession. But in heaven there are no pauper princes. There they are rich to all the intents

of bliss. They have their crowns, and they have their kingdoms. All things are theirs—the gift of God—and God is theirs and Christ is theirs. They are clothed with honor and majesty—not outwardly only, but inwardly—and they have all the accompaniments that should go with royal dignity. Does it not seem, however, like a dream, as one thinks it over and tries to realize it? Let us pause a moment and follow the reverie, to which a well assured faith gives substantial reality. You and I, if we believe in Jesus, will soon sit with Jesus where we shall be crowned! We are poor today, obscure and ignoble—we have no influence, it may be, and possibly are of little account among our fellows—but within a short time, perhaps before this year or even this month shall have run out its anxious days, we shall be with crowns upon our heads spiritually. We shall be before the throne in spirit, and then, by-and-by, when the Lord shall come, we shall in body, as well as in spirit, sit there raised from the dead and made perfect forever, enjoying the rank of kings and priests unto our God, for we shall reign forever and ever! Can you conceive of it? Bunyan represents Mercy as laughing in her sleep. Truly, as we think this over, one feels inclined to laugh for very joy of heart. Shall I wear a *crown?* Those who were despised and rejected of men and counted fools—will they be kings? Those saints that were made to lie in prison for their Master's sake and no names of humiliation were thought base enough for them—will they be kings? Will the angels be courtiers while these humble ones, raised and changed, but yet the same, sit as kings in the midst of the courts of heaven, there to abide forever? Even so it will be!

Come! If the head aches tonight, let the reflection that it will soon be crowned be a consolation to you. Come! If you have had much to worry you throughout the day, let the sweet thought that you will soon be where not a wave of trouble shall ever cross your peaceful breast be a rich consolation to you. There is a throne in heaven that no one can occupy but you! And there is a crown in heaven that no other head can wear but yours! And there is a part in the eternal song that no voice can ever compass but yours! And there is a glory to God that would be missing if you did not come to render it! And there is a part of infinite majesty and glory that would never be reflected unless you should be there to reflect it! Therefore comfort one another with this, that before long you shall be there! Because the grace of God has elected you, you have a hereditary right through the new birth. You have a marriage right by reason of union with Christ. You have rights of conquest as a warrior. You shall have the rights of character, for your character will be perfect before long. And you have the rights of possession, for God has given you all that which goes with the crown.

II. Well, now, secondly we come to a department of our subject which seems easier to believe. Though they all have crowns THEY ALL CAST

THEM BEFORE THE THRONE. We can well conceive that, for to many of us that would he the first impulse of our minds. If ever we get to those sacred heights we will do adoring homage and if ever we receive any honors we will present them to Him to whom all the honor is due! Why, then, you ask now, do they cast their crowns at the foot of the throne? There are four answers which may very properly be given.

The first, no doubt, is for the reason of solemn reverence. They see more of God than we do, therefore are they more filled with awe and thrilled with admiration. From what we—who worship, as it were, in His outer courts, and get but distant glimpses of His majesty, and His mercy—from what we at present know of God we should be constrained to say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory for Your mercy and Your truth's sake." But where God more gloriously reveals Himself and where His attributes are more clearly seen, no doubt there is more overwhelming emotion and more intense reverence—therefore at once, and of spontaneous impulse—the soul pays all the homage that it can before the throne of God. I think it would seem to them as though it could not be that they could sit with crowned heads in the presence of the King of kings. That head that once was crowned with thorns, when we see it adorned with the royal diadem, surely we should not bear to be crowned in the presence of such a one! For what are we, and what is our Father's house? God has done all He can for us, yet what shall we be as compared with Him, the infinite and eternal! And as compared with Christ, the ever-blessed who died for us? O, our reverence will always make us feel in the lowest state of self-abasement at the foot of the throne!

Moreover, they are, no doubt, actuated by sincere humility. Reverence to God always brings a humble opinion of one's own self. Here below, beloved, we sometimes murmur at the divine will when His appointments cross and foil our inclinations. Were we more humble and less self-opinionated we should utterly distrust ourselves and put implicit confidence in Him. We should at once cast our wills at the Lord's feet. Here we set up our own opinion in opposition to the revealed will of God. We would not do that if we knew ourselves, but we should lay our judgment at the foot of the throne. But up there they judge righteous judgments, and knowing God and beholding His glory, they shrink into nothing and lay themselves at His feet—much more do they renounce their will. They feel, they know, they confess that any honor or desert they have has been obtained through the grace of God—that they must fully, heartily, unreservedly ascribe to grace that which they dare not claim to themselves.

Doubtless, also, they do this for another reason, namely, because of their profound gratitude. They bless God that they are where they are

and what they are. If you ask those before the throne, they will tell you that not only do they owe their crowns to grace, but every single gem in their crowns. They have not one single star in their diadem but what the Lord put there and there is not a single sparkle of any crystal sapphire that is in their coronet but what they may trace the flashing gleam to the sovereign grace of God. Therefore, how could they keep anything to themselves? Gratitude constrains them to lay their crowns where their crowns came from.

And, above all, they are actuated by intense affection. They love their Lord, and loving their Lord they do anything to adore Him. Self-denial is the name we give on earth to that grace which not only ignores but consumes one's self in the fervor of zeal, in the passion of love. What word would answer for the like? Though the greater vehemence of those in heaven I cannot tell. They are glad to fling their richest goods, their choicest trophy, and their most cherished treasure at His feet—they love Him so. Here we love ourselves and cherish some fond attachment to our fellow creatures also. And our hearts are stolen away by some earthly object. But there they love God intensely, continually, undividedly, without a flaw, and consequently they cast everything down before Him—and they lay their crowns at His feet.

As we see what they do, let us consider what we should do, and anticipate what we shall do when we join that august assembly. I would like to have a bright crown, bright with many gems of souls turned to righteousness, for they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as stars forever. But I think the sweetness will be to have a bright crown to lay at His feet, not for the sake of wearing it but giving it, if thereby a saved one might give honor to His Savior. You will notice they do not attempt to put the crown upon the Lord's head. No, we cannot add to His splendor! He is infinitely glorious! Without creatures, without servants, without saints, He is glorious—we cannot add to His glory—we can but lay our crowns at His feet. We cast them at the feet though we cannot put them on the monarch's head. And would not we wish to have as bright a crown as possible for the sake of placing it there? O, fight, you soldier of Christ, and bear hardness that your crown may be a precious one. Pray, minister of God, that you may preach with all your heart and soul and strength, that your diadem may be a sparkling one. Dear sister in your tent, or dear brother out in the battle, be valiant for God, for we all agree in this, that whatever the crown shall be, at His dear feet we cast it.

III. Now I come to the practical lessons which these simple facts should teach us. There is at first sight a simple, obvious reflection which will readily occur to the thoughtful hearer. By this text, we can know whether we are on the way to heaven or not, because no man goes to heaven to learn for the first time heavenly things. We must be scholars in

Christ's school here, or else we cannot be taken into Christ's college above. If you and I should walk into some great cathedral where they were singing and ask to be allowed to sing in the choir, they would ask whether we had ever learned the tune, and they would not let us join unless we had. Nor can we expect that untrained voices should be admitted into the choirs above. Now, dear brothers and sisters, have you learned to cast your crowns at the Savior's feet already? Have you been professors of religion for some years and been honored in the Sunday school class, or in the ministry, and have you been enabled to maintain an upright character? Well, in some measure, you have a crown. Are you in the habit continually of casting that at His feet? Let me put it to you—have you anything that you call your own to boast of? Have you some good things that you have done that you could speak of? Could you say, like one of old, "Lord, I thank You that I am not as other men"? Have you been very good and industrious, very consistent and persevering and do you feel you deserve a good deal of esteem and honor as an acknowledgment of your distinguished services? My dear friend, I am afraid you are learning a music that will never answer in heaven. There is no one in glory that ever says—"I have done well. I deserve credit and honor." Quite the reverse! There, the one music is, *"Non nobis Domine!"* "Not unto us, Lord! Not unto us!" Have you learned that? Is that your spirit every day? O, I think I hear one say, "Yes, indeed it is, for I have nothing whatever that I can boast of. I cannot say that I lay my crown at His feet—I do not seem to have any." Yet, very likely, the person who is saying that is the one who is serving God more zealously than any of us, for, it is the mark of God's children that the more beautiful they are the more uncomely they think themselves. They that are very lovely themselves, all unconscious of their own attractions, can see a loveliness in others, while they perceive nothing to recommend their own character. When you, yourself, are mourning and lamenting that you are so deformed or so deficient, it is a mark that you are better than you think. The spirit that gives all glory to God and takes no glory to itself, is the spirit that is on the road to heaven. May you judge yourselves by that!

The next lesson, beloved, is a lesson of unanimity. Our text says they *all* cast their crowns before the throne. There are no divided opinions in heaven, nor denominations and parties, no schisms there. They are all in perfect harmony and sweet accord. What one does, all do. They cast their crowns, without exception, before the throne. Let us begin to practice that unanimity here. As fellow Christians, let us get rid of everything that would divide us from each other, or separate us from our Lord. I do not read that there was a single elder who envied his brother's crown and said, "Ah, I wish I were such a one as he is, and had his crown." I do not read that one of them began to find fault with his brother's crown, and

said, "Ah, his jewels may be bright, but mine have a peculiar tint in them, and are of greater excellence." I do not read anything of dissension. They were all unanimous in casting their crowns at Jesus' feet. They were all unanimous in glorifying God. And it is high time we gave over congratulating ourselves, or censuring our fellow Christians. Rest assured there is something in the man you condemn, if he is a child of God, which condemns you, and you might do well to become a scholar of his in some respects. If any honorable rivalries occur among brethren, let both cast their crowns at the foot of the cross or at the foot of the throne and ascribe all to Him who gave them. Those that have obtained the prize are unanimous in their ascription of praise.

Do you ask the reason? I suppose, first, it is because their understanding is alike transparent. Here our understandings are divided—one cannot see this, and another cannot see that. There are a great many differences of opinion, though there is only one truth after all. The fault must be in our perception, and doubtless, the blame may be distributed among us. But none the less, our allegiance to truth demands that we stand by our own convictions, or rather, by God's revelation. We cannot all be right—it is no use our professing that we are. When a person says, "You must give up this, and you must give up that for the sake of charity," they do but ask us to practice benevolence at the expense of honesty. What right have I to give up a truth? Truth is truth and we must fight for it, and die for it, if need be.

Every effort to promote union among Christians by compromise is treachery to the Most High. If you are right and I am wrong, contradict me. Or if I am right and you are wrong, I will contradict you. Yet I will not outrage charity, I will rather cherish it. Is my opponent poor, I would supply his need without regard to his creed? Be he a Jew or a Papist, give him his civil rights. Let them benefit by our good works, but let us never indulge their evil. The way to unity is to find the truth out and acknowledge it together. When we come to the word of God, all of us, we shall come together. But any patching up, making this compromise and that unwarrantable concession, is all wrong. If it did lead to a unity, the unity would be worse than a division. In heaven the understandings are clarified and purified. They understand that their salvation is of grace and they all cast their crowns at Jesus' feet. Wesley does it. So does Toplady. The Arminian that preached doctrines that sounded like the will of the flesh casts his crown as freely as the Antinomian who was known to say, "It is of grace. It is of grace, alone." There are no differences there. They have come to see eye to eye because they see with the eyes of the pure in heart that have been made to see God.

But then they are all agreed in heart as well as in understanding. They love each other and they love God—all their affections flow in one chan-

nel and in one direction. Therefore, united, they cast their crowns before the throne. Brethren, let us stick together closely in unity of judgment and heart. We have done so, many a year, to my marvel and astonishment. May the same Spirit of God who has made us a three-fold cord in our unity with Christ, keep us so in years to come, if it please Him to spare our lives. May we in this church be like the 24 elders, always casting our crowns before the throne!

Once again, these redeemed ones in heaven teach us the true way of happiness. They set before us what perfect bliss is. You observe, it does not consist in selfishness. Never believe that possible. If a man says, "I shall make myself happy," he will rather mar than make happiness for himself. But when he seeks the glory of God he will be happy in the pursuit as well as in the attainment of his object. Did you ever go out for a day to enjoy yourself? If you went out with that intent I am sure you would find yourself hard to please. But if you went out to enjoy the society of other people, or to help them to enjoy themselves, you will most likely have been very well rewarded. There is no happiness beneath the clouds like the happiness of unselfishness. Strip yourself and you clothe yourself. Throw money away and you grow rich—I mean in a spiritual sense. To scatter is to gather. To give is to grow rich. It is a hard lesson for some minds to learn, but it is a lesson which Christ taught us. He saved others but Himself He could not save. And yet He has glorified both Himself and His Father by that very sacrifice of Himself!

Happiness, again, consists in adoration, for these blessed spirits find it to be their happiness to adore God. The happiest days you ever spent are those in which you worshipped God most. If you are doing a great deal, but have your minds far off from God, your labor will be irksome, your spirits will flag and you will lack the stimulus of His acceptance. Mary was happy at her Master's feet because she was there adoring Him. Mind you have much of Mary's spirit and adore God all day long, for that is the vestibule of heaven.

But then they were not merely happy because they were self-denying and adoring, but because they were practical. They took off their crowns and laid them before the throne. And our joy on earth must lie in practically carrying out our principles. The best religion in the world laid aside, will be of no good. You shall only get joy out of it when you throw it into the winepress in clusters and tread it in practical service. Cast your ability to do and to suffer, as well as the crown of your labor and patience, at the feet of your God—serve Him with all your heart and wisdom and strength, and thus your self-denial and adoration being mixed, you shall realize on earth as much as possible a foretaste of what the joy of heaven may be.

O that our souls may be always aspiring towards this blessed place where we are to dwell, proving the sincerity of our faith by fighting under God's banner for the crown—by living in the spirit of adoption whereby we prove our right to our crown, by cultivating daily communion with Christ—whereby we prove our union with Him by always ascribing all honor, power and blessing to the Lord our God—whereby we anticipate the homage of heaven. Brothers and sisters, be not slack in worship. I am afraid we are. We are sometimes told that in the Church of England the most prominent thing in worship is prayers, and that we do not come together so much to pray as to hear a sermon. There may be some truth in the charge that is thus preferred against us, and if there is truth in it, do not let it be so any longer. But I hold that hearing a sermon is worship. If it is practically heard it is worship and if it is applied to the soul, there is no higher adoration on the part of the entire man than listening to the truth which God will speak through the minister to our ear and heart. It is a part of worship and a very blessed part too. But mind you make it so, and let it be so to us that while some worship within walls we worship everywhere, live worshipping, live adoring. Remember, sermons are, as it were, but the beginning, but adoration is the great end of preaching. "Praying is the end of preaching," says Herbert, and so it is, but praising is the end of praying—the result which is to come out of it all. It is that for which praying exists, that God may be glorified. Pray God to help you to do so in every breath you draw, in every act you do. Let your common actions be a part of your holy, priestly life and be priests and kings in your doings in the house, in the shop, in the barn, and in the field. The Lord bless you, dear friends.

And as to those here present who know not Christ, you will never be crowned if you abide in ignorance of Him, or in enmity against Him. Oh, that the Lord would change your hearts and lead you to the Savior! May you see Him crowned with thorns and trust in Him, and then you shall come to be crowned with the royal diadem hereafter. The Lord grant it for His name's sake. Amen!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—REVELATION 4 and 7.

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PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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THE CONDITIONS OF POWER IN PRAYER
NO. 1103

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 23, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And whatever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that keeps His commandment dwells in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us." 1 John 3:22-24.

I THOUGHT of addressing you this morning upon the importance of prayer and I designed earnestly to stir you up to pray for me and for the Lord's work in this place. Truly, I do not think I could have had a weightier subject, or one which weighs more upon my soul. If I were only allowed to offer one request to you it would be this—"Brothers and sisters, pray for us." Of what use can our ministry be without the divine blessing and how can we expect the divine blessing unless it is sought for by the Church of God? I would say it even with tears, "Brethren, pray for us." Do not restrain prayer—on the contrary, be abundant in intercession, for so, and so only, can our prosperity as a church be increased, or even continued. But then, the question occurred to me, what if there should be something in the church which would prevent our prayers being successful? That is an important question and one which ought to be considered most earnestly even before we exhort you to intercession. As we have already been taught by the first chapter of Isaiah, the prayers of an unholy people will soon become abominations to God. "When you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear." Churches may fall into such a state that the devotions will be an iniquity. "Even the solemn meeting" will be weariness unto the Lord. There may be evils in the heart of any one of us which may render it impossible for God, in consistency with His own character and attributes, to have any regard to our intercessions. If we regard iniquity in our hearts the Lord will not hear us. According to our text there are some things which are essential to prevalence in prayer. God will hear all true prayer, but there are certain things which the people of God must possess or else their prayers will fall short of the mark. The text tells us, "Whatever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." Now, this morning the subject of consideration will be the essentials to power in prayer—what we must do, what we must be, what we must

have—if we are to prevail habitually with God in prayer, as a matter of constant fact. Let us learn how to become Elijahs and Jacobs.

I. I shall begin, first, by considering THE ESSENTIALS OF POWER IN PRAYER. We must make a few distinctions at the outset. I take it there is a great difference between the prayer of a soul that is seeking mercy and the prayer of a man who is saved. I would say to every person present, whatever his character, if you sincerely seek mercy of God through Jesus Christ you shall have it. Whatever may have been your previous condition of life, if you now penitently seek Jehovah's face through the appointed Mediator, He will be found of you. If the Holy Spirit has taught you to pray, hesitate no longer but hasten to the cross and there rest your guilty soul on Jesus. I know of no qualifications for the sinner's first prayer except sincerity, but we must speak in a different way to those of you who are saved. You have now become the people of God and while you shall be heard just as the sinner would be heard, and shall daily find the necessary grace which every seeker receives in answer to prayer, yet you are now a child of God and you are under a special discipline peculiar to the regenerated family. In that discipline answers to prayer occupy a high position and are of eminent use. There is something for a believer to enjoy over and above bare salvation. There are mercies, blessings, comforts and favors which render his present life useful, happy and honorable. And these he shall have irrespective of character. They are not vital matters with regard to salvation—the believer possesses them unconditionally, for they are covenant blessings. But we now refer to the honors and the dainties of the house which are given or withheld according to our obedience as the Lord's children. If you neglect the conditions appended to these, your heavenly Father will withhold them from you. The essential blessings of the covenant of grace stand unconditioned—the invitation to seek for mercy is addressed to those who have no qualifications whatever, except their need. But come inside the divine family as saved men and women and you will find that other choice blessings are given or withheld according to our attention to the Lord's rules in His family. To give a common illustration; if a hungry person were at your door and asked for bread, you would give it to him whatever might be his character. You will also give your child food whatever may be his behavior—you will not deny your child anything that is necessary for life. You will never proceed in any course of discipline against him, so as to deny him his necessary food, or a garment to shield him from the cold; but there are many other things which your child may desire which you will give him if he is obedient, which you will not give if he is rebellious to you. I take it that this illustrates how far the paternal government of God will push this matter and where it will not go.

Understand, also, that the text refers not so much to God's hearing a prayer of His servants now and then, for that He will do, even when His servants are out of course with Him and when He is hiding His face from them. The power in prayer, here intended, is continuous and absolute power with God, so that to quote the words of the text, "Whatever we ask of Him we receive."

For this prayer there are certain prerequisites and essentials, of which we have now to speak, and the first is *child-like obedience*—"Whatever we ask, we receive of Him, *because we keep His commandments."* If we are destitute of this the Lord may say to us as He did to His people Israel, "You have forsaken Me, and served other gods, therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which you have chosen." Any father will tell you that for him to grant the request of a disobedient child would be to encourage rebellion in the family and render it impossible for him to rule in his own house. It is often incumbent upon the parent to say, "My child, you did not listen to my word just now, and therefore, I cannot listen to yours." Not that the father does not love, but that he does love the child, and because of his love he feels bound to show his displeasure by refusing the request of his erring offspring. God acts with us as we should act towards our refractory children. And if He sees that we will go into sin and transgress, it is a part of His kind paternal discipline to say, "I will shut out your prayer, when you cry unto Me; I will not hear you when you entreat of Me; I will not destroy you, you shall be saved, you shall have the bread of life, and the water of life, but you shall have no more. The luxuries of My kingdom shall be denied you, and anything like special prevalence with Me in prayer you shall not possess."

That the Lord deals with His own people is clear from the 81st Psalm—"Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries. I should have fed them, also, with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out the rock should I have satisfied you." Why, if the disobedient child of God had the promise put into his hands—"Whatever you ask in prayer, you shall receive," he would be sure to ask for something that would bolster him up in his rebellion. He would be asking for provision for his own lust, and aids for his rebellion. This can never be tolerated. Shall God pander to our corruptions? Shall He find fuel for the flames of carnal passion?

A self-willed heart hankers after greater liberty that it may be the more obstinate. A haughty spirit longs for greater elevation that it may be prouder still. A slothful spirit asks for greater ease that it may yet be more indolent. And a domineering spirit asks for more power that it may have more opportunities of oppression. As such the man is, will his prayer be—a rebellious spirit offers self-willed and proud prayers. Shall God listen to such prayers as these? It cannot be. He will give us what we ask if we keep His commandments, but if we become disobedient and reject His government He, also, will reject our prayers and say, "If you walk contrary to Me, I also will walk contrary to you. With the stubborn, I will show Myself stubborn." Happy shall we be if, through divine grace, we can say with David, "I will wash my hands in innocence; so will I compass Your altar, O Lord." This will never be perfect innocence, but it will at least be innocence of the love of sin and of willful revolt from God.

Next to this is another essential to victorious prayer—*child-like reverence*. Notice the next sentence. We receive what we ask, "because we keep His commandments, and *do those things that are pleasing in His sight."* We do not allow children, when they have a command from their

father, to question its propriety or wisdom. Obedience ends where questioning begins. A child's standard of its duty must not become the measure of the father's right to command—good children say, "Father has bid us to do so-and-so, and therefore we will do it, for we delight to please him always." The weightiest reason for a loving child's action is the persuasion that it would please his parents. And the strongest thing that can be said to hold back a gracious child is to prove that such a course of action would displease his parents. It is precisely so with us towards God, who is a perfect parent, and therefore we may, without fear of mistake, always make His pleasure the rule of right, while the rule of wrong may safely remain that which would displease Him. Suppose any of us should be self-willed and say, "I shall not do what pleases God, I shall do what pleases myself." Then, observe, what would be the nature of our prayers? Our prayers might then be summed up in the request, "Let me have my own way." And can we expect God to consent to that? Are we to be not only lords over God's heritage but over God Himself? Would you have the Almighty resign His throne to place a proud mortal there? If you have a child in your house who has no respect, whatever, for his father, but who says, "I want to have my own way in all things," if he comes to you with a request, will you stoop to him? Will you allow him to dictate to you and forget the honor due you? Will you say, "Yes, my dear child, I recognize your importance. You shall be lord in the house and whatever you ask for you shall have"!

What kind of a house would that be? I fear there are some such houses, for there are foolish parents who suffer their children to become their masters and so make a rod for their own backs. But God's house is not ordered so! He will not listen to His self-willed children, unless it is to hear them in anger and to answer them in wrath. Remember how He heard the prayer of Israel for meat, and when the meat was yet in their mouths it became a curse to them? Many persons are chastened by obtaining their own desires, even as backsliders are filled with their own devices. We must have a child-like reverence of God, so that we feel, "Lord, if what I ask for does not please You, neither would it please me; my desires are put into Your hands to be corrected. Strike the pen through every petition that I offer which is not right, and Lord, put in whatever I have omitted even though I might not have desired it had I remembered it. Good Lord, if I ought to have desired it, hear me as if I had desired it. 'Not as I will, but as You will.'" Now I think you can see that this yielding spirit is essential to continual prevalence with God in prayer. The reverse is a sure barrier to eminence in supplication. The Lord will be reverenced by those who are round about Him. They must have an eye to His pleasure in all that they do and all that they ask, or He will not look upon them with favor.

In the third place, the text suggests the necessity of *child-like trust*—"And this is His commandment that *we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ."* Everywhere in Scripture faith in God is spoken of as necessary to successful prayer. We must believe that God is and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, or else we have not prayed at all. In proportion to our faith will be the success of our prayer.

It is a standing rule of the kingdom, "According to your faith, so be it unto you." Remember how the Holy Spirit speaks by the mouth of the Apostle James, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed; for let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."

The text speaks of faith in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, which I understand to mean faith in His declared character, faith in His gospel, faith in the truth concerning His substitution and salvation. Or it may mean faith in the authority of Christ, so that when I plead with God and say, "Do it in the name of Jesus," I mean, "Do for me as You would have done for Jesus, for I am authorized by Him to use His name. Do it for me as You would have done it for Him." He that can pray with faith in the name of Jesus cannot fail, for the Lord Jesus has said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." But there must be faith and if there is no faith we cannot expect to be heard. Do you understand that?

Let us come back to our family similitudes again. Suppose a child in the house does not believe his father's word and is constantly saying that he finds his mind full of doubts as to his father's truthfulness? Suppose, indeed, that he tells his brothers and sisters that his faith in his father is very weak? He mentions that wretched fact and is not at all shocked that he should say such a thing, but he rather feels that he ought to be pitied, as if it were an infirmity which he could not avoid. Somehow or other he does not believe that his father speaks the truth and he declares that though he tries to believe his father's promise, yet he cannot. I think a father so basely distrusted would not be in a very great hurry to grant such a son's requests. Indeed, it is very probable that the petitions of the mistrustful son would be such as could not be complied with, even if his father were willing to do so, since they would amount to a gratification of his own unbelief and a dishonor to his parent. For instance, suppose this child should take it into his head to doubt whether his father would provide him with his daily food? He might, then, come to his father and say, "Father, give me enough money to last for the next 10 years, for I shall then be a man and shall be able to provide for myself. Give me money down to quiet my fears, for I am in great anxiety." The father replies, "My Son, why should I do that?" And he gets for a reply, "I am very sorry to say it, dear father, but I cannot trust you. I have such a weak faith in you and your love that I am afraid one of these days you will leave me to starve. And therefore I should like to have something sure in the bank." Which of you fathers would listen to a child's request if he sought such a thing? You would feel grieved that thoughts so dishonoring to yourself should pass through the mind of one of your own beloved ones! But you would not and could not, give way to them. Let me, then, ask you to apply the parable to yourselves. Did you never offer requests which were of much the same character? You have been unable to trust God to give you, day by day, your daily bread, and therefore you have been craving for what you call, "some provision for the future."

You want a trustier provider than providence, a better security than God's promise. You are unable to trust your heavenly Father's Word. A few bonds of some half-bankrupt foreign government you consider to be far more reliable. You can trust the Sultan of Turkey, or the Viceroy of Egypt, but not the God of the whole earth! In a thousand ways we insult the Lord by imagining "the things which are seen" to be more substantial than His unseen omnipotence. We ask God to give us, at once, what we do not require at present and may never need at all! At bottom, the reason for such desires may be found in a disgraceful distrust of Him which makes us imagine that great stores are necessary to ensure our being provided for. Brethren are you not to blame here, and do you expect the Lord to aid and abet your folly? Shall God pander to your distrust? Shall He give you a heap of cankering gold and silver for thieves to steal and chests of garments to feed moths? Would you have the Lord act as if He admitted the correctness of your suspicions and confessed to unfaithfulness? God forbid! Expect not, therefore, to be heard when your prayer is suggested by an unbelieving heart—"Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass."

The next essential to continued success in prayer is *child-like love*—"That we should believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, *and love one another as He gave us commandment."* The great commandment after faith is love. As it is said of God, "God is Love," so may we say that, "Christianity is love." If we were, each one, incarnations of love we should have attained to the complete likeness of Christ. We should abound in love to God, love to Christ, love to the church, love to sinners and love to men everywhere. When a man has no love to God, he is in the condition of a child without love to his father. Shall his father promise absolutely to fulfill all the desires of his unloving, unfilial heart? Or, if a child has no love to his brothers and sisters, shall the father trust him with an absolute promise, and say, "Ask and it shall be given you?" Why, the unloving son would impoverish the whole family by his selfish demands, regardless of all the rest of the household. He would only care to indulge his own passions. His request would before long be—"Father, give me all the inheritance," or, "Father, regulate the home to suit me and make all my brothers submit to my wishes."

Vain of his personal appearance, like Absalom, who was proud of his hair, he would soon seek the kingdom for himself. Few Josephs can wear the garment of many colors and not become household tyrants. Who would allow a prodigal to run off with the estate? Who would be so unwise as to install a greedy, domineering brother in the seat of honor, above his brethren? Therefore, you see that selfishness cannot be trusted with power in prayer. Unloving spirits, that love neither God nor men, cannot be trusted with great, broad, unlimited promises. If God is to hear us we must love God and love our fellow men for, when we love God, we shall not pray for anything that would not honor God and shall not wish to see anything happen to us which would not also bless our brethren. Our hearts will beat true to God and to His creatures and we shall not be wrapped up in ourselves. You must get rid of selfishness before God can trust you with the keys of heaven. When self is dead, then He will enable

you to unlock His treasuries and as a prince, shall you have power with God and prevail.

Next to this, we must have *child-like ways* as well. Read the next verse, *"He that keeps His commandments dwells in Him, and He in him."* It is one of a child's ways to love its home. The good child, to whose requests its father always listens, loves no place so much as the dear old house where its parents live. Now he who loves and keeps God's commandments is said to dwell in Him—he has made the Lord his dwelling place and abides in holy familiarity with God. In him our Lord's words are fulfilled, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." Faith and love, like two cherubic wings, have borne up the believer's soul above the world and carried him near to the throne of God. He has become like God and now it is that his prayers are such as God can answer—but until he is thus conformed to the divine mind there must be some limit to the potency of his pleadings. To dwell in God is necessary to power with God.

Suppose one of you had a boy, who said, "Father, I do not like my home, I do not care for you and I will not endure the restraints of family rule. I am going to live with strangers, but mark, father, I shall come to you every week and I shall require many things of you. And I shall expect that you will give me whatever I ask from you"? Why, if you are at all fit to be at the head of the house, you will say, "My son, how can you speak to me in such a manner? If you are so self-willed as to leave my house, can you expect that I will do your bidding? If you utterly disregard me, can you expect me to support you in your cruel unkindness and wicked insubordination? No, my son, if you will not remain with me and own me as a father, I cannot promise you anything." And so is it with God. If we will dwell with Him and commune with Him, He will give us all things. If we love Him as He should be loved, and trust Him as He ought to be trusted, then He will hear our requests. But if not, it is not reasonable to expect it. Indeed, it would be a slur upon the divine character for Him to fulfill unholy desires and gratify evil whims. "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart," but if you have no delight in God and He is not your dwelling place, He will not answer you. He may give you the bread of affliction and the water of affliction and make life bitter for you, but certainly He will not give you what your heart desires.

One thing more—it appears from the text that we must have a *child-like spirit,* for, *"Hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us."* What is this but the Spirit of adoption—the Spirit which rules in all the children of God? The willful who think and feel and act differently from God must not expect that God will come round to their way of thinking and feeling and acting. The selfish who are actuated by the spirit of pride, the slothful who are actuated by the love of ease must not expect that God will indulge them. The Holy Spirit, if He rules in us, will subordinate our nature to His own sway and then the prayers which spring out of our renewed hearts will be in keeping with the will of God—and such prayers will naturally be heard. No parent would think of listening to a willful child, to a child that said, "I know my father does

not wish me to have this, but I will have it." Why, as a man you would not thus be twisted about by an upstart youngster. Shall God grant us that which we ask for when it is contrary to His holy mind? It must not be! Such a possibility is not conceivable. The same mind must be in us, which is also in Christ Jesus, and then we shall be able to say, "I know that You hear me always."

But we must pass on and occupy your attention, for a few minutes, with another branch of the same subject.

II. In the second place we shall notice THE PREVALENCE OF THESE ESSENTIAL THINGS. If they are in us and abound, our prayers cannot be barren or unprofitable.

First, if we have *faith* in God, there is no question about God's hearing our prayer. If we can plead, in faith, the name and blood of Jesus, we must obtain answers of peace. But a thousand arguments are suggested. Suppose these prayers concern the laws of nature then the scientific men are against us. What of that? I will glory in giving these scientific men scope enough—I had almost said rope enough. I do not know of any prayer worth praying which does not come into contact with some natural law or other and yet I believe in prayers being heard. It is said that God will not change the laws of nature for us, and I reply, "Whoever said He would!" The Lord has ways of answering our prayers irrespective of the working of miracles or suspending laws. He used to hear prayer by miracle, but as I have often said to you, that seems a rougher way of achieving His purpose—it is like stopping a vast machine for a small result—He knows how to accomplish His ends and hear our prayers by I know not what secret means.

Perhaps there are other forces and laws which He has arranged to bring into action just at times when prayer also acts, for laws just as fixed, and forces just as natural as those which our learned theorizers have been able to discover. The wisest men know not all the laws which govern the universe, no, nor a tenth of them. We believe that the prayers of Christians are a part of the machinery of providence, cogs in the great wheel of destiny—and when God leads His children to pray, He has already set in motion a wheel that is to produce the result prayed for and the prayers offered are moving as a part of the wheel. If there is but faith in God, God must either cease to be, or cease to be true, or else He must hear prayer.

The verse before the text says, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God; and whatever we ask, we receive of Him." He who has a clear conscience comes to God with confidence and that confidence of faith ensures to him the answer of his prayer. Childlike confidence makes us pray as none else can. It makes a man pray for great things which he would never have asked for if he had not learned this confidence. It makes him pray for little things which a great many are afraid to ask for, because they have not yet felt towards God the confidence of children. I have often said that it needs more confidence in God to pray to Him about a little thing than about great things. We fancy that our great things are somewhat worthy of God's regard, though in truth they are little enough to Him! And then we imagine that our little

things must be so trifling that it would be almost an insult to bring them before Him, whereas we ought to know that what is very great to a child may be very little to its parent—and yet the parent does not measure the thing from his own point of view but from the child's.

You heard your little boy the other day crying bitterly. His mother called him and asked what ailed him? It was a splinter in his finger. Well, that was a small affair. You did not want to call in three surgeons to extract it, or raise a tone and cry in the public press. Bring a needle and we will soon set it right. Oh, but what a great thing it was to that pretty little sufferer as he stood there with eyes all wet with tears of anguish. It was a great concern to him. Now, did it occur to that boy that his pain was too small a thing for his mother to attend to? Not at all! What were mothers and fathers made for but to look after the little needs of little children? And God, our Father, is a good father. He pities us as fathers pity their children and condescends to us. He knows the number of the stars, and calls them all by their names, yet He heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds. The same God who kindles the sun has said, "I will not quench the smoking flax." If you have but confidence in God, you will take your great things and your little things to Him and He will never belie your confidence—for He has said they that trust in Him shall never be ashamed or confused, world without end. Faith must succeed.

But next, *love* must succeed, too, since we have already seen that the man who loves, in the Christian sense, is in accord with God. If you confine your love to your own family, you must not expect God to do so, and prayers narrowed within that circle He will disregard. If a man loves his own little self and hopes everybody's crop of wheat will fail, that his own produce may fetch a higher price, he certainly cannot expect the Lord to agree with such mean selfishness. If a man has heart enough to embrace all the creatures of God in his affection while he yet prays specially for the household of faith, his prayers will be after the divine mind. His love and God's goodness run side by side. Though God's love is like a mighty rolling river and his is like a trickling brook, yet they both run in the same direction and will both come to the same end. God always hears the prayers of a loving man because those prayers are the shadows of His own decrees.

Again, the man of *obedience* is the man whom God will hear because his obedient heart leads him to pray humbly and with submission, for he feels it to be his highest desire that the Lord's will should be done. Therefore it is that the man of obedient heart prays like a prophet—his prayers are prophecies. Is he not one with God? Does he not desire and ask for exactly what God intends? How can a prayer shot from such a bow ever fail to reach its target? If your soul gets into accord with God's soul, you will wish God's own wishes. The difficulty is that we do not keep, as the word is, *in rapport* with God. But if we did, then we should strike the same note as God strikes and though His would sound like thunder and ours as a whisper, yet there would be a perfect unison—the note struck by prayer on earth would coincide with that which sounds forth from the decrees in heaven.

Again, the man who lives in *fellowship with God* will assuredly prevail in prayer because, if he dwells in God, and God dwells in him, he will desire what God desires. The believer in communion with the Lord desires man's good and so does God. He desires Christ's glory and so does God. He desires the church's prosperity and so does God. He desires himself to be a pattern of holiness and God desires it too. If that man at any time has a desire which is not according to God's will, it is the result of ignorance, seeing that man is but man and not God. Even when he is at the best he must err, but he provides for this defect by the form of his prayer which always has this addendum at the end of it—"Lord, if I have asked in this, my prayer, for anything which is not according to Your mind, I beseech You, do not regard me. And if any wish which I have expressed to You—even though it is the desire which burns in my bosom above all other wishes—is a wish that is not right in Your sight, regard me not, my Father, but, in Your infinite love and compassion, do something better for Your servant than Your servant knows how to ask." Now, when a prayer is after that fashion, how can it fail? The Lord looks out of the windows of heaven and sees such a prayer coming to Him, just as Noah saw the dove returning to the ark, and He puts out His hand to that prayer. And as Noah plucked the dove into the ark, so does God pluck that prayer in unto Him and puts it into His own bosom, and says, "You came out of My bosom, and I welcome you back to Me—My Spirit composed you, therefore will I answer you."

And here, again, let us say, our text speaks of the Christian man as being *filled with God's Spirit*—"We know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us." Who knows the mind of a man but the spirit of a man? So, who knows the things of God but the Spirit of God? And if the Spirit of God dwells in us, then He tells us what God's mind is. He makes intercession in the saints according to the will of God. It is sometimes imagined that men who have prevalence in prayer can pray for what they like, but I can assure you any one of these will tell you that that is not so. You may call upon such a man and ask him to pray for you, but he cannot promise that he will. There are strange holdings back to such men when they feel they know not how or why that they cannot pray effectual fervent prayers in certain cases, though they might desire to do so. Like Paul, when he essayed to go into Bithynia and the Spirit suffered him not, so there are requests which we would naturally like to put up, but we are bound in spirit. There may apparently be nothing objectionable about the prayer, but the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him and He gives secret intimations when and where His chosen may hope to prevail. He gives you the promise that He will hear your believing prayer, you being a man that walks with Him, filled with His Spirit. But He does not, at the same time, give you faith about everything that everybody likes to put before you—on the contrary He gives you a discretion, a judgment and a wisdom—and the Spirit makes intercession in the saints according to the will of God.

Thus I think I have laid down the doctrine pretty clearly. Now a few minutes of practical improvement, as the old Puritans used to say. I only wish it may be of improvement to many of us.

The first is, we want to pray for a great blessing as a church. I think I should command your votes if I said we intend to pray God to send a blessing on the church at large. Very well, have we the essentials for success? Do we believing in the name of Jesus Christ? Well, I think we are. I do not think fault could be found with the soundness of our faith, though much is to be confessed about the weakness of it.

Let us pass on to the next question. Are we full of love to God and one another? The double commandment is that we believe on the name of Jesus Christ and that we love one another. Do we love one another? Are we walking in love? There are none of us perfect in it. I will begin to confess by acknowledging I am not what I should be in that respect. Will you let the confession go round and each one think how often we have done unloving things, thought unloving things, said unloving things, listened to unloving gossip, held back our hand unlovingly when we ought to have rendered help and put forth our hand unlovingly to push down a man who was falling? If in the church of God there is a lack of love, we cannot expect prayer to be heard, for God will say, "You ask for prosperity. What for? To add more to a community which does not already love itself? You ask for conversions. What? Is it to bring in others to join an unloving community?" Do you expect God to save sinners whom you do not love, and to convert souls whom you do not care a bit about? We must love souls into Christ for, under God's Holy Spirit, the great instrument for the conquest of the world is love. If Christians will love more than Muslims do, and Jews do, they will overcome Muslims and Jews. And if they show less love, Muslims and Jews will overcome them. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is the master weapon, and next to that is the loving carriage and generous conversation of Christians towards their fellow men. How much of that have we got? Shall I say, how little?

Next, are we doing that which is pleasing in God's sight? We cannot expect answers to prayer if we are not. Put the inquiry to yourselves all round. Let each church member, especially, answer that question. Have you been doing, lately, that which you would like Jesus Christ to see? Is your household ordered in such a way that it pleases God? Suppose Jesus Christ had visited your house this week, uninvited and unexpected—what would He have thought of that which He would have seen? "Oh," says one, "I know so-and-so acts very inconsistently." Sir, I pray you think of yourself! That is the point. Correct yourself. Unless the members of God's church do that which is pleasing in His sight, they bar the door against prosperity—they prevent the prayers of the church from succeeding. Who wishes to be the man that stands in the way of the prosperity of God's church through inconsistency of conduct? Who would be so guilty? God forgive some of you. We could speak of some even weeping, for, alas, though they profess to be the followers of Christ, they are so inconsistent that they are not friends, but enemies of the cross of Christ.

The next question is, do we dwell in God? The text says that if we keep His commandments, God dwells in us, and we in Him. Is that so? I mean, during the day do we think of God? In our business are we still with God? A Christian is not to run unto God in the morning and again

at night, and use Him as a shelter and a makeshift, as people do of an arch or a portico which they run under in a shower of rain. We are to dwell in God and live in Him from the rising of the sun until the going down thereof, making Him our daily meditation, and walking as in His sight, feeling evermore, "You God see me." How is it with you, dear friends! O let the question go from pew to pew and heart to heart, and mind—let each one answer for himself.

Lastly, does the Spirit of God actuate us, or is it another spirit? Do we wait upon God and say, "Lord, let Your Spirit tell me what to say in this case, and what to do. Rule my judgment, subdue my passions, keep down my baser impulses and let Your Spirit guide me. Lord, be You to me better than myself. Be soul and life to me and in the triple kingdom of my spirit, soul, and body, good Lord, be You supreme Master that in every province of my nature Your law may be set up and Your will may be regarded"? We would have a mighty church, if we were all, of this mind. But the mixed multitude, are with us, and the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt and these fall a-lusting. The mischief always begins with them. God save us as a church from losing His presence! The mixed multitude must be with us to try us, for the Lord has said, "Let both grow together till the harvest," and if we try to root up the tares we should root up the wheat also—yet, at any rate, let us pray God to make the wheat be the stronger. One of two things always happens in a church. Either the wheat chokes the weeds or the weeds choke the wheat. God grant that the wheat may overtop the weeds in our case! God grant grace to His servants to be strong enough to overcome the evil which surrounds them, and having done all, to stand to the praise of the glory of His grace, who also has made us accepted in the Beloved. The Lord bless you, and be with you evermore. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
1 JOHN 3; ISAIAH 1:10-20.

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SPRING
NO. 1104

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 30, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"As the earth brings forth her bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations."
Isaiah 61:11.

DURING the past week the air has been balmy with the breath of spring, and all nature has felt the influence of the "ethereal mildness." The earth, of which, through the long winter, we might have said, "She is not dead, but sleeps," has now awakened, and she begins already to put on her garments of glory and beauty. Wild flowers are springing up in the hedgerows, buds upon the trees are hastening to burst, the time of the singing of birds is come, and if the voice of the turtle dove is not heard in our land, yet we trust the winter is past—the rain is over and gone. Now, nature is not at work to amuse and please us merely; its mission is instruction. Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter are God's four Evangelists, bringing each one a different version of the self-same gospel of divine love. Spring has its own peculiar testimony, and it is for us to read it, and to interpret it, by the light of God's Spirit. A close analogy is often hinted at in the Old and New Testaments between the springtime, and the work of God in the hearts of men. As God has promised in the outward world, that there shall be seed time, and then a harvest-winter, and a following summer, so He declares, over and over again, that His Word, which, when it goes forth, is like unto the sowing, shall not return unto Him void, but shall prosper in the thing for which He has sent it. As surely as in due season the earth brings forth her buds, and the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so shall God's great purposes be accomplished and righteousness and praise shall spring forth before all the nations.

The teaching of this morning is that there is a spiritual springtime appointed of God, and it will surely come. As certainly as spring comes to the earth physically, so surely will it come to the church spiritually! As certainly as God keeps His covenant with the elements, so will He keep His covenant with His church, and with His Son.

I. I shall need you, this morning, to first CONTEMPLATE THIS TRUTH IN REFERENCE TO THE BROAD FIELD OF THE WORLD. Let our meditations go abroad, and let them range through history and into prophecy. God will surely, in the great world at large, cause the principles of righteousness which bring praise to His name to spring forth before all mankind.

This leads us, first of all, to expect that *there may be, in God's work, and in our work for God, a period of unrequited labor.* The analogy between the processes of nature and God's work in the church holds good not only as to the revivals of spring, but as to the depressing incidents of winter. There is a time when the farmer is occupied with the plow and with the scattering of the seed; while from day to day he sees no result from his labor. He trusts to the earth his golden grain, and buries it in hopes of a future springing up, but month after month he has no return. He watches patiently; he sees the dreary months go round, but not a single ear is brought loose to give him promise, much less do ample sheaves reward his toil. "Dread winter reigns tremendous over the conquered year," the vegetable world lies dead. As it is in the natural world, we must expect it to be in the spiritual world—there will ordinarily be a time of unrequited sowing for the Lord's laborers. To a great extent this was so with the church of God in her early history; then she was fitly imaged in these words—"A sower went forth to sow."

True, through the infinite compassion of the great Farmer, there were souls saved at once by the preaching of the gospel, but yet the wide spread of the gospel was not a work of a few months—years of self-denial were needed. Good men had to toil throughout the whole of their lives, yes, and to lay down those lives, too, by painful and bloody deaths. And yet, at the first, Christ's kingdom did not come. Generation after generation of holy martyrs and confessors went to prison and to death to bear testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus. It was the church's time of sowing, and her seed was steeped in tears and blood. God's presence and power did not so much reveal themselves in immediate success as in patient endurance, heroic fortitude, and boundless self-sacrifice. Holy hymns were not sung by assembled thousands where passers-by could hear them, but in the crypts and in the catacombs the righteous praised the Lord. The Word of God was in those days hidden away like a buried thing, concealed like the seed-corn beneath the clods. The church parted with her holiest sons, who died that she might live and grow, and multiply, and subdue the earth—but for many years it seemed as if the sacrifice had been made in vain, for her truths were still the scoff of the age, and the butt of perpetual ridicule. It looked as if her principles, as well as her martyrs, would be buried. Imperial tyrants boasted that they would exterminate Christianity, and leave to the church neither root nor branch, nor place, nor name. This was but the Lord's winter, with its bitter chills, driving tempests, and stormy winds fulfilling His Word, and we also must expect to see the great sowing work of the church proceed under the same trying conditions. We must not always reckon to see nations converted the moment the gospel is preached to them; and especially where new ground has been broken up, where countries have just received the gospel message, we must not be disappointed if neither today nor tomorrow we are rewarded with abundant results. God's plan involves plowing, sowing, waiting; and after these the springing up and the harvest. "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.

Behold the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain."

While the seed is under the ground, a thousand adversaries present themselves, all apparently in array against its ever rising from the earth. The seed might look up from the soil and say of the frosts and storms of winter, "All these things are against me." It was but a few weeks ago that the earth where the farmer had sown his grain was frozen as though it were of iron. Beneath his foot it was hard as the share with which he had formerly plowed it. Then came the snow and buried the green blades beneath its fleecy showers. Who could imagine that harvests would spring forth from frost-bound clods, or from beneath so thick a shroud of snow; then came the rain, again and again. It deluged everything. The weeping months followed each other in mournful procession. It has rained this year as our forefathers have seldom seen it, and yet, despite frost, snow, rain, and flood, seeds are peeping forth in the garden. The almond blossom is in its beauty. The golden cup of the crocus is brimmed with sunshine, and the trees are bursting into leaf. So we must expect to see the same in the church of God! Desperate obstacles will obstruct the spread of the gospel; fearful disappointments will wither hope; solemn calamities will overthrow success; iniquity will abound, and the love of many will wax cold! When we survey the condition of affairs apart from faith in God, it may even seem to us that our cause is hopeless and the further persecution of it a forlorn endeavor. We must expect to see it so. If it is so in nature, so may it also be in grace, and I sometimes think that we have fallen upon such times even now.

Probably there was never a period less favorable to the advance of true religion than the present one. I admit that there is a tendency among men advanced in years to depreciate the present, and to say that the former times were better than now. With that feeling I think I have little or no sympathy, neither my age nor my temperament lead me in that direction, yet I fear that in some respects, the present era is peculiarly trying to the Christian church in this country. Our nation has grown enormously rich; unequalled prosperity has continued with us for several years, and out of this has grown a worldly and luxurious spirit. Pride and fullness of bread have taken men's thoughts off God and His salvation. Boundless luxury has bred indifference to the gospel. The lower classes, as they are called, are less than ever within the reach of the gospel. In some districts working men appear to have no mind for anything but their beer, their dogs, and their sports; even politics do not stir them as once they did, and religion they regard as a matter of perfect indifference. Extra wages, which should mean mental elevation and increased family comfort, are converted into increased self-indulgence and profligacy. The enormous amount derived by our national revenue from the sale of strong drink largely represents excesses of riot and drunkenness. God's great mercy to us, of leading us gratefully to serve Him, is perverted into an occasion for greater sin. Alas that it should be so. But those who love the cause of God and truth must not be discouraged, as though some

new thing had happened to us. Dark times, and wintry seasons there have been before; sharp frosts, and drenching rains are no novelties; we are passing through a spiritual winter, but the spring shall surely come, and with it spiritually—

"A season of refreshing,
A waking as from sleep,
A longing and a singing
That make the pulses leap!
A sense of renovation
Of freshness and of health,
A casting off of worldliness
A love for heavenly wealth."

While our text leads us to expect a time of unprofitable sowing, it excites *the hope of a sacred spring time*. God's gospel cannot perish; His kingdom cannot fail; His truth cannot be overcome! And that for many reasons, among which are these—that which is sown in the garden, springs up from out of the ground because there is vitality in it. The life is dormant for a while, but it displays itself in due season. There is at the appointed hour for all the buried seeds, a bursting of grave clothes, a rending of sepulchers, and an upheaval of the earth; and then in resurrection freshness comes forth the blade, to be succeeded by the ear, and that by the full corn in the ear. Even so the truth of God is a living and incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever! Or, to use another figure, it is as the oak tree, whose substance is in it when it loses its leaves. It is not possible that the truth of God should perish; even if it is cut down, at the scent of water it will bud and send forth new shoots. Life in garden seeds may be destroyed; under certain influences the life-germ may perish, but the living truth of God is immortal and unconquerable. The Lord has Himself declared that it abides forever—"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God shall stand forever." Therefore do we assuredly look for a blessed spring time. We wait to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living; yes, we expect to see the universal reign of the everlasting gospel.

But seed springs up not only because of its own vitality, but because of its surrounding circumstances. Put the seed away in the mummy's hand, and hide it in the pyramid, and though it may be vital, still it is not quickened into growth. The seed under a clod waits awhile till all its surroundings become propitious, and then it begins to germinate. The moisture and the warmth cooperate, and the soil begins to yield its nourishment to the little life-germ. So we may rest assured that God will make all things propitious in His providence to the growth of His own truth. He knows under what conditions religious thought will spring up in the minds of men, and He can create those conditions; He has created them and He will! The dews, are they not in His hand? The rains, does He not pour them forth from His palm? The sunlight, is it not the smiling of His face, and the heat, is it not the breath of His love? Is not the residue of the Spirit with Him? Can He not open the bottles of heaven? Is He not the Father of Lights also, who can pour forth the brightness of His grace

upon men's hearts? We may rest assured that because all conditions are in the hand of God, and He can order them according to His own will, He will cause the seed which He has sown in the earth to spring up. Why, I think I may say of the gospel, that under the divine superintendence, everything is in league with it. They fight from heaven; the stars in their courses fight for the gospel of Jesus. For it winds blow, and tempests rage. It is in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field are at peace with it. The stupendous wheels of providence, as they revolve, are full of eyes, and all those eyes are fixed upon Christ, and upon His cross, and as they turn upon their mystic axles, they revolve forever with one design—I thought I heard them speak as they moved onward, and a voice from among them said, "Let the name of God be glorious, and let the Christ of God be king among the people." The gospel must spread; it is, in itself, vital and energetic, and the Lord of hosts orders all things to secure its growth.

But the corn comes not up out of the earth because it is vital, or merely because of its surroundings, for, as we believe, there is the actual power of God at work throughout nature. We have never been able to agree with the theory that nature, once started, works of itself, like a clock which has been wound up. We believe that its operations conform to certain laws, but there must be some power to carry out the laws, or else they would be a dead letter. Everything that exists is a continuous emanation from the Most High, and everything that is done anywhere in the world, God lends the strength, and gives the power whereby it is done. If we were to see performed upon this stage, in a single moment, the turning of one grain of wheat into a full-grown ear, we would exclaim, "Wonderful!" And we would regard it as a miracle! But if God is pleased to take some few months in performing the same operation, it is not the less wonderful! If spring came but once in a century, what wonder it would excite in all hearts! If it had never happened but once, it would be considered to be the crown of miracles, and skeptics would ridicule those who believed in its possibility. Yet God creates our harvests as surely as if there never had been a harvest before, and He forms our ripe fields by His omnipotence as truly even as He fashioned man in the Garden of Eden, perfect at once! God is alive, and God is at work; He has not betaken Himself into His secret chambers, and shut the door behind Him, and left us orphans in the world, and the earth without a ruler and without a friend! He works everywhere, in the deepest caverns of the sea, and among the highest pinnacles of the heavens. And He works there among the violets of yonder bank and the primroses which peer forth from amidst the dry leaves around the underbrush of the thicket of small trees. And also there where the bees begin to hum, the lark to sing, and the lambs to play! It is God that sends, "Spring, the Awakener," to fill earth's bosom with flowers. He does it all! And it is because of this that we expect the gospel to flourish—not merely because the Word of God is vital, and because God will order providence on its behalf, but because He is at work in it—mysteriously at work, it is true, but certainly at work,

for the Spirit of the living God which was given at Pentecost has never gone back to heaven. He is still here, and He that worked among the crowds of the streets of Jerusalem, and made them cry out, "Sirs, what must we do to be saved?" is working in our cities even at this day.

Where Jesus Christ is preached, His Spirit is pledged to be present. God's Spirit always works. He is breaking hard hearts as the winter pulverizes the clods; He is melting stubborn wills into obedience as the spring showers soften the hard earth, and He is awakening the young germs of hope, prayer, and desire, just as the warm sunlight is calling up the green blades and the flowers. The Spirit of God always works. O you adversaries of the gospel, it is not the gospel alone that you have to stand against, but the God over all, blessed forever, omnipotent and eternal, is engaged in the battle! If the gospel is His sword, you may well tremble at its edge, but you may be much more afraid when you remember the arm which wields that deadly weapon—which can divide asunder soul and spirit. The gospel is His arrow and His bow, and He who draws that bow, and directs that arrow is the same God who launches thunderbolts in the day of tempest, and touches the hills, and they smoke. The God of the gospel is He who wheels the earth in its orbit, and marshals all the stars. Jehovah invisible, but also almighty, is engaged to show Himself strong for the gospel, and therefore do we expect victory. Despite the times of depression, and of sorrow, days of refreshing must come from the presence of the Lord. The spring must follow the winter—"As the earth brings forth her buds, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and peace to spring forth before all the nations."

If at any time our mind should grow desponding concerning the progress of the gospel, and I confess mine is very heavy at times, it ought to encourage us to remember that the gospel will conquer, not because it looks as if it would, but because God has declared and decreed that it shall do so. I know of no efforts which have been made to promote the advent and progress of spring. We have had a blustering March; we had a cold February; we were deluged with rain, and swathed in mist all through November, December, and January. I saw nothing in the atmosphere or the sky to help on spring. Did it need any helping? Did it need human aid? No, the earth pursued its ordained orbit, and every hour it neared the point where spring, laden with flowers, laid in kind ambush, longing to scatter her garlands over the glad earth. God needs no helpers to create spring; He sends it in His own time, and lo it comes. Even thus the Lord stands in no need of creature help to cause the designs of His grace. Spring has never lingered until assembled parliaments have permitted and commanded its coming; neither has it waited for Emperors to smile, and say—"Let the buds come forth." Far away in the dense forest, and here in merry England in a thousand forests the sap is flowing in the trees, and myriads of buds are swelling, but not by mans art or aid.

The daffodils are blooming in the meadows where no man planted them and the bluebells in the dells where gardener's spade has never

come. Yes, and I know right well that the dew of divine grace, and the showers of regenerating love tarry not for man, nor wait for the sons of men. If there had been a general revolt against spring, it would not have been delayed. If the kings of the earth had set themselves, and the rulers taken counsel together, no single gleam of sunlight would have hesitated to shine forth. If the Pope himself, in his "infallibility," had issued an edict forbidding the sun to re-cross the equator, and advance to the northern tropic, I venture to predict that it would have pursued the even tenor of its way, despite the bidding of his Holiness. None can stay the marches of the year, or turn the seasons from their course. Who is he that can fight against the Lord, or withstand the power of the Most High? Our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. We do not reckon upon the progress of the gospel because we have a company of rich men to help us, a goodly fellowship of eloquent divines to advocate the cause, and a considerable number of respectable persons to support the good work. No, sirs, our Master has not come to such a beggarly state of dependence that He needs a mortal's help. He has told us that, "Cursed is he that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm," and He has not come to trust in man Himself, and make flesh His arm—"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." As comes the spring by God, Jehovah's own arrangement so shall come the time of the church's triumph, and the victory of truth, by God's appointment, let men say what they will.

Be it never forgotten that the disheartening circumstances of the winter may have been, all of them, promotive of the success of the spring. I cannot tell what connection there may have been between the sharp frost and the coloring of the cowslip, but I have no doubt that if the flowers could speak they could tell. I do not know what the connection is between the drenching showers, and the gushes of song from the woodlands, but doubtless the larks and the thrushes hold the secret among them. Neither do I know how howling winds are linked with leafy bowers, but what the oak or the elm could say if they were permitted to prophesy for a while, it is not for me to guess. There is an intimate intermarriage and commingling of the dark, and of the bright, the chill and the warm; and from this has come forth the joy of spring. Every child knows that March winds and April showers bring forth the sweet May flowers, so all the sorrows and troubles which the church has borne, and shall yet bear, are mothers of the victories she shall yet achieve. Her days would never be so bright if her nights had not been so dark. Believe, therefore, that the worst times are working on towards something better. Beloved, we have God's promise to sustain us in all our efforts to spread abroad His kingdom. He has, Himself, declared that, "As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not there, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall My Word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing where I sent it." The Lord God

cannot lie, He must keep His promise, and He cannot be disappointed by unforeseen difficulties! His power is irresistible, therefore we feel quite sure that His Word must win the day!

Think for a moment, you who are growing weary through the long night, whose watches seem as if they would never end; I hear you cry, "When will the day break, and the shadows flee away"; be not dispirited, but encourage yourselves with these thoughts. Remember what a sowing has already gone before. Christ sowed the earth with Himself. A sower went forth to sow. and as He sowed, He passed by the garden of Gethsemane, and cast a precious handful there, steeped in His own bloody sweat; then He went up to Golgotha and sowed full handfuls there, where the plowers made deep furrows; then He went up to the cross, and you know how He sowed there, for there He was that grain of wheat which fell into the ground and died, and therefore cannot abide alone, but must bring forth much fruit. Did God Himself become man to save men, and shall not men be saved? Did Christ Himself come from heaven to fight with the dread enemy, and did He fight him, and return victorious with dyed garments from Bozrah, and shall the enemy win the day after all? Is Calvary nothing? Is Gethsemane nothing? The Son of God in anguish and in death—is He nothing? Yet so it must be if the gospel does not conquer, and the world is not converted to God; "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied."

Remember, too, who is the Farmer of this field. He has not bid His church till the world without divine help, "My Father is the farmer." God Himself is watching over the broad field of the world to promote the growth of what the Savior sowed, and shall He fail? Shall it be said at the close of the great Farmer's work, there is no result from it? The idols are still firm on their pedestals; Antichrist sits upon her seven hills in pompous state, and the simple gospel is still in the minority! Will the Almighty fail? What do you think, sirs? Can omnipotence be defeated? No! It cannot be, as Jehovah lives, it cannot be! The living God must conquer. The right hand of the Lord shall be exalted, for it does valiantly. He may, for a while, permit the conflict to tremble in the balances, but divine power must overcome, we cannot dream otherwise.

Moreover, there is the Spirit of God Himself, as well as the Father, and the Son, and He has designed to dwell in the midst of the church. The Spirit of God is here, and is especially at work. He moved upon chaos and turned it into order; He it is also that quickens the dead, and shall He be defeated and disappointed in the conversion of this world? Let the thought be accursed, for it is near akin to blasphemy, if it is not blasphemy itself. The triune God must make the knowledge of Himself to "cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." God's honor is engaged in the matter. On this battle-field of the world, He has flung down the gauntlet to the powers of hell. Satan has taken up the glove of battle, and the fight has raged long, but it must end in victory for God; it cannot be otherwise! My soul loathes the theory of some that this world will get worse, and worse, and worse, and never will be won to obedience to the

Lord God. Scripture is against that theory—a theory so desponding, so fitted to make God's soldiers fling away the sword. Surely there shall come a time when the nations shall know the Lord, and the multitude of the people shall worship before the most High God. The winter shall be succeeded by its spring. Therefore be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

II. Now, I shall spend just a minute or two upon the same topic, setting it in another light. Dear brethren, I want you to CONTEMPLATE THIS TRUTH IN REFERENCE TO THE GARDEN COMMITTED TO YOUR OWN PERSONAL CULTIVATION. As God's people you have all something to do for Him. I want you to do it, and to do it in the best possible manner, but I am sure you will not do so unless you are of good heart, and full of comfort. Be not impatient with regard to the result of what you are doing. A little child puts his seed into the ground, and he goes in an hour or two, and stirs the ground to see whether the seed is growing. That is because he is a little child—if he were a man, he would know better. You go and teach your Sunday school class, and you expect to see all the children converted then and there. It may be God will grant you your desire in a measure, but if He does not, do not be impatient—go on, go on, go on! Do not wonder if your seed does not spring up immediately, work on! And do not be disheartened. Never listen to any voice which says to you, "Leave off work." If such a voice should ever whisper in your ear, know it to be the voice of Satan, and redouble your diligence, because Satan is likely to put such a thought into your mind when you are nearest to success. Be of good comfort—your seed will come up; grace insures the harvest. If you want your seed to come up more quickly, water it again with your tears, and your prayers, but never despair, success will come to it; work on! Work on! And never be unhappy about it.

Remember that if a farmer were to sigh every morning, it would not make his wheat or his barley grow faster; and if he were to stand and weep all day because he could not see a harvest, it would not become one whit more visible in spite of his tears. Love souls, and do all you can for them, but be not unbelieving. Anxiety may be good, but it is only so to a degree; beyond that it unfits us for duty, and dishonors God. Take heed of being unbelieving. "But," you say, "What a poor worker I am." Beloved, why do you despair on that account? The trees in a man's garden do not bring forth less fruit because the owner is a sickly man. The fruit depends upon the trees and the season. A harvest will not be bounded by the sower's feebleness. I saw some little children in the fields the other day, and they were putting in the seeds, but the result will be none the smaller because the children were little. If God's work were as weak as God's workers are, it would be weak indeed, and if the kingdom of Jesus depended upon the strength of His disciples, it would soon come to nothing. The garden causes the seeds that are sown in it to spring forth though a consumptive hand may have dropped them into their places. My dear fainting brethren, work on, wait on, pray on, watch on! You shall

have your reward before long—"He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." I may not linger longer upon this point.

III. I beg you, in the third place, to CONTEMPLATE THIS SAME TRUTH IN REFERENCE TO THE BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL STATE. Do you not sometimes fall into a wintry condition? I mean you who love the Lord; I think I need hardly ask you, for one of us may generally serve as specimen of the rest. There are times when we feel as if we had no life at all. We hope we do love God, and our faith is fixed in Christ, but we cannot see much evidence of it. We read the Bible, and it is dull; we try to pray, and we get through a sort of exercise which we hope is prayer, but it does not refresh us; and even the prospect of going up to the house of God on Sunday makes us groan out, "Lord send us a blessing," but we hardly think He will. We feel so dull, and dead, and cold. Well, it is not to be wondered at. We are living in a world whose influences are never helpful to grace, and we bear about us a body of sin and death which never will aid us in the way to heaven. At such times we are like the earth in the winter. The seed is there but it lies hidden. The sap is in the tree, but it has gone down to the root, and is not actively flowing and revealing itself. Now, in such times as these, we cannot make any change in ourselves. "All the king's horses, and all the king's men," as we have already said, could not turn winter into spring. Neither can we warm ourselves into energy. We say, "I will read the Bible, and I will pray." Well, we do it, but it is no better than a dead form; we are none the better for it. But there is comfort in store for us, for what we cannot do in that we are weak through the flesh, God can do. How sweetly He has appeared for some of us! "Or ever I was aware," says the sweet singer in the Canticle, "My soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." We could not move or stir, yet all of a sudden we found ourselves borne onward, like the swiftly driven chariots of Amminadab—we were full of life, full of love, full of joy, full of strength—and all in a moment. Just as in a moment God sends the thaw, and melts the ice, and the frozen brooks leap on their way in living rills; so will our soul leap with holy joy in the presence of God, because the Lord has come to us, and has revived us. Are you not conscious that such things have happened to you many times, my brothers and sisters? "Oh, yes," you say. Very well, expect them again, even now ask for them, and look up to God for them. Anything is better than everlastingly meditating over yourself, and your own frames and feelings. The cold of the winter will not, by being thought of, give a man any warmth. All the frosts that ever were will not create heat by our meditating upon them. Neither does any man rise into life and joy through merely meditating upon his own spiritual death and misery. Turn away from the darkness, and look at the light. Spring comes from yonder sun, and so must our revival in religion, our restored joy and peace come from God our Father. Blessed be His name, it has come from Him before, and it will come from Him again. Let us wait upon Him in solemn confidence that He has not left us forever, but will return to us in His mercy—

"In all the years that have been
The spring has greened the bough.
The gladsome, healthful spring time
Keep heart, it comes now."

Do not allow Satan to get an advantage over you by saying, "God has forsaken us; we shall backslide from bad to worse; we shall fall from grace; we shall perish." You shall do no such thing! You shall be restored; you shall be revived! Yes, perhaps you came here this very morning with the intent that God might work a wonder of grace in you; that again you should abound in fruits of righteousness, and your tongue should sing to His praise; and from this day forth you shall be one of the happiest and most useful of Christians, instead of being as you have been for some months past—one of the dullest and least useful of the holy brotherhood.

IV. Now the last point shall be this—WE WILL CONTEMPLATE ALL THIS IN REFERENCE TO THOSE WHO ARE NEWLY AWAKENED. I may have some present this morning who are saying, "Oh, that I could be saved! Oh, that I knew where I might find Christ! What would I give if I could but have a good hope through grace!" Dear brother, dear sister, those very desires of yours show that there is some good seed sown in you. God's grace has taught you to desire, and to long. We never knew a man sincerely desire Christ till Christ had first worked in him by the Spirit. No sinner can be beforehand with Christ. If you want Christ, He has wanted you long ago, and has already come to you. "Ah," you say, "but I feel so dull; I cannot pray as I used to do; I do not feel my sins as I ought. In fact, I feel nothing at all as I ought to feel it." It is winter time with you, dear friend; may that winter do you good. "It is very painful," you say, "and very dangerous." Yes, and God means to make you see what a poor thing you are, and to make you know what a wretched sinner you are, and how lost you are. Do you not know that He will strip you before He will clothe you? It is always His way to kill before He makes alive. He will not begin filming over proud flesh; He will take the knife and cut it out; and with many a cruel gash too, as it may seem, for He means to have a lasting cure. Therefore you must pass through these winters.

But let me remind you that your only hope of anything better than what you are passing through lies in Christ. You cannot save yourself. As long as you have any lingering idea that you can do so, you never will be saved. You can no more save yourself than the arctic regions can turn themselves into the torrid zone. "Why," you say, "that could never be done, unless God were to reverse the poles." Ah, and He must do as great a thing for you as that would be, or else you will always be in the cold winter you are now in! And worse, you will utterly perish unless He appears for you. You do not deserve that He should appear for you; you deserve to be left to be what you now are, and to go from hardness to greater hardness, still, till you make your own destruction sure. The power to save you lies wholly with Him. What shall I say to you, then? Why, look to Him, cry to Him, ask Him to visit you! If you want the full light of God's love, you will see it yonder, on the cross, where hangs the Son of

God bleeding out His life for the sins of men. God's love is concentrated there as the beams of the sun are focused by a magnifying glass. If you want to feel the full heat of God's love, go to the cross! And if you will look up to Jesus dying there, to your own surprise you will feel that spring has come to your heart, and your winter is over and gone.—

"Your mercy is more than a match for my heart
Which wonders to feel its own hardness depart.
Dissolved by Your goodness, I fall to the ground
And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found."

O, what a wonderful passage that is, from darkness to light, from death to life, from damnation to salvation, from being an enemy of God to friendship with Him. Yet that passage does not occupy a moment. The result is instantaneous! One look and it is done! A glance of the eyes at a dying Savior and the sinner is saved! The garden has caused the things that were sown in it to spring forth; the earth has brought forth her bud, for God has visited the earth, and the garden, and the miracle of grace is performed! I pray that these thoughts may bring comfort to many. I have labored earnestly to encourage workers, but I would be yet much more earnest to encourage seekers. Do not let the devil tell you, my dear hearer, that the Lord will never appear for you. He will—He must! There was never a soul that humbled itself at His feet, and cried for mercy through His Son that He left to perish—not one. There has never been a year without its spring and its summer, and there is never a poor soul that has sorrowed for sin that has been left to end its life without consolation. The Lord must appear to you; He must come and bless you! And I pray He may do it for you now! And when He is gracious to you, mind that you give Him the glory of it; come and tell His people, and join with them. As long as you have breath in your body, praise Him, and then in heaven forever shout His praises who has done great things for you. The Lord add His blessing for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 62, 63.

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THE HEART OF JESUS
NO. 1105

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 6, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I am meek and lowly in heart."
Matthew 11:29.

WE have preached upon the whole of this passage several times before, therefore we do not intend to speak upon it in its full teaching, or enter upon its general run and context. But we select for our meditation this one expression, which has greater depth in it than we shall be able to fully explore—"I am meek and lowly in heart."

I have felt very grateful to God for the mercy of the past week during which the ministers educated in our College have been gathered together as a devout convocation and have enjoyed a flood-tide of the divine blessing. Unusually great and special joy has filled my soul, and therefore, I have asked myself, "What can I do to glorify the Lord my God who has been so gracious to me, and has so prospered the work committed to me and my brethren?" The answer which my heart gave was this—"Endeavor to bring sinners to Jesus; nothing is sweeter to Him than that, for He loves the sons of men." Then I said to myself, "But how can I bring sinners to Christ? What means will the Holy Spirit be likely to use for that purpose?" And the answer came, "If you would preach sinners to Christ, you must preach Christ to sinners, for nothing so attracts the hearts of men as Jesus Himself." The best argument to bring sinners to believe in Jesus is Jesus. Has He not said, "I, if I am lifted up, will draw all men unto Me?" Then I said, "But what shall I preach concerning Jesus?" And my soul replied, "Preach the loving heart of Jesus; go to the center of the subject, and set forth His very soul, His inmost self, and then it may be that the heart of Jesus will draw the hearts of men."

Now, it is very remarkable that the only passage in the whole New Testament in which the heart of Jesus is distinctly mentioned is the one before us. Of course there are passages in which His heart is intended, as for instance when the soldier, with a spear, pierced His side, but this passage is unique as to the actual mentioning of the *kardia* or heart of Jesus by a distinct word. There are several passages in the Old Testament which refer to our divine Lord, such as—"Reproach has broken My heart, and I am full of heaviness." And that notable one, in the 22nd Psalm, "My heart is like wax, it has melted within Me." But in the New Testament this is the only passage which speaks of the heart of Jesus Christ, and therefore we will weigh it with all the more care. Without further preface we shall have two things carefully to do. First, *to consider the description here given of the heart of Jesus*; and then, secondly, we

will *labor to obey the exhortations which are connected with this description*. For both these matters we shall need the rich assistance of the Holy Spirit, and I pray that it may be vouchsafed, since it is the Spirit's office to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. We may confidently expect that He will shine upon so choice a subject as the sacred heart of our loving Lord.

I. LET US MEDITATE UPON THE DESCRIPTION OF THE HEART OF THE LORD JESUS, which is presented to us in the text. It consists of two adjectives—"I am *meek* and *lowly* in heart." There is no pomp or display in either of the qualities mentioned; they both belong to the gentle order of virtues, and are but little esteemed among the princes of this world and their warriors.

The first is the word, "meek". It is used in the New Testament in the third beatitude—"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." And Peter uses it, when speaking of, "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." Of our Lord it is also said—"Behold your King comes to you, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." The original word has the significations of "mild, gentle, soft, and meek." Such is the heart of Christ. And you will observe that Jesus Christ says this concerning Himself—"I am meek in heart." There are points of character which a man could not fitly declare concerning himself, or it might savor of self-praise. But the virtue of meekness was of old so little esteemed, that a man might claim it without being suspected of seeking approval. It is remarkable that Moses, also, has recorded in the 12th chapter of the Book of Numbers the fact that he was remarkable for meekness—"Now the man Moses was very meek above all the men that were upon the face of the earth." It has been thought by some that the verse must be an interjected one, and could not have been written by Moses. But I strongly object to the supposition of interjections, although that method of removing difficulties is now so very fashionable in certain quarters, and I think we ought never to fall back upon that suggestion unless we are absolutely forced to do so. I believe that Moses, guided by infallible inspiration, wrote that description of himself for our example, and was utterly free from any vainglory in so doing, just as our blessed Lord, in all lowliness, here spoke concerning Himself, and said, "I am meek and lowly in heart." Meekness seeks not its own; and when it asserts itself, it is always with an eye to the benefit of others; therefore none can bid it be silent. For a man to boast before his adversaries, "I am wise," or, "I am strong," would be vainglory, but to say to them, "I am meek," would be not boasting, but a sacred argument for peace—a plea for gentleness and quiet. Our Savior, who never sought the praise of man, says of Himself, "I am meek," because He desired to remove the fears of those who trembled to approach Him, and would win the allegiance of those who feared to become His followers, lest His service should prove too severe. He, in effect cried, "Come to Me, you offending men, you who feel your unworthiness, you who think that your transgressions may provoke My anger; come to Me, for I am meek." It would be no pride for a man to say, "I am strong," if he

would thereby induce a drowning person to trust him for the saving of his life. Neither would it be wrong for a person to say, as a physician practically says, "I am wise in medicine," in order to lead a dying person to take the medicine which he felt sure would heal him. We may and must assert ourselves, and avow those qualities which are truly ours, if by doing so a great benefit can be bestowed upon others. And Jesus, therefore says, "I am meek," because this gentle attribute would silence fear, and lead the timid to approach Him, and learn of Him.

The other adjective is, "lowly." "I am meek and lowly in heart." This is the word which is translated in the memorable song of the Virgin Mary, "low degree." "He has put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted them of low degree." It is also used in Romans, where Paul says, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." It is also used in Second Corinthians, 7th chapter and sixth verse, where it is rendered differently—"God that comforts those that are cast down," while in the epistle of James it is translated, "humble." "He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble," and it is so rendered in the first epistle of Peter. If you turn to any Greek lexicon you will find that the word does not signify merely what the Scriptures translate it by, but since the Greeks were a war-like people, a proud people, an intimidating people, and thought it foul scorn to patiently endure an insult, the word which we translate by, "lowliness," they would understand to mean, "baseness, or meanness." The word to the heathen Greeks meant, "Keeping near the ground, vile, contemptible"—and our Savior has deigned to describe His own heart by a word which unregenerate men would thus misinterpret. Even now a man who will not fight, but has learned to suffer wrong without resenting it, is thought by certain people to be destitute of spirit, and worthy of contempt. That lowly grace which the world calls base and mean-spirited, Jesus claims as being His own peculiar quality. He is not lofty, ambitious, proud, and haughty. He dwelt with the humble and contrite; He associated with men of low estate, such as the ungodly would look down upon as utterly beneath regard. He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant. When He was reviled, He reviled not again. He did not strive, nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets—a bruised reed He did not break, and the smoking flax He did not quench. Thus have we weighed the words themselves.

Now, this description of the heart of Christ may be understood as opposed, first, to quickness or anger. Meek men bear many provocations. Some men take fire at a single spark, if you do but even seem to pay them disrespect, they are indignant in a moment. But Christ says, "I am meek; I can pardon your ingratitude and disrespect, yes, and forgive your profanity, your blasphemy, your insult, your scorn, your enmity, your malice, for I am meek." Even when put to a cruel death He muttered no curse and threatened no revenge. "Slow to anger and plenteous in mercy," like His Father, is the Son of the Highest. Meekness and lowliness are also opposed to haughtiness of spirit. Jesus did not seek the empty glories of pomp and state, neither did He desire honor from men. He did

not speak proudly to those around Him and domineer over them, or exercise lordship over them as the princes of the gentiles do. He was affable, easily to be reached, and ready to be entreated. The poor and the sick could readily move His heart to pity, and His hand to help. He was called the friend of publicans and sinners, and of Him it was said, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." As a teacher Jesus was meek and lowly in heart and therein was the very opposite of the scribes. If you saw a Pharisee in Christ's day, you would have seen the incarnation of pride—he professed, by his very name, to be a select being, and in dress, manner and conversation, he set himself up to be some great one. He would not come to the windward of a sinner if he could help it—he passed him in the street as though he were a dog. But Christ was gentle and willing to associate with the vilest of the vile, and the lowest of the low, for He was "lowly in heart."

The expression of the text is also opposed to that pretended meekness and mock lowliness which has at times imposed upon the world. It is true our Savior was meek and lowly in appearance, for even in His greatest pomp He rode upon a colt, the foal of an ass, and not upon a horse which indicated state. He was always lowly in manner and deportment, and though He could flame and flash with sacred boldness, and speak words that burn in His holy indignation against hypocrisy, yet when He uttered the glad message of the gospel, He was very gentle, even as a nurse with her child. Yet the meekness and lowliness of Christ were not things of manner and of word alone—He was so in His heart. He was not of those who fake humility to secure power; of whom an almost forgotten poet said—

"There are some that use
Humility to serve their pride, and seem
Humble upon their way, to be prouder
At their wish'd journey's end."

It is said of Thomas A'Becket that he affected the greatest lowliness and humility, and for this reason he washed the feet of 13 beggars every morning—but yet he was arrogance itself, and lorded it over his king. He was the proudest of the proud, though he pretended to be the humblest of the humble. Many men have concealed inordinate pride beneath a crouching manner, mimicking humility while harboring arrogance. While their spirit has been full of imperial despotism, they have pretended to be the friends of the people, and have talked like the most truthful demagogue. Not so our truthful Master. He was "meek and lowly *in heart."* To Him association with the poor and sinful was no affectation of condescension; He was already on their level in intense sympathy with their sorrows. His heart was with the common people. He did not force Himself down from a natural haughtiness to a constrained contact with the lowly, but He became a real friend of sinners, and a willing companion of the needy. He rejoiced in spirit when He said, "Father, I thank You that You have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes." His heart was meek and lowly; it was His very nature

to be clear of anger and pride, passion and enmity. Thus from its opposites we see more clearly the meaning of our text.

It will further help us if we consider that the words employed here include, first, a readiness on the part of Christ to pardon all past offenses. "Come unto Me," He says, "you sinners, for however much you may have offended in the past, I am meek, and easily to be entreated. I am ready to forgive, to forget, and cast behind My back all your provocations. I do not say this to cajole you; My very heart says it, for My heart is full of tenderness and compassion for you. I have borne much from you, and can bear still more. I will be mindful of your infirmities, and forgetful of your transgressions, and I will not be so grieved by your rebellions as to cast you out if you come to Me." Jesus is long-suffering, compassionate, and ready to forgive. Like His Father He passes by transgression, iniquity, and sin because He delights in mercy.

But the words include also a willingness to endure yet further offenses. "I am meek" means, "Not only do I forget the past, but I am ready to bear with you, still, though you should still offend Me; though you should still be ungrateful; though you should treat Me as I ought not to be treated, and give unkindness for My love, I will endure it all. Come to Me although you cannot hope that your future character will be perfect; I will help you to struggle into holiness, and be patient with your failures. If you come to Me, I am prepared to forgive you unto seventy times seven, yes, as often as you shall err, so often will I restore you, and as frequently as you shall grieve Me, as frequently will I forgive you. If you take My yoke, I will not be angry if sometimes it appears heavy to you; if you learn of Me, I will not be vexed if you prove but dull scholars. I am meek in heart, ready to forgive the past, and willing to bear with you in the present and in the future." Beloved brethren, what a heart Jesus has to receive sinners in this divine manner!

And then as to the second word, "I am lowly in heart," that means, "I am willing to receive the lowest and the poorest among you; the most obscure, despised, and ignorant, I welcome to My salvation. O you laboring and heavy-laden ones, I shall not feel, in your coming to Me, that you are presuming, and that your company is a dishonor to Me. I shall not say to you, 'Get you gone, I have chosen the company of kings and princes, of philosophers and divines, of the wealthy and the witty.'" No, Jesus covets not the so-called aristocracy, but seeks after men of all ranks. The poor have the gospel preached to them. Some of His professed ministers have looked down upon the toiling masses, but their Master said, "Come unto Me all you that labor." Stand not back, you people, because you are of low estate, for Jesus is of a lowly heart. Come to Him, you who are like the Soodras, of whom the Brahmins say that they came from God's foot, while the Brahmins came from the head of deity—Jesus thinks not so. Come to Him, you who are the pariahs of society, outcasts, and men of no caste at all, for Jesus, also, was rejected by His brethren. You, whom men despise, come to Him who was despised of men. You homeless, come to Him who had not where to lay His head. You needy, come to Him

who hungered and thirsted. Yes, you lost, draw near to the Son of man, who is come to seek and to save that which was lost, for "He is lowly in heart."

His lowliness means this, also, that as He is willing to receive the lowest so He is willing to do the very lowest and most menial service for those who come to Him—willing to bear their burdens, willing to wash their feet, willing to purge them from their sins in His own blood. Jesus waits to be gracious, and delights to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. For sinners He has performed feats of lowly love, for He has borne their sin and their shame, their iniquities and their sicknesses. He willingly stooped to the lowest position to save the lowest of men. You see I am talking very calmly and in a quiet manner, but my heart glows within me while I am telling you these things about my own dear Lord and Master, whose shoe lace I am not worthy to untie. He has, in these two words, as with two masterly strokes of the pencil, given us a perfect picture of His dear, gentle, face; no, not of His face, but of His inmost heart. How I wonder that we are not all in love with Him. He is "Meek and lowly in heart!" These are two beauties, which to sinners' eyes, when sinners know themselves, are the loveliest and fascinating attributes, such as charm their fears, and chain their hearts. He that has eyes to see let him look here, and looking, let him love—

"Jesus who gave Himself to us,
Upon the cross to die,
Unfolds to us His sacred heart.
O, to that heart draw near!
You hear how kindly He invites,
You hear His words so blest—
All you who labor come to Me,
And I will give you rest."

To set forth these words a little more, I beg you to remember that they are enhanced in value if we reflect who it is that speaks them of Himself. Remember it is the Lord God, the Son of the Highest, who says, "I am meek and lowly in heart." As I listened to this text, at first it spoke to me with a still small voice, and made me very glad. Then, like Moses at the bush, I drew near unto it; but, lest I should be too bold and grow irreverent, it changed its tone, and I heard peal upon peal of thunder issuing from it, as I listened to the words, *"I am."* Hear you not in those words the incommunicable name, JAH, Jehovah, the Self-Existent One? Yet, as I listened awe-struck to that thunder's crash, and feared lest it might forbade a tempest, and precede destruction, I felt the soft drops of eternal mercy fall upon my brow, and heard, again, the gentle voice of the Mediator saying, *"Meek and lowly in heart."* Jehovah Jesus is gentle, tender, and condescending. What a divine blending of glory and grace! Oh, it is marvelous! Words cannot set it forth! Omnipotent, yet lowly! Eternal God, yet a patient sufferer! He is King of kings, and Lord of lords, yet "meek and lowly in heart!"

Remember well, that He who spoke these words is He who said in the 27th verse, "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father." Yes, He is

possessor of all things, and yet says, "I am meek and lowly in heart." You know, brethren, it is difficult to be a man of power, and yet to be meek; to be a king, and to order things after your own will, and yet to be lowly; to be master of all, and to suffer with patience the scoffs and reproaches of those who are not worthy to be put among the dogs of your flock. To have all things delivered to Him by God, and yet He was so meek as to endure all manner of contradiction of sinners against Himself. He allowed sinners to spit in His face, to pluck His hair, and scourge Him cruelly—this is matchless and unparalleled meekness, and lowliness of heart! Yet such was Jesus Christ—as God Almighty and as man most lowly. Having an infinite mediatorial power, with all things delivered to Him, yet our Redeemer was "meek and lowly in heart."

And remember one thing else. He has told us elsewhere that, "The Father has delivered all judgment unto the Son." If it were your business and mine, as it is not, to exercise judgment, and to be the universal censors, I guarantee you it would be a superlative difficulty to be able to retain a meek and lowly heart. But Jesus Christ is universal Judge, His eyes, like flames of fire, discern between the precious and the vile, burning up the stubble, and purifying the gold. And yet, though ruler of all mankind, and soon to come upon His throne to judge both angels and men, He could say in the days of His flesh, "I am meek and lowly in heart." These are very wonderful words. I do not know whether you catch the contrast. If you do not, it is my fault in not being able to put it, for it is surpassingly striking; a divine being, superlative in power, and commissioned to judge mankind, and yet, for all that, "meek and lowly in heart."

It is most possible that the very reason of His meekness and lowliness may lie somewhere in His glorious greatness, though it may seem a paradox, for who are the meekest in the world but those who are truly strong? You shall pass down the street and a yelping dog will bark at you, but yonder powerful pit-bull takes no note of you. A cackling goose will follow you upon the village green, while the powerful ox feeds on in peace. Real strength is the backbone of meekness. The angry are weak, the patient are strong. The infinite heart of Jesus is a meek heart partly because it is infinite. And I have noticed too, that really great men are lowly men, at any rate, they are only great as far as they are lowly. When a man is fond of dignity, pomp and show, he is a second-rate man, and an essentially little man. Those who stick out for minute points of honor and respect are the very small men. The man who must have all his titles written after his name shows that he feels he needs them. The more eminent a man becomes, the plainer his name becomes in men's mouths. The greatest men among us in the state are seldom or never called even by their full names and honors, but are known by the shortest designations. The greater a man is the less state he cares for. Look into the army. Every petty officer is decorated to the fullest, but the commander-in-chief is plainly dressed, and scarcely wears an ornament at all, simply because he is great. The entire world over, the man who wants to be

thought great is essentially little, and he, who for the good of others is ready for any service, has the elements of greatness in his character. The Lord Jesus Christ is so infinitely great that none can add to His glory, and therefore He is surpassingly lowly too. We are too proud to seek the conversion of a harlot, but He was not. He went to Samaria to find her and talk to her. We are too great to speak to the babes, but He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not." It is a delightful thought that He should be so great, and yet so lowly, and there is an intimate connection between the two great facts.

Now to close this exposition, let me notice that our blessed Lord proved throughout His life the truth of what He asserted, for when He said, "I am meek and lowly in heart," He stated what His biography, if it is studied rightly, most fully bears out. When He came to earth His first advent was to a stable, and to a humble woman's breast. His youth was spent in a carpenter's shop, and when some gleaming of His superlative wisdom was seen in the temple, yet He went back with His mother and His reputed father, and was subject to them. Throughout His life His associations were with the poor. He never put on soft raiment, or affected the courts of princes. Herod might be anxious to see something of Him, but Christ never went to the palace to flatter Herod, or to amuse his curiosity. He was quite content to be with Peter and James, and John, humble fishermen as they were. His tenderness towards children was always remarkable. His gentleness towards all who approached Him was most memorable. Whom did He ever spurn? To whom did He ever speak in tones of pride? When was He ever irritated? Did He not bear insults in silence? Did He not answer craftiness with wisdom? Was not mercy His only reply to malice? Even in His death His silence before His enemies was His lowliness, and His prayer for His murderers was His meekness. While "despised and rejected of men," He was evermore their friend, returning good for all their ill. He was, indeed, "meek and lowly in heart." Thus I have led you to consider the description given of the heart of Christ.

II. Now, I want your earnest attention while I EXHORT YOU TO CARRY OUT WHAT IS COMMANDED IN THE CONTEXT. There are three commands—"Come unto Me"; "Take My yoke upon you"; "Learn of Me."

First, I have great pleasure in declaring that all of you who are heavy-laden and are laboring, are invited to *come* to Christ, and you are persuaded to do so because He is meek. I know what you will say. "How can I come to Jesus? I have neglected Him so long; I am now getting on to 70 years of age—can I expect that He will receive me after so long a despising of Him?" "Come unto Me," He says, "for I am meek of heart; ready to forgive your 70 years' neglect. However great your transgressions, My love to you shall be greater, still." Perhaps you add, "But I have most obstinately rejected Christ. Sermons have impressed me, but I have shaken off impression. I have been almost persuaded but I have said, 'Go Your way this time. When I have a more convenient season I will send for You.' After I have let the Lord Jesus knock at my door so long without opening

to Him, will He still enter? I have refused him a thousand times; will He still come to me?" Yes, He will, for He says—"I am meek in heart, bearing all your misbehavior, kind and loving to the end." But I think I hear one say—"I have spoken evil against You, O Lord; I have been a doubter of Your divinity; I have had an ill word to say against Your substitution." All this, also, He will forgive, for He is meek, and He invites all guilty sinners to look into His face—no, to look into His heart and see if they can discover anything like vengeance, anything like implacable wrath. He does not repel even blasphemers! Even to them the Savior does not say, "Depart," but He invites them to come, and says to them, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out."

It is true that many of you have sought another savior; you have tried to save yourselves; you have set up your own righteousness in opposition to His righteousness, which is a dire insult to His blessed person. Nevertheless, forsake your pride, poor sinner, and come, for Jesus is ready to forgive you even this. Do you say, "But, ah, even while I think of coming to Him, I feel so unworthy; my very prayers must be offensive to Him. I do not feel my sin as I ought; I have not that tenderness of conscience I ought to have"? Nevertheless, Jesus says, "Come unto Me, for I am meek; I will not judge you with a spirit of censure, nor be harsh towards you. I give liberally and upbraid not. Come as you are; though you are unfit and unworthy, yet still come, for I am meek and lowly in heart." Oh, dear hearers, why do you hesitate? What hardness of heart is this that makes you linger? And if you add, "But I am afraid if I did come to Christ I might sin again in the future; I might again go back and prove unfaithful to Him," Yet, says Jesus, "I am meek and lowly in heart. I know what you are; I have considered you; I know that your frame is dust, and that your very nature is sinful, yet still I say, come, for I am able to keep you from falling." "Alas," you say, "I have a foul leprosy upon me, and my forehead is white with it." "Come," says Jesus, "Notwithstanding your pollution, come, even as you are." Sinner, delay no longer! Trust Jesus now. Do I hear you still objecting? "But I have a great gangrened wound which means death, and at this moment it is offensive to me—how much more loathsome will it be to Him?" Nevertheless, come, for Jesus invites most lovingly. He loves all who come, and loathes none. If you yet cry out, "O, but I am evil, and foul, and vile, none can tell how disgusting I seem to be to myself." Nevertheless, "Come," He says, "for I am meek in heart."

And then to meet another set of objections, which do not so much arise from sinfulness as from a sense of insignificance, Jesus declares, "I am lowly in heart." "I am," says one, "very poor." What does Christ care about riches? What are they to Him? He loves the poorest. The woman of Samaria was quite as welcome to Christ as were those honorable women who ministered unto Him of their substance. "But I am so ignorant." Did you ever hear of Christ rejecting a disciple because he was ignorant? Did not that prove how necessary it was that he should become a learner? Does not Jesus receive just such scholars, and teach them wisdom? "Ah, but I am insignificant; nobody will care for me. I am unknown and unob-

served." What does that matter? Christ knows you, and it has pleased Him to choose the things that are not before the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. I know it is a common temptation of Satan to make men and women think, "Well, but there is something about my birth and rank which disqualifies me." Perhaps the individual was a child of shame, yet the meek and lowly Jesus will not be ashamed of him. It may be there are circumstances about the man's past life which are too disgraceful to be mentioned—but Jesus can blot it all out. Jesus cures not the whole, but the sick. And He calls to Himself not the righteous, but sinners. You may think yourself to be, in constitutional tendencies, one of the very worst of mortals, and you may even think it better not to have existed than to be such a wretched thing as you are, but I pray you fear not to come to Jesus, for He is "meek and lowly in heart," and He rejects no seeking soul. None are beneath Him—His love can descend lower than you have ever fallen—

"Buried in sorrow and in sin
At hell's dark door we lay.
But He descends in love divine,
And lifts us into day."

If you lie between the jaws of hell, Jesus can pluck you out! It is delightful to my soul to tell these glad tidings to you. The only sorrow I have is the thought that many of you do not take an interest in them. Even now I do not see about you the solemn attention I desire to see, and a trifling noise makes you turn your heads. O sirs, do you despise the heart of Jesus? Has His tender love no beauty in your eyes? Alas, if you knew how near the grave some of you are, and how precious His salvation is to those who possess it, I should have all eyes and ears, and hearts engrossed with such a subject as this. O sinners, sinners, there is never a sweeter word in all Scripture than this, "I am meek and lowly in heart." Nothing should charm you and encourage you more. Jesus, by these lips, speaks to you this morning, and says—"Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy-laden." Oh, may His Spirit lead you. Come and trust the Savior! Come and bow at His dear pierced feet! Come and take from His wounded hands the boundless mercies which He delights to give! Come and look into His face, for it beams with love, and accept Him as your Savior now! "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land." If you accept Him, and bow at His feet, He will save you now, and save you in the day of His coming. This is the first exhortation—an exhortation to sinners to come.

The second is an exhortation to *obey*—"Take My yoke upon you, for I am meek and lowly in heart." Oh, Christian people, this is for you. Obey Christ, for He is no tyrannical master. It is very easy to serve a man who is lowly and meek. It is very difficult, I should think, to be continually employed by a person who is too haughty to speak to you, whose commands are intolerant and who, if you do not fulfill them to the letter, will upbraid you in furious language. It must be hard to be a servant to a hard master. But, O, to serve Jesus is to serve one whose service is per-

fect freedom, who is ever lenient towards our faults, who forgives as soon as we offend, and if grieved by us, is only grieved because we injure ourselves. "Take My yoke upon you," He says, "for I am meek and lowly in heart." Who would not obey Jesus? Who would not wait upon so kind a prince? But I cannot dwell upon that, for time fails me. I need, however, a minute or two upon the third exhortation.

III. "*Learn* of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." I feel this is a lesson which I need to learn, and a lesson which most here present need to learn also, to be "MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART." To be meek! We are not all meek, and some of us who may appear to be meek, perhaps owe it rather to a softness of nature than to a sweetness of grace—the true meekness is that which grace gives. Matthew Henry says that there are only three men in the Bible whose faces are said to have shone—Moses, Jesus, and Stephen—and all these were meek men. God will not make angry men's faces shine—rather do they gather blackness. If anything can put a divine glow on a Christian's face, it is a readiness to forgive. If you are ready to forgive, you possess one of the sweetest beauties of the Redeemer's character. It is wonderful the power of meekness, if we would but believe it. There is, after all, no power in anger: "The wrath of man works not the righteousness of God." Stoop to conquer, submit to overcome. Holy Mr. Dodd, when reproving a degenerate, was assailed by him in his anger, and two of the good man's teeth were dashed out. When simply wiping the blood from his mouth, the man of God said, "And I will cheerfully allow you to knock out all the rest if you will but mind what I have said, and seek the salvation of your soul." His opponent felt that there was something in the good man which he did not possess, and he was won to a better mind. A woman who had before been a terrible shrew was converted. Her husband persecuted her cruelly for her religion, and one day, in his passion, he struck her on her face so as to knock her to the ground. When she simply rose and said, "But, my husband, if it would do you any good, and bring you to Christ, I would be willing to be struck again." "Woman," he said, "these religious people have made a wonderful change in you, or you would not have spoken so gently, go where you will from now on." Nothing conquers like meekness—not the meekness which is feigned, but real gentleness. Of all things in the world, I think the most foul and sickening is the pretense of forgiving a person when you are the individual who committed the offense. The sanctimonious pretence of meekness when you are justly upbraided is detestable. May God grant us grace to find peace by getting rid of anger, for only by meekness shall you find peace unto your souls. You cannot be at peace while you are harsh and severe, and ready to resent every trifling injury.

The other word is, "lowly in heart." Now this is one of the things every Christian ought to learn of Christ. Augustine was once asked what the most essential thing in religion was. I do not quite agree with his answer, but there was much truth in it. He said, "The first essential thing is humility, the second is humility, and the third is humility." There is more

than that essential, but at the same time, in a perfect Christian character, one of the rarest but at the same time one of the most precious pearls is humility. Quaint old Secker says, "The lowliest Christian is the loveliest Christian." A vessel that is empty lifts itself aloft. Go down to the Thames and see how it displays itself. The empty boat rides high exposing itself completely to view. It stands out of the water seeming to say to everybody, "Look at me! What a size I am!" But as soon as that vessel is filled, and has its cargo on board, its bulk sinks out of sight under the stream—it hides a great part of its hull in the water. A full man is a humble man; a proud man is an empty man. Conceit means weakness—lowliness of heart is strength. Jesus Christ, as I have shown, was strong, and yet meek. He was great, and yet lowly. Oh, that we might learn the lesson from Him, and be, "meek and lowly in heart!"

I have thus preached the gospel to the sinner, and bid him come and find rest; I have also preached Christ to the saint, and bid him find a yet further rest in imitating the character of his Lord. May God bless these words according to His own infinite love by His mighty Spirit, and His shall be the praise evermore. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 11.

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"THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED"
NO. 1106

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 13, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Why seek you the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke unto you when He was yet in Galilee." Luke 24:5, 6.

THE first day of the week commemorates the resurrection of Christ, and following apostolic example, we have made the first day of the week to be our Sabbath. Does not this intimate to us that the rest of our souls is to be found in the resurrection of our Savior? Is it not true that a clear understanding of the rising again of our Lord is, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the very surest means of bringing our minds into peace? To have a part in the resurrection of Christ is to enjoy that Sabbath which remains for the people of God. We who have believed in the risen Lord do enter into rest, even as He is resting at the right hand of the Father. In Him we rest because His work is finished, His resurrection being the pledge that He has perfected all that is necessary for the salvation of His people, and we are complete in Him. I trust, this morning, that some restful thoughts may, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be sown in the minds of believers while we make a pilgrimage to the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and see the place where the Lord lay.

I. And, first, this morning I will speak to you upon certain INSTRUCTIVE MEMORIES which gather around the place where Jesus slept "with the rich in His death." Though He is not there, He assuredly once was there, for, "He was crucified, dead, and buried." He was as dead as the dead now are, and though He could see no corruption, nor could be held by the bands of death beyond the predestined time, yet He was in very deed most assuredly dead. No light remained in His eyes, no life in His heart; thought had fled from His thorn-crowned brow, and speech from His golden mouth. He was not, in mere appearance, but in reality, dead—the spear-thrust decided that question once and for all. Therefore in the sepulcher they laid Him, a dead man, fit occupant of the silent tomb. Yet as He is not there now, but is risen, it is for us to search for memorials of His having been there. Not for the "holy sepulcher" will we contend with superstitious sectaries, but in spirit we will gather up the precious relics of the risen Redeemer.

First, He has left in the grave *the spices*. When He rose He did not bring away the costly aromatics in which His body had been wrapped, but He left them there. Joseph brought about one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, and the aroma remained. In the sweetest spiritual sense, our Lord Jesus has filled the grave with fragrance. It no longer

smells of corruption and foul decay, but we can sing with the poet of the sanctuary—

"Why should we tremble to convey
These bodies to the tomb?
There the dear flesh of Jesus lay,
And left a long perfume."

Yonder lowly bed in the earth is now perfumed with costly spices and decked with sweet flowers, for on its pillow the truest friend we have, once laid His holy head. We will not start back with horror from the chambers of the dead, for the Lord Himself has traversed them, and where He goes, no terror abides.

The Master also left His *grave clothes* behind Him. He did not rise from the tomb wrapped about with a winding-sheet. He did not wear the burial clothes of the tomb as the garments of life, but when Peter went into the sepulcher, he saw the grave clothes lying carefully folded. What if I say He left them to be the hangings of the royal bedchamber wherein His saints fall asleep? See how He has curtained our last bed! Our dormitory is no longer bare and drear, like a prison cell, but hung around with fair white linen, and comely tapestry—a chamber fit for the repose of princes of the blood! We will go to our last bedchamber in peace, because Christ has furnished it for us. Or if we change the metaphor, I may say that our Lord has left those grave clothes for us to look upon as pledges of His fellowship with us in our low estate, and reminders that as He has cast aside the death garments, even so shall we. He has risen from His couch, and left His sleeping robes behind Him in token that at our waking there are other vestures ready for us also. What if I again change the figure, and say that as we have seen old tattered flags hung up in cathedrals, and other national buildings as the memorials of defeated enemies, and victories won, so in the crypt where Jesus vanquished death, His grave clothes are hung up as the trophies of His victory over death, and as assurances to us that all His people shall be more than conquerors through Him that has loved them? "O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory?"

Then, carefully folded up and laid by itself, our Lord left *the napkin* that was about His head. Yonder lays that napkin now. The Lord needed it not when He came forth to life. You who mourn may use it as a handkerchief with which to dry your eyes. You widows, and you fatherless children—you mourning brothers, and you weeping sisters—and you, you Rachels, who will not be comforted because your children are not; here, take this which wrapped your Savior's face, and wipe your tears away forever. The Lord is risen indeed, and therefore thus says the Lord, "Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for they shall come again from the land of the enemy." "Your dead men shall live." O mourner—together with the Lord's dead body shall they arise. Why, sorrow not as they that are without hope, for if you believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so they, also, which sleep in Jesus will the Lord bring with Him.

What else has the risen Savior left behind Him? Our faith has learned to gather up memorials sweet from the couch of our Lord's tranquil slumber. Well, beloved, He left *angels* behind Him, and thus made the grave—

"A cell where angels use
To come and go with heavenly news."

Angels were not in the tomb before, but at His resurrection, they descended. One rolled away the stone, and others sat where the body of Jesus had lain. They were the personal attendants and bodyguard of the Great Prince, and therefore, they attended Him at His rising, keeping the doorway, and answering the inquiries of His friends. Angels are full of life and vigor, but they did not hesitate to assemble at the grave, gracing the resurrection even as flowers adorn the spring. I read not that our Master has ever recalled the angels from the sepulchers of His saints. And now, if believers die as poor as Lazarus, and as sick and as despised as he, angels shall convey their souls into the bosom of their Lord, and their bodies, too, shall be watched by guardian spirits, as surely as Michael kept the body of Moses and contended for it with the foe. Angels are both the servitors of living saints, and the custodians of their dust.

What else did our Well-beloved leave behind Him? He left *an open passage* from the tomb, for the stone was rolled away—doorless is that house of death. We shall, in our turn, if the Master comes not speedily, descend into the prison of the grave. What did I say?—I called it a "prison," but how can it be a prison, it has no bolts or bars! How can it be a prison that has not even a door to close upon its occupants? Our Samson has pulled up the posts, and carried away the gates of the grave with all their bars. The key is taken from the belt of death, and is held in the hands of the Prince of Life. The broken signal and the fainting watchmen are tokens that the dungeons of death can no more confine their captives. As Peter, when he was visited by the angel, found his chains fall off him, and iron gates opened to him of their own accord, so shall the saints find ready escape at the resurrection morning. They shall sleep for a while, each one in his resting place, but they shall rise readily, for the stone is rolled away. A mighty angel rolled away the stone, for it was very great, and when he had done the deed, he sat down upon the stone. His garment was white as snow, and his face like lightning, and as he sat on the stone he seemed to say to death and hell, "Roll it back again, if you can."

"Who shall rebuild for the tyrant his prison?
The scepter lies broken that fell from his hands;
His dominion is ended; the Lord is arisen!
The helpless shall soon be released from their bands."

One thing else I venture to mention as left by my Lord in His forsaken tomb. I visited, some few months ago, several of the large grave vaults which are to be found outside the gates of Rome. You enter a large square building, sunk in the earth, and descend by many steps, and as you descend, you observe on the four walls of the great chamber, innumerable little pigeonholes in which are the ashes of tens of thousands of

departed persons. Usually in front of each compartment prepared for the reception of the ashes stands *a lamp*. I have seen hundreds, if not thousands, of these lamps, but they are all unlit, and indeed, do not appear ever to have carried light; they shed no ray upon the darkness of death. But now our Lord has gone into the tomb and illuminated it with His presence—"The lamp of His love is our guide through the gloom." Jesus has brought life and immortality to light by the gospel. And now in the dovecotes where Christians nestle, there is light—yes, in every cemetery there is a light which shall burn through the watches of earth's night till the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, and the resurrection morn shall dawn.

So, then, the empty tomb of the Savior leaves us many sweet reflections which we will treasure up for our instruction.

II. Our text expressly speaks of VAIN SEARCHES—"Why seek you the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!"

There are places where seekers after Jesus should not expect to find Him, however diligent may be their search, however sincere their desire. You cannot find a man where he is not, and there are some spots where Christ never will be discovered. At this present moment I see many searching for Christ among the monuments of *ceremonialism,* or what Paul called, "The weak and beggarly elements," for they, "observe days and months, and times and years." Ever since our Lord arose, Judaism and every form of symbolic ceremony have become nothing better than sepulchers. The types were of God's own ordaining, but when the substance had come, the types became empty sepulchers, and nothing more. Since that time men have invented other symbols which have not the sanction of divine authority, and are only dead men's graves. At this present period the world has gone mad after its idols, deluded and deceived by those who have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Surely there never was a period, even when Rome was most dominant, in which men heaped unto themselves ceremonies at such a rate as at the present day. They have made Christianity to be a greater yoke of bondage than was Judaism—but in vain shall any sincere and awakened soul hope to find Jesus among these vain performances. You may stumble from one "holy day" to another, and from one "holy place" to another, and from one hocus-pocus to another, but you shall not find a Savior in any of them, for thus has He Himself declared, "Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem shall men worship the Father, but the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him." Jesus has torn the veil, and abolished ceremonial worship, and yet men seek to revive it, building up the sepulchers which the Lord has broken down. This day He repeats in our ears the warning, "Take good heed unto yourselves, for you saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spoke to you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire; lest you corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female." Yet certain men among us go about to set up the altars which our

godly forefathers broke down, and the work of reformers and of Protestants must now be done over again. God send us a Knox or a Luther with a mighty hammer to break in pieces the idols which the priests of Baal are setting up! They seek the living among the dead. Jesus is not in their "masses" and processions. He is risen far above such carnal worship. If He were a dead Christ, such a worship might, perchance, be a suitable pageant over His tomb; but to one who always lives, it must be insulting to present such materialistic service.

Alas, there are many others who are seeking Christ as their Savior among the tombs of moral *reformation*. Our Lord likened the Pharisees to whitewashed sepulchers—inwardly they were full of dead men's bones, but outwardly they were fairly garnished. Oh, the ways in which men, when they get uneasy about their souls, try to whitewash themselves. Some one gross sin is given up, not in heart, but only in appearance, and a certain virtue is cultivated, not in the soul, but only in the outward act—and thus they hope to be saved though they still remain enemies to God, lovers of sin, and greedy seekers after the wages of unrighteousness. They hope that the clean outside of the cup and the platter will satisfy the Most High, and that He will not be so severe as to look within and try their hearts. O, sirs, why do you seek the living among the dead? Many have sought peace for their consciences by their moral reforms—but if the Holy Spirit has truly convicted them of sin, they have soon found that they were looking for a living Christ amidst the tombs. He is not here, for He is risen. If Christ were dead, we might well say to you, "Go and do your best to be your own saviors," but while Christ is alive, He needs no help of yours—He will save you from top to bottom, or not at all. He will be Alpha and Omega to you, and if you put your hands upon His work and think in any way that you can help Him, you have dishonored His holy name, and He will have nothing to do with you. Seek not a living salvation among the sepulchers of outward formality.

Too many, also, are struggling to find the living Christ amidst the tombs which cluster so thickly at the foot of Sinai. They look for life by *the law,* whose ministry is death. Men think that they are to be saved by keeping God's commandments. They are to do their best, and they conceive that their sincere endeavors will be accepted, and they will thus save themselves. This self-righteous idea is diametrically opposed to the whole spirit of the gospel. The gospel is not for you who can save yourselves, but for those who are lost. If you can save yourselves, go and do it, but do not mock the Savior with your hypocritical prayers. Go and stumble among the tombs of ancient Israel, and perish as they did in the wilderness, for Moses and the law can never lead you into rest. The gospel is for sinners, who cannot keep the law for themselves, who have broken it and incurred its penalty and who know that they have done so, and confess it. For such, a living Savior has come that He may blot out their transgressions. Seek not salvation by the works of the law, for by them shall no flesh living be justified. By the law is the knowledge of sin and nothing more. Righteousness, peace, life, salvation come by faith in

the living Lord Jesus Christ, and by no other means. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved," but if you go about to establish your own righteousness, you shall surely perish because you have rejected the righteousness of Christ.

There are others who seek the living Jesus among the tombs by looking for something good in *human nature*—in their own natural hearts and dispositions. I can see you now, for I have known you a long time, and this has always been your folly—you will go into the morgue of your own nature, and say, "Is Jesus here?" Beloved, you are sad and depressed, and I do not wonder. Look at yonder dry bones and bleaching skeletons. See that heap of rottenness, that mass of corruption, that body of death—can you bear it? "Ah," you say, "I am a wretched man, indeed, but I long to find some good thing in my flesh!" O beloved, you search in vain. You might as well rake hell over to find heaven in it, as look into your own carnal nature to find consolation. Behold this day God has abandoned the old nature, and given it up to death. Under the old law, circumcision was the putting away of the filth of the flesh, as though after this filth were gone, the flesh might perhaps be bettered. But now, under the new covenant, we have a far deeper symbol, for "Know you not, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we, also, should walk in newness of life." The old man is buried as a dead thing out of which no good can come; "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that from now on we should not serve sin." God does not attempt to renew the old carnal mind, but to make us new creatures in Christ Jesus. If any man continually practices self-examination with a view to consolation, he might as well pile up blocks of ice with a view to burn down a city. If you are turning over your frames and feelings, your thoughts and imaginations, to discover comfort, you might far sooner hope to find precious diamonds in the sweepings of the roads. "He is not here," says the whole of our old nature. He is not here, He is risen! And for consolation you must look alone to Him, as He is enthroned above the skies.

Yet again, too many have tried to find Christ amidst the gloomy catacombs of the world's *philosophy*. For instance, on Sunday they like to have a sermon full of thought—thought being, in the modern meaning of it, something beyond, if not opposite to, the simple teaching of the Bible. If a man tells his people what he finds in the Scriptures, he is said to "talk platitudes." But if a man amuses his people with his own dreams, however opposed they may be to God's thoughts, he is a "thinking man," a "highly intellectual preacher." There are some who love, above all things, the rambling of daydreamers, and the crudities of skeptics. If they can hear what an infidel Professor has said against inspiration; if they can be indulged with the last new blasphemy, some hearers feel that they are making advances in that higher culture which is so much praised nowadays. But, believe me, the bat-haunted caves of false phi-

losophy and pretended science have been searched again and again, and salvation dwells not in them. In Paul's day there were Gnostics who tracked all the winding passages of vain-glorious learning, but they only discovered "another gospel which was not another." The world by wisdom knew not God. After roaming amid the dreary catacombs of philosophy, we come back to breathe the fresh air of the living Word, and concerning the mazes of science, we gasp out the sentence—"He is not there." Reason has not found Him in her deepest mining, or speculation in her highest soaring, though indeed, He is not far from any one of us. Athens has her unknown God, but in the simple gospel, God is known in the person of Jesus. Socrates and Plato hold up their candles, but Jesus is the sun. Our moderns quibble and dispute, and yet a living Christ is among us converting sinners, cheering saints, and glorifying God. If the Lord were a dead question for debate, philosophy might help us; but as He is a living power, a grain of faith in Him is better than mountains of philosophy. O you who know not the inner life and the quickening Spirit, what have you to do with the risen Lord? As well might corruption's world become the judge of cherubim, as you become the arbiters of the truth concerning Jesus our Lord!

How anxiously do I wish that you who have been searching for salvation in any of these directions would give up the hopeless task, and understand that Christ is near you—and if you, with the heart believe on Him, and with the mouth confess Him, you shall be saved. "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and beside Me there is none else." This is His cry to you. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Jesus is still living and able to save to the uttermost. All you have to do is simply turn the glance of your faith towards Him. By that faith He becomes yours, and you are saved. But oh, seek not the living among the dead, for He is risen.

III. We will again change our strain, and consider, in the third place, UNSUITABLE ABODES. The angels said to the women, "He is not here, but is risen." As much as to say, since He is alive He does not abide here. The living Christ might have sat down in the tomb—He might have made the sepulcher His resting place, but it would not have been appropriate. And so He teaches us today that Christians should dwell in places appropriate to them. You are risen in Christ, you ought not to dwell in the grave. I shall now speak to those who to all intents and purposes, live in the sepulcher though they are risen from the dead.

Some of these are excellent people, but their temperament, and perhaps their mistaken convictions of duty, leads them to be perpetually *gloomy and desponding*. They hope they have believed in Christ, but they are not sure. They trust that they are saved, but they would not be presumptuous enough to say so. They do not dare to be happy in the conviction that they are accepted in the Beloved. They love the mournful string of the harp; they mourn an absent God. They hope that the divine promises will be fulfilled; they trust that, perhaps, one of these days they

may come forth into light, and see a little of the brightness of the Lord's love—but now they are ready to quit; they dwell in the valley of the shadow of death, and their soul is sorely burdened.

Dear friend, do you think this is a proper condition for a Christian to be in? I am not going to deny your Christianity for a moment, for I have not half as much doubt about that as you have. I have a better opinion of you than you have of yourself. The most trembling believer in Jesus is saved, and your little faith will save you; but do you really think that Christ meant you to stay where you are, sitting in the cold and silent tomb amid the dust and ashes? Why stay underground? Why not come into the Master's garden where the flowers are breathing perfume? Why not enjoy the fresh light of full assurance, and the sweet breath of the Spirit's comforting influences? It was a madman who dwelt among the tombs—do not imitate him. Do not say I have been such a sinner that this is all I deserve to enjoy. If you talk of deserving, you have left the gospel altogether. I know you believe in Jesus, and you would not give up your hope for the entire world; you feel, after all, that He is a precious Christ to you. Come, then, rejoice in Him though you cannot rejoice in yourself. Come, beloved, come out of this dreary vault, and leave it at once! Though you have lain among the pots, yet now you shall be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. Your Master comes to you now, and says, "O my dove, that are in the clefts of the rocks, in the secret places of the stairs, let Me see your countenance, let Me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is comely."

Members of the body of a risen Savior, will you still lie in the grave? Arise and come away! Doubt no longer! O believer, what cause have you to doubt your God? Has He ever lied to you? Question no longer the power of the precious blood. Why should you doubt it? Is it not able to cleanse you from sin? No longer inquire as to whether you are saved or can be—if you believe, you are as safe as Christ is. You can no more perish than Christ can, if you are resting in Him—His word has pledged it, His honor is involved in it; He will surely bring you unto the promised rest! Therefore be glad. Why, I have known a brother live down in the catacombs and vaults so long that he has condemned his brethren for living in the sunlight, and has said, "I cannot understand a man speaking so confidently, I cannot understand it." My dear brother, because you cannot understand it, it is not, therefore, wrong. There is a great deal about eagles that owls do not understand. You that are always fretting and worrying in that way are sinning against God—you are grieving His Spirit! You are acting inconsistently with your Christian profession, and yet you judge others who believe God to be true and take Him at His Word, and therefore get joy and comfort out of His promise. Never do that, it would be wicked indeed, for you to set yourselves up as judges; instead, pray the Lord to lift up the light of His countenance upon you, to give you joy and peace in believing, for this He says, "Rejoice in the Lord you righteous, and shout for joy all you that are upright in heart." Come

out of the tomb, dear brother and sister, for Jesus is not there, and if He is not there, why should you be? He is risen. O rise into comfort, too, in His Spirit's power.

Another sort of people, seem, to dwell among the tombs—I mean Christians—and I trust real Christians. They are very, very worldly. It is no sin for a man to be diligent in business, but it is a grievous fault when diligence in business destroys fervency in spirit, and when there is no serving of God in daily life. A Christian should be diligent so as to provide things honest in the sight of all men, but there are some who are not content with this. They have enough, but they covet more, and when they have more, they still stretch their arms like seas to grasp in all the shore, and their main thought is not God, but gold—not Christ, but wealth. O brethren, brethren, permit me earnestly to rebuke you lest you receive a severe rebuke in providence in your own souls. Christ is not here! He dwells not in piles of silver. You may be very rich, and yet not find Christ in it at all—and you might be poor, and yet if Christ were with you, you would be happy as the angels. He is not here, He is risen! A marble tomb could not hold Him, nor could a golden tomb have contained Him. Let it not contain you. Unwrap the grave clothes of your heart—cast all your cares on God who cares for you. Let your conversation be in heaven. Set not your affection on things on the earth, but set it upon things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

Once more on this point, a subject more grievous still—there are some professors who live in the house of *sin.* Yet they say that they are Christ's people. No, I will not say they live in it, but they do what, perhaps, is worse—they go to sin to find their pleasures. I suppose we may judge of a man more by where he finds his pleasure, than by almost anything else. A man may say, "I do not habitually frequent the gaieties of the world; I am not always found where sin is mixed with mirth, and where worldlings dance upon the verge of hell; but I do go there now and then for a special treat." I cannot help quoting the remark of Rowland Hill, who, when he met with a professor who went to the theater—a member of his church—said to him, "I understand you attend the theater." "No," he said, "I only go for a treat now and then." "Ah," said Mr. Hill, "that makes it all the worse. Suppose that somebody said, 'Mr. Hill is a strange being, he eats carrion,' and I am asked, 'Is it true, Mr. Hill, that you live on carrion?' 'No, I do not habitually eat carrion, but I have a dish of it now and then just for a treat.' Why, you would think I was nastier than I would have been if I had eaten it ordinarily." There is much force in the remark. If anything that verges on the unclean and lascivious is a treat to you, why then, your very heart is unclean, and you are seeking your pleasure and comfort among the dead. There are some things that men take pleasure in nowadays that are only fit to make idiots laugh, or else to cause angels to weep. Do be particular, Christian men and women, in your company. You are brothers to Christ; will you consort with the sons of Belial? You are heirs of perfection in Christ; you are, even now, arrayed in spotless linen, and you are fair and lovely in the sight of God—

you are a royal priesthood, you are the elect of mankind; will you trail your garments in the mire, and make yourselves the sport of the Philistines? Will you consort with the beggarly children of the world? No, act according to your pedigree and your newborn nature, and never seek the living among the dead. Jesus was never there. Go not there yourselves He loved not the noise and turmoil of the world's pleasures; He had meat to eat of another kind. God grant you to feel the resurrection life strong within your spirits.

IV. But I pass on from that. In the fourth place, I want to warn you against UNREASONABLE SERVICES. Those good people to whom the angels said, "He is not here, but is risen," were bearing a load, and what were they carrying? What is Joanna carrying and her servants? And Mary, what is she carrying? Why, white linen; and what else? Pounds of spices, the most precious they could buy. What are they going to do? Ah, if an angel could laugh, I think he must have smiled as he found they were coming to embalm Christ. "Why He is not here and, what is more, He is not dead. He does not need any embalming, He is alive." You might have seen all over England, on Good Friday, and also on this Easter Sunday, crowds of people—I have no doubt very sincere people, coming to embalm Christ. They tolled a bell because He was dead, and they hung crepe over what they call their "altars" because He was dead, and they fasted and sung sad hymns over their dead Savior. I bless the Lord my Redeemer is not dead—and I have no bells to toll for Him, either. He is risen, He is not here! Here they come, crowds of them with their white linen, and their precious spices to wrap up a dead Christ. Are they mad? But they say, "We were only acting it over again." Oh, was that it? Practical charades, was it? Acting the glorious atonement of Calvary as a play! Then I accuse the performers of blasphemy before the throne of the eternal God who hears my words! I charge them with profanity in daring to rehearse in mimicry that which was once done and done forever, and is never to be repeated. No, I cannot suppose they meant to mimic the great Sacrifice, and, therefore, I conclude that they thought their Savior to be dead. And so they said, "Toll the bells for Him! Kneel down and weep before His image on a cross." If I believed Jesus Christ died on Good Friday, I would feast all day long because His death is over! As He has ordained the high festival of the Lord's Supper to be His commemoration, I would follow His bidding and keep no fast. Who would sit down and whine over a friend once dead, if you know Him to be restored to life, and exalted in power? Why toll a bell for a living friend? However, I condemn not the good people any more than the angels condemned those holy women, only they may take their spices home, and their white linen too, for Jesus is alive and does not need them.

In other ways a great many fussy people do the same thing. See how they come forward in defense of the gospel. It has been discovered by geology and by arithmetic, that Moses was wrong. Straightway many go out to defend Jesus Christ. They argue for the gospel, and apologize for it, as if it were now a little out of date, and we must try to bring it round to suit

modern discoveries and the philosophies of the present period. That seems to me exactly like coming up with your linen and precious spices to wrap Him in. Take them away. I question whether Butler and Paley have not, both of them, created more infidels than they ever cured—and whether most of the defenses of the gospel are not sheer impertinences. The gospel does not need defending. If Jesus Christ is not alive, and cannot fight His own battles, then Christianity is in a hopeless case. But He is, and we have only to preach His gospel in all its naked simplicity, and the power that goes with it will be the evidence of its divinity. No other evidence will ever convince mankind. Apologies and defenses are well intended, no doubt—so was the embalming well intended by these good women, but they are of small value. Give Christ room, give His preachers space, and opportunities to preach the gospel, and let the truth be brought out in simple language, and you will soon hear the Master say, "Take away the spices, take away the linen! I am alive, I do not need these."

We see the same kind of thing in other good people who are sticklers for old-fashioned, stereotyped ways—they must have everything conducted exactly as it used to be conducted 100 or 200 years ago. Puritan order must be maintained, and there must be no divergence and the way of putting the gospel must be exactly the same way in which it was put by good old Dr. So-and-So; and in the pulpit there must be the most awful dreariness that can possibly be compassed! And the preacher must be devoutly dull, and all the worship must be serenely proper—lots of spices and fine linen to wrap a dead Christ up in. I delight to break down conventional proprieties. It is a grand thing to put one's foot right through merely human regulations—life cannot be strapped down by regulations fit only for the dead. Death lies wrapped up like a mummy in the museum—it will always do the proper thing, or rather won't do anything at all. But life, real life, will show itself unexpected ways. Life will say what death could not say; it will break out where it was not expected and break all your laws and regulations into a thousand pieces.

But still I see the good people holding up their hands in horror, and crying out, "Bring here the Arabian gum, the myrrh, and the aloes; bring here the linen—we must take care of our dear, dead Master." Leave Him alone! Leave Him alone, man! He is alive, and does not need your wrapping up. I do not hesitate to say that a great deal of church order among Dissenters and Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and all sorts of denominations—and a great deal of propriety and decorum, and regulation, and, "As-it-was-in-the-beginning-is-now-and-ever-shall-be-isms"—are only so much spices and linen for a dead Christ. And Christ is alive, and what is needed is to give Him room! I do not say this for my own sake—am I not always proper? But I say it for the sake of earnest brother Evangelists who, in preaching to the poor, use extravagance of language, and perhaps of action. Let them use it. Scoffers say they are histrionic. Was ever anybody ever half as histrionic as Ezekiel? Did not all the prophets do strange things to get the attention of the people? Why, the same charge

was brought against Whitefield and Wesley—"These people are breaking through all rules," and so on. What a blessed thing it is when men can do it! Mr. Hill went to Scotland to preach the gospel, and they said he rode on the back of all order and decorum. Then said he, "I will call my pair of horses by those names, and make it true." It was true! No doubt he did ride on the back of order and decorum, but then he drew souls to Christ with those two strange steeds, and his breaking through rules enabled him to get at men and women who never would have been got at in any other way. Be ready to set Christ at liberty and give His servants liberty to serve Him as the Spirit of God shall guide them.

V. I wanted to speak, last of all, upon THE AMAZING NEWS which these good women received—"He is not here, but He is risen!" This was amazing news to His enemies. They said, "We have killed Him; we have put Him in the tomb; it is all over with Him." Aha! Scribe, Pharisee, Priest! What have you done? Your work is all undone, for He is risen! It was amazing news for Satan. He, no doubt, dreamed that he had destroyed the Savior—but He is risen! What a thrill went through all the regions of hell! What news it was for the grave! Now it was utterly destroyed, and Death had lost his sting! What news it was for trembling saints. "He is risen, indeed." They plucked up courage, and they said, "The good cause is still the right one, and it will conquer, for our Christ is still alive as its head." It was good news for sinners. Yes, it is good news for every sinner here. Christ is alive! If you seek Him, He will be found of you. He is not a dead Christ to whom I point you today. He is risen! And He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. There is no better news for sad men, for distressed, desponding, and despairing men than this—the Savior lives—able still, to save, and willing to receive you to His tender heart. This was glad news, beloved, for all the angels, and all the spirits in heaven, glad news indeed for them. And this day it shall be glad news to us, and we will live in the power of it by the help of His Spirit! And we will tell it to our brethren, that they may rejoice with us, and we will not despair any longer. We will give way no more to doubts and fears, but we will say to one another, "He is risen indeed: therefore let our hearts be glad." The Lord bless you, and in coming to His table, as I trust many of His people will come, let us meet our risen Master. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 24.

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A CALL TO WORSHIP
NO. 1107

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 20, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts: I will go also." Zechariah 8:21.

THIS prophecy may relate to the Jews, literally, and it is referred to by their learned doctors as to the days of the Messiah. We also believe that it refers to the days of the Messiah, and we look for times when again the Holy Land shall be fully inhabited, and the people shall rejoice to meet together to worship the Lord their God. We do not see, however, that this prophecy has yet been accomplished, and we look for it to be fulfilled in the latter days. Spiritually it teaches just this, that when God returns to bless His church, there are certain signs and marks of His return. Just as the coming back of the sun when he advances north of the Equator, and again cheers us with his warmth, is marked by the springing up of flowers, and the singing of birds, so the return of God's Holy Spirit to bless His church is marked by certain signs and tokens. The text tells us what those signs and tokens are, but before I mention them, let me suggest that every believer should pray that these cheering indications may be manifest in our midst—that in these, our days, the Lord may return unto His Jerusalem, and be jealous for her with a great jealousy; that we may see glad seasons such as our fathers have told us of, which happened in their days, and in the olden times before them. As far as shall lie in the ability of any one of us, may we help towards such revivals by our prayers, by our efforts, and by our consistent obedience to the gospel. And may the Lord visit us according to the desire of our hearts.

I. One of the first signs of God's presence among a people is that THEY TAKE GREAT INTEREST IN DIVINE WORSHIP. "The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts." It is clear from this, that they no longer despise assemblies for worship, and no longer count divine service to be weariness. On the contrary, they begin to value the means of grace, and desire to make good use of them.

The first solemn assembly mentioned here is *the prayer meeting,* and certainly one of the surest tokens of a visitation of God's Spirit to a community is their delighting to meet for prayer. The first cry of the people mentioned in our text was, "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord." It is no statement of mine, suggested by unreasonable zeal, but it is the re-

sult of long-continued observation when I assert that the condition of a church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. If the spirit of prayer is not with the people, the minister may preach like an angel, but he cannot expect success. If there is not the spirit of prayer in a church, there may be wealth, there may be talent, there may be a measure of effort, there may be extensive machinery, but the Lord is not there. It is a sure evidence of the presence of God that men pray, as the rising of the thermometer is an evidence of the increase of the temperature. As the Nilometer measures the rising of the water in the Nile, and so foretells the amount of harvest in Egypt, so is the prayer meeting a "graceometer," and from it we may judge of the amount of divine working among a people. If God is near a church, it must pray, and if He is not there, one of the first tokens of His absence will be slothfulness in prayer.

God's people, by their saying one to another, "Let us go speedily to pray," manifest that they have a sense of their needs. They feel that they need much, much that nature cannot yield them. They feel their need of divine grace, their need of quickening, and their need of God's help if sinners are to be converted. They feel their need of His help if even those who are saved are to be steadfast, their need of the Holy Spirit that they may grow in grace and glorify God. He who never prays surely does not know his own needs, and how can he be taught of the Lord at all? God's people are a people sensible of their needs, and therefore the absence of a sense of poverty is a sad token.

Moreover, the love which God's people have for prayer shows their desire after heavenly things. Those who frequently meet together for persistent, wrestling prayer, practically show that they desire to see the Lord's Kingdom come. They are not so taken up with their own business that they cannot afford time to think of God's business. They are not so occupied with the world's pleasures, that they take no pleasure in the things of God. Believers in a right state of heart value the prosperity of the church, and seeing that it can only be promoted by God's own hand, they cry mightily unto the Lord of hosts to stretch out His hand of mercy, and to be favorable to His church and cause. Church members who never pray for the good of the church have no love for it. If they do not plead for sinners, they have no love for the Savior, and how can they be truly converted persons? Such as habitually forsake the assembling of themselves together for prayer may well suspect the genuine character of their piety. I am not, of course, alluding to those who are debarred by circumstances, but I allude to those who, from frivolous excuses, absent themselves from the praying assemblies. How dwells the love of God in them? Are they not dead branches of the vine? May they not expect to be taken away before long?

Earnest meetings for prayer not only prove our sense of need, and our desire for spiritual blessings, but they manifest most practically our faith

in the living God, and our belief that He hears prayer. For, men will not continue in supplication if they do not believe that God hears them. Sensible men would soon cease their prayers if they were not convinced that there is an ear which hears their petitions. Who would persevere in a vain exercise? Our united prayers prove that we know that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. We know that the Lord is able to work according to our desires, and that He is willing to be entreated of us. I have never known a thirsty man by a well who would not use the bucket which was there ready to hand, unless he was of the opinion that the well was dry. I have never known a man who wanted wealth, and had a good trade, who would not exercise his trade. And so I have never known a man who believed prayer to be really effectual, and felt his great needs, who did not engage in prayer. It is an ill token to any community of Christians when prayer is at a low ebb, for it is clear evidence that they do not know their own needs, they are not anxious about spiritual things, and neither do they believe that God will enrich them in answer to their petitions. Beloved, may we never, as a church, deserve censure for neglecting prayer. Our meetings for prayer have excited general astonishment by their number, but they are not all they might be. I shall put it to the conscience of each one to say whether you are as prayerful as you should be. Did you ever hear of a church member who had not attended a prayer meeting for a month? Do you know of church members who never assemble with the brethren so much as once in a quarter of a year? Do you know of any who have not been to a prayer meeting in this place for the last six months? Do you know such? I will not say I know any such. I will do no more than hint that such people may exist. But if you know them, will you give them my Christian love, and say that nothing depresses the pastor's spirit like the absence of church members from the public assemblies of prayer. And that, if anything could make him strong in the Lord and give him courage to go forward in the Lord's work, it would be if all of you were to make the prayer meeting your special delight. I shall be satisfied when I see our prayer meetings as crowded as the services for preaching. And it strikes me if ever we are fully baptized into God's Spirit, we shall arrive at that point. A vastly larger amount of prayer ought to be among us than at present, and if the Lord visits us graciously, He will set us praying without ceasing.

But next, these people also took an interest in meetings for instruction. I find that the Chaldee translates the second sentence, "Let us seek the doctrine of Jehovah of Hosts." The Lord's coming near to any people will be sure to excite in them a longing to hear the Word. God sends impulses of inquiry over men's minds, and suddenly places of worship become crowded which were half empty before. Preachers also, who were cold and dead, become quickened, and speak with earnestness and life. No doubt waves of religious movement pass over nations and peoples,

and when God comes to a people, the crest of that wave will be seen in this form: the kingdom of heaven becomes an object of interest, and men press unto it.

During the revival under John the Baptist, the people went in crowds into the wilderness to hear the strange preacher who bade them repent. The revival under the apostles was marked by their everywhere preaching the Word, and the people listening. This was the great token of the Reformation—meetings were held under Gospel Oaks, out upon the commons, and away in lone houses, and in glens and woods men thronged to listen to the Word of God. The professionals of popery were forsaken for the simple preaching of the truth. This also marked the last grand revival of religion in our own country under Whitefield and Wesley. The Word of the Lord was precious in those days, and whether the gospel was preached among the colliers of Kingswood, or the rabble of Kennington Common, tens of thousands were awakened and rejoiced in the joyful notes of free grace. Men loved to hear the Word—they said to one another, "Let us seek the Lord." It is said that Moorfields would be full of light on a dark winter's morning at five o'clock when Mr. Whitefield was to preach, because so many people would be finding their way to the rendezvous, each one carrying a lantern. And so also over there in Zoar Street, in Southwark, when Mr. John Bunyan was out of prison, and was going to preach, a couple of thousand would be assembled at five o'clock in the morning to enjoy his honest testimony. It is a token for good when people press to hear the Word. I think we have in a measure the first token—a love for prayer, but we need far more of it. As for the second token, namely, an earnest love for listening to the Word of God, we have that in abundance. See you not how the crowds rush in like a mighty torrent as soon as the doors are open?

Putting the two together, it seems that both these forms of meeting were loved by the people because they sought salvation therein, or as the margin has it, they "entreated the face of the Lord." They came to pray with a view to be saved. They came to hear preaching with a view to divine favor. They wanted reconciliation with God; they had wandered from Him, but now they sought Him. They wanted fellowship with God. They had said to God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Your ways." But now they said, "Reveal Yourself unto us, O God, as You do not unto the world." They longed to promote God's glory, even as before they dishonored Him. Yes, when prayer meetings and preaching meetings shall be attended with this end and objective—that we may get near to God, and that we may glorify God—there shall be happy days for us. Master Fox in his, "Acts and Monuments," speaking of the time when the Reformation was breaking out, uses language something to this effect—"It was lovely to see their travels, earnest seeking, burning zeal, Bible reading, watching, sweet assemblies, resort of one neighbor to another for conference and mutual confirmation." And, he adds, "All which may

make us now to blush for shame in these, our days, of free profession." We may take the good man's hint and feel shame for neglected opportunities, cold devotions, and disregard of the Word of God. Our fathers loved to meet for prayer, and to hear the preaching of the truth. And when they came together, it was with an intensely earnest desire to obtain the divine blessing. To get this they risked life and liberty, meeting, even, when fine and imprisonment, or perhaps the gallows might be their reward. O to see the same earnestness among ourselves as to the means of grace! May the Lord Jesus send it to us by the working of His Holy Spirit.

II. Another sign of God's visiting a people in mercy is that THEY STIR EACH OTHER UP TO ATTEND THE MEANS OF GRACE, for "The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord." That is to say, they did not merely ask one another to go if they casually met; they did not bring in the subject accidentally if they could do so readily in common conversation—but the inhabitants of one city went to another on purpose to exhort them. They made a journey about it. As men go to market, from town to town, so, did these people try to open a market for Christ, and not only one messenger, but many of the inhabitants of one city went on purpose all the way to another city, with set design, to induce them to join in worship, saying, "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord." They put themselves out of the way to do it. They had such a desire that great numbers might come together to worship the Most High, that they took much trouble to invite their neighbors. God will be with us, indeed, if each one of us shall be anxious to bring others to Jesus, and to that end shall try to bring them to listen to the Word of God.

Why were these men so earnest? The reply will be, they persuaded others to come to the meetings for worship out of love to God's house, to God's cause, and to God Himself. God's house is honored and beautified when great numbers come together. The ways of Zion do mourn and languish when but few assemble for prayer. Christ has promised to be where two or three are met together in His name, but still, it is not helpful to comfortable fellowship for a mere handful to meet in a large house. We feel like sparrows alone on the housetop when such is the case. A great space and only a sprinkling of people to occupy it, is like a big barn with only one bundle of straw in it—the winds howl in and out of it very miserably. I am sure if any of you attend a place of worship where there are very few beside yourselves, you must feel unhappy, and if you do not, why surely your hearts cannot be in the right place. Warm hearts are not easily kept alive among empty pews. A coal must be very lively to burn alone, but many glowing coals laid together help to keep each other alight.

No one can doubt, moreover, that full houses give opportunity to the preacher to glorify God. It is hopeful work to throw the net where there

are great shoals of fish. Where men are hearing, we may hope that God will be blessing, and therefore earnest Christians love to see the aisles and seats crowded. Besides, God is glorified when great numbers come together with earnest minds to celebrate His worship. In early days, in the Jewish Church, the men of Israel did not come by twos and threes and meet together in scant numbers, but from all parts of Judea's land—north, south, east, and west, they came together in companies, singing through the glades of the forest, singing through the dells, and singing over the hills. And when they reached the city of Jerusalem in their hundreds of thousands, their praise was a great shout, like the voice of thunder, and the smoke of their sacrifices rose up in clouds to Heaven. Those were grand days. Does not David seem to relish the service of the Lord his God all the more because of the multitude that kept holy day? Therefore the saints love to see many come to pray and to listen to the Word, because the multitude honors the house, and God thus honors God Himself. O brethren, we think the cause is sadly declining when hearers are like the gleanings of the vintage, when service time comes and sees vacant seats by the score because professors shrink at the weather, or hunt up an excuse for staying at home, being too idle, too indifferent to cross the threshold of their houses unless some eloquent preacher or fresh comer shall attract them. But we reckon that God's cause prospers when the people come joyfully in their bands to listen to the truth, and God's Spirit applies it to their hearts with power, leading them to prayer and praise.

Moreover, believers love to bring others to the House of God because they wish to do good for them. Did you ever notice how the little birds, when they find a heap of corn, begin to chatter and twitter as if they would call all the other birds to come and feast? Grace is generous, and is never akin to churlish Nabal. Misers would gladly keep all their wealth to themselves, but a man who is rich in faith feels his happiness increased when others have faith too. As soon as we drink of the water of life, a sacred instinct within us bids us cry, "Come." "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come you to the waters." He knows not the grace of God who has no desire that others should know it also. You will assuredly long for the souls of others if God has saved your soul. Natural humanity, let alone our alliance to the divine nature, leads us to bid others come to Christ.

Besides, the love of company in the Christian makes him invite his neighbors to gospel worship. Believers are like sheep in this among other things, namely, that they are gregarious. A man who loves to keep his religion to himself must surely be a stranger to the religion of Christ. Communion is one of the sweetest joys of the spirit. Fellowship with saints above will be one jewel of our everlasting crown, and fellowship with saints below is one of the sweetest cordials of our mortal cares. "I went to the House of God in company," says David, as if it made the house so much the sweeter to go in company with others who went

there. "I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the House of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day." For the sake of communion we long to see many going upon the heavenly pilgrimage.

Observe in our text there does not appear to have been any minister or missionary employed to go from one city to another, and to say, "Let us go and pray," but the inhabitants, themselves, undertook the duty of invitation and persuasion, and said, "Let us go and pray unto the Lord." The people, themselves, attended to mutual provocation to love and to good works. How I wish they did so now! They did not wait for the exhortations of one specially set apart to be a prompter and an organizer, but their own hearts were so warm that they did it spontaneously among themselves. My brethren may you thus be pastors to one another. There are far too many of you for me to look after personally, therefore I pray you stir one another up to every good word and work. I believe that when a man stirs others up it is good for him, for a man cannot, in common decency, be very cold, who bids others be warm. He cannot, surely, unless he is an arrant hypocrite, be negligent of those duties which he bids others attend to. Beloved, I commit this charge to you, and then I have done with this point. This morning I ask you to visit one another and to say, "Come, let us not as a church lose the presence of God after nearly 20 years' enjoyment of it; let not our minister's hands grow weak by our neglect of prayer. Let not the work of the church, flag through our indifference, but let us make a brotherly covenant that we will go speedily to pray before the Lord and seek the Lord of Hosts, that we may retain His presence, and have yet more of it, to the praise of the glory of His grace."

III. I must pass on to notice that it appears from our text that it is a sure mark of God's visiting a people, when THEY ARE URGENT TO ATTEND UPON THESE HOLY EXERCISES AT ONCE. The text says, "Let us go *speedily* to pray," by which is meant, I suppose, that when the time came to pray, they were punctual; they were not laggards; they did not come into the assembly late; they did not drop in, one by one, long after the service had begun, but they said, "Let us go *speedily."* They looked up to their clocks and said, "How long will it take us to walk so as to be there at the commencement? Let us start five minutes before that time, lest we should not be able to keep up the pace, and should, by any means, reach the door after the first prayer." I wish late comers would remember David's choice. You remember what part he wished to take in the House of God? He was willing to be a doorkeeper, and that not because the doorkeeper has the most comfortable berth, for that is the hardest post a man can choose, but he knew that doorkeepers are the first in, and the last out, and so David wished to be first at the service, and the last at the going away. How few would be of David's mind! It has been said that Dissenters in years gone by placed the clock outside the meeting house so that they might never enter late. But the modern Dis-

senters place the clock inside, so that their preachers may not keep them too long. There is some truth in the remark, but it is not to our honor. This was, however, a fault with our forefathers, for quaint old Herbert said—

"O be drest,
Stay not for th' other pin:
Why you have lost
A joy for it is worth worlds."

Let us mend our ways and say, one to another, in the language of the text, "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord." Let us go with quick feet. If we go slowly to market, let us go quickly to prayer meeting. If we are slow on week days, let us go quickly on the Sabbath. Let us never keep Jesus Christ waiting, but we shall do so if we are not on time, for He is sure to be punctual, even if only two or three are met together in His name.

The expression, however, means more than this. "Let us go speedily," means, let us go heartily—do not let us crawl to prayer, but let us go to it as men who have something before them which attracts them. When the angels serve God, they never do it as though they were half asleep. They are all alive and burning like flames of fire. They have six wings, and I guarantee you, they use them all. When the Lord says, "Gabriel, go upon My bidding," he outstrips the lightning. O, to exhibit some such ardor and zest in the service of God. If we pray, let us pray as if we mean it. If we worship, let us worship with our hearts. "Let us go speedily," and may the Lord make our hearts to be like the chariots of Amminadib for swiftness and rapidity—glowing wheels and burning axles may God give to our spirits, that we may never let the world think we are indifferent to the love of Jesus. "Let us go speedily."

The words, "Let us go speedily," mean, let us go at once, or instantly. If any good thing has been neglected, and we resolve to attend to it better, let us do it at once. Revivals of religion—when is the best time for them? Directly! When is the best time to repent of sin? Today! When is the best time for a cold heart to grow warm? Today! When is the season for a sluggish Christian to be industrious? Today! When is the period for a backslider to return? Today! When is the time for one who has crawled along the road to heaven to mend his pace? Today! Is it not always today? And, indeed, when should it be? "Tomorrow," you say. Ah, but you may never have it. And when it comes, it will still be today. Tomorrow is only in the fool's almanac—it exists nowhere else. Today! Today, let us go speedily. I beseech the Church of God here to be yet more alive, and at once to wake up. Time is flying—we cannot afford to lose it. The devil is wide awake, why should we be asleep? Error is stalking through the land; evil influences are abroad everywhere; men are dying; hell is filling; the grave is gorged and yet is insatiable—and the man of destruction is not yet satisfied. Shall we lie down in wicked satisfaction, yielding to

base laziness? Awake, arise, you Christians! Now, even now, lest it be said of you, "Curse you Meroz, says the Lord, curse you bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

I know we are all apt to think that we live in the most important era of history, and I admit that under certain aspects every day is a crisis, but I claim liberty to say that there never was a period in the world's history when Christian activity, and prayerfulness, and genuine revival were more needed than just now. Where is our nation? Is it not on the very verge of becoming, once again, a province of the Pope's dominion? Are not the modern Pharisees compassing sea and land to make proselytes? Does it not seem as if the people were gone mad about their idols, and were altogether fascinated by the charms of the whore of Babylon, and drunken with her cup? Do you not see everywhere the old orthodox faith forsaken, and men occupying Christian pulpits that do not believe, but even denounce the doctrines which they have sworn to defend? Might I not say of Christendom in England, that "Her whole head is sick and her whole heart faint"? The daughter of Zion staggers in the street for weakness. There is none to help her among all her sons. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies. Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper. Her Nazarites were purer than snow, and their separation from the world was known of all men; but now they are defiled with worldliness until they are blacker than coal. From the daughter of Zion her beauty is departed. O you that love her, let your hearts sound as a harp for her! O you that love her, weep day and night for her hypocrisy, for unless the Lord returns unto her, the time of her sore distress draws near. Thus says the Lord, "Arise, cry out in the night season, pour out your hearts like water before the Lord, and then the Lord will return and be gracious to His inheritance."

IV. For a moment I shall call your attention to another point. When God visits a people, they will not only attend to prayer and preaching, and stir each other up to do so at once, but THEY WILL HAVE A SPECIAL EYE TO GOD IN THESE DUTIES. Observe, they shall say, "Let us go speedily to pray *before the Lord,* and to *seek the Lord of hosts."* Alas, many go to religious meetings to be seen of men. I am afraid there is a great deal too much exhibition of dress in some quarters, and there certainly cannot be a greater abomination than to make the house of God a show room for our finery. Jesus might say, "Take these things away. It is written My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it an exhibition wherein to display yourselves." Some go to worship because it is the custom, and it would not be respectable to stay away. "We must have a pew in church, you know, or we should be remarked upon in society." I am glad that people attend divine worship for any reason, but mere custom is a poor motive, and is no sign of grace. The people in the text did not say, "We will go that we may see our neighbors, and that our

neighbors may see us." No, they went to "pray before the Lord." They did not assemble to seek a man. They did not go to hear Mr. So-and-So preach. Of course they would sooner hear one who preached the entire gospel, and preached it plainly, than another who preached half the gospel, and fired over their heads. But, still, they looked through the man, to the man's Master, and they did not think that the Master was tied up to any one man. May we cultivate in our midst the desire to worship for God's sake, not for the preacher's sake, whoever he may be. I believe it is not wrong for a Christian to feel that he is better fed by one minister than by another, and therefore to be most glad when God's servant is in the pulpit. But if that feeling grows so that if he cannot hear his favorite preacher he will stay at home, it is most mischievous. I thank God that my Master has other preachers besides Paul. There is Apollos, there is Cephas, and beyond these I see a great company of them that publish the good news. I will hear what God will speak through them.

I would have you note, beloved, how different is my text from that formal worship into which it is so easy to fall. "I have been to the prayer meeting. I have done my duty, and I can go home satisfied. I have taken a seat at the tabernacle, and listened to two sermons on Sunday—I feel I have done my duty." Oh, dear hearer! That is a poor way of living. I need a great deal more than all that, or I shall be wretched. At the prayer meeting I must see God. I must pour out my soul before Him. I must feel that the spirit of prayer has been there, and that I have participated in it, otherwise what was the good of my being there? I must, when in the assembly on the Sabbath day, find some blessing to my own soul. I must get another glimpse of the Savior. I must come to be somewhat more like He. I must feel my sin rebuked, or my flagging graces revived. I must feel that God has been blessing poor sinners, and bringing them to Christ. I must feel, indeed, that I have come into contact with God, or else what is my Sunday worth, and what is my having been in the assembly worth? If God shall bless you, indeed, you will worship spiritually, and you will count nothing to be true worship which is not of the spirit, and of the heart and soul. May God quicken us all up to that point, and He shall have the praise.

V. The last thing is this—it is a blessed sign of God's visiting a people when EACH ONE OF THEM IS PERSONALLY RESOLVED THAT HE WILL, IN A SPIRITUAL MANNER, WAIT UPON GOD. Notice the last four words. *"I will go also."* "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts: *I will go also."* That is the point—"I will go also." The Christian should neither be content, when he goes to worship, to leave others behind, nor should he be content to drive others before him, and stay behind himself. It is said of Julius Caesar that he owed his victories to the fact that he never said to his soldiers, "Go," but always said, "Let us go." That is the way to win. Example is mightier than precept. We read of the Pharisees of old that they laid burdens on other men's shoul-

ders, but they did not touch them with one of their fingers—true Christians are not so. They say, "I will go also." Was not that bravely spoken of poor old Latimer, when he was to be burnt with Ridley. Ridley was a younger and stronger man, and as he walked to the stake, old Latimer, with his quaintness about him to the last, cried to his brother, Ridley, "Have after, as fast as my poor old legs can carry me." The dear old saint was marching to his burning as fast as he could—not at all loath to lay his aged body upon the altar for his Lord. That is the kind of man who makes others into men—the man who habitually says, "I will go also, even if I am called to be burned for Christ. Whatever is to be done or suffered, I will go also." I would be ashamed to stand here and say to you, "Brethren, pray! Brethren, preach! Brethren, work," and then be an idler myself. And you, also, would be ashamed to say to others, "Let us pray. Let us be earnest," while you are not praying, and not earnest yourselves. Example is the backbone of instruction. Be what you would have others be, and do what you would have others do.

"I will go also," because I need to pray as much as anybody else. I will go to hear the Word, for I need to hear it as well as others. I will go and wait upon God, for I need to see His face. I will cry to Him for a blessing, for I need a blessing. I will confess my sin before Him, for I am full of sin. I will ask mercy through the precious blood of Jesus, for I must have it or perish. "I will go also." If nobody else will go, I will go; and if all the rest go, I will go also. I do not want to pledge any of you this morning. I shall not, therefore, ask you to hold up your hands, but I should like to put it very personally to all the members of this church. We have enjoyed the presence and blessing of God for many years in a very remarkable manner, and it is not taken from us. But I am jealous; I believe it is a godly jealousy, and not unbelief—lest there should be among us slackness in prayer, and a lack of zeal for the glory of God, and a neglecting of the souls of our neighbors, and ceasing to believe to the full in our mission, and in the call of God to be each one of us, in this world as Christ was saviors of others. My brethren, knit together as we are in church fellowship, and bound by common cords to one blessed Master, let each one say within himself, "I will go also. The church shall be the subject of my prayer. The minister shall share in my petitions. The Sunday school shall not be forgotten. The College shall be remembered in supplication. The Orphanage shall have my heart's petitions. I will plead with God for the evangelists. I will consider the congregation at the Tabernacle, and pray that it may gently melt into the church; I will pray for the strangers who fill the aisles and crowd the pews that God will bless them. Yes, I will say unto God this day, 'My God, You have saved me, given me a part and lot among Your people, and put me in Your garden where Your people grow and flourish. I will not be a barren tree, but abound in fruit, especially in prayer. If I cannot do anything else, I can pray. If this is my one mite, I will put that into the treasury. I will put You in remembrance, and plead

with You, and give You no rest until You establish Your cause, and make it praise in the earth.'" I am not asking more of you than Jesus would ask, nor do I exact anything at your hands—you will cheerfully render that which is a tribute due to the infinite love of your Lord. Now, do not say, dear brother, "I hope the church will wake up." Leave it alone, and mind that you wake up yourself. Do not say, "I hope they will be stirred up this morning." Never mind others! Stir up yourself. Begin to inquire, "Which prayer meeting shall I go to, for I mean to join the people of God, and let them hear my voice, or at least have my presence. And if I cannot go to the Tabernacle, I will drop in near my own house. And if there is no meeting there, I will open my own house—the largest room of my cottage shall be used for a prayer meeting—or my parlor if I have one. I will have a share in the glorious work of attracting a blessing from the skies. I will send up my electric rod of prayer into the clouds of blessing to bring down the divine force."

Do it! Do it! Let each one say, "I will go also." May God bless this word to His people, and I am sure it will result in benediction to sinners. For remember, you ungodly ones, that all this noise is about you. What we need the blessing of God for is that you may be saved. We cannot bear that you should remain as you are, unconverted. And I am asking God's people to pray especially with an eye to your salvation. Shall *we* think about your souls, and will you not think about them yourselves? Are we inclined to move heaven and earth that you might be saved, and will you sit still and perish? May the Lord awaken you to say, "If others are going to pray unto the Lord, and seek His face, I will go also," and the Lord bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ZECHARIAH 8.

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"As far as the east is from the west, so far has
He removed our transgressions from us."
Psalm 103:12.

WE shall aim at no novelty tonight, nor shall we try to serve up the old Truths of God in any new and attractive forms. Upon your tables you always require bread, and generally you account salt to be indispensable; some kinds of food are presented to us over and over again, and it would foretell ill for our health if they were not always relished. It was an evil lusting which made Israel tire of the manna; an Israelite in his right mind found it to be still a dainty, though he ate of it every day of his 40 years' pilgrimage. Who tires of the green grass of the fields, the light of the sun, or the air we breathe? These things are always fresh and new, and always necessary. The Doctrine of Forgiving Love is one of those necessities of daily life concerning which it may be affirmed that if we should set them before you every day we should not be guilty of vain repetition. None need fear of tiring man, or vexing God's Spirit by harping too much on this string! Therefore we come to our favorite theme tonight. To speak of the great Gospel Truth of the forgiveness of sin in the simplest manner we possibly can is the purpose we have immediately in view. To babes, to young men and women, and to fathers and mothers in Christ, this all-important Truth will be equally precious, while the poor trembling sinner who cannot yet claim to be one of the sacred family may be encouraged by it. Our Text has in it a word of peculiarity, and to this I call your attention at the outset. It is not every man in the world that could truly use the language of this verse, for it does not refer to all mankind—"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

A people separated and set apart, a people upon whom there has been a peculiar world of Divine Power, a people whose experience of the Grace of God towards them has melted their hearts with devout gratitude; such as these can sing this joyous stanza; but no one else. I will describe these people to you. I should gather from the 9th verse that they are a people who have been made truly, deeply, painfully conscious that they are sinful, and have felt the chidings of God in their conscience—therefore it is that they say, "He will not always chide." They know that God is angry with sin; they have felt some biting of that wrath upon their spirit, and they have been humbled into contrition, repentance, and confession;

therefore do they now say, "Neither will He keep His anger forever." They are a people who have keenly realized the desperate condition they were reduced to; who know that if forgiven, it must be through Divine Mercy and through Mercy only. They know that they have no claim upon God; they understand that they deserve to be cast away from His Presence; therefore they say, "He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." They are a people who have tasted of that surprising Mercy which baffles all human thought, and excites the adoring wonder of all who contemplate this darling Attribute of the Most High. They have gone to Jesus, in whom the Mercy of God is treasured up; they have believed in Him, and they have received Mercy through Him, for Mercy comes to men through the Atoning Sacrifice of Jesus Christ!

And having tasted of that Mercy, they say, "As the Heaven is high above the earth, so great is His Mercy toward them that fear Him." Then they go on to sing, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Oh, priceless gift! Oh, matchless blessing! Say now, out of this vast throng, how many of us have been made to feel that sin is sinful, to loathe it, and to confess it with bitterness of heart? How many of us have fled to the great Atoning Sacrifice, and have believed in Jesus to the saving of our souls? So many may repeat this verse, and affirm it of themselves, with truth, but no more. Separate yourselves, then—let the force of conscience now be exercised, and let this Text be to you, for a moment, like the Throne of Jesus before which He exercises the prerogatives of His Gospel Sovereignty, and divides the sinners from the saints, making men either tremble or rejoice! Our Text has a word of positiveness; in this song the Psalmist speaks of the pardon of sin as a positive fact; he celebrates it in grateful strains as a matter of certainty to himself and to others associated with him. David was an optimist of the right sort; ifs and perhapses would not suit him. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." He does not indulge in fond hopes, or express vague wishes, or point in hesitant tones to some favorable omens—he speaks of his sins being forgiven, knowing it to be a matter of *fact* which there was no room to question!

Now there are many professing Christians who do not think that you ever can know that you are forgiven while you remain in this world; they are not of this mind merely because they are ignorant of the Gospel, but because *their* gospel is beclouded with errors! Their teachers throw dust into their eyes, or envelope them in mist; they see men as trees walking, and no more. They are brought up in orthodox fashion to repeat a mournful litany, and to call themselves, "miserable sinners," in stereotyped phrases; they are taught to go on forever asking for pardon as if they had never received it; they are made to look upon themselves as still needing to be dealt with as lost sheep, and reconciled as rebels. Their

standing is always at the foot of Sinai! They are not taught that the Lord has forgiven us all our trespasses; their church, as if to chasten it for its alliance with the State, has lost the jubilant tone of faith, and made its daily service rather a wail for sinners than a song for saints!

Now the Gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that there is pardon; that we may have it, and that when we believe in Jesus, we have obtained full remission—*that we are pardoned when we believe in Jesus*—and that our iniquities are forgiven us! It is a matter signed, sealed, and delivered! It is a fact accomplished before the Lord and infallibly ascertainable by us! Sin is put away; though we shall never be in such a condition, here, that we shall not have need to confess daily sin, for new sins will rise, yet, at the same time, the moment we believe in Jesus, no condemnation is upon us, nor ever can be! "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." We are forgiven! Pardon is a fact; a fact most certain in the history of Believers; there is nothing more sure to them than this, that they are certainly forgiven inasmuch as they have believed in Jesus Christ! I know there are many professed Christians who shrink with morbid apprehension from claiming this great act of God's Love as a benefit which they really enjoy. They venture to *hope* it may be so, but they dare not speak with confidence of their own pardon! This, to their view, would be presumption; but is it not far more presumptuous to pay so much respect to your *own* misgivings, as to totally ignore the blessedness of knowing that you are *forgiven?* Is it not awful presumption to settle down as so many do while their eternal state is a matter of question to them? Do you tell me that you do not know whether you are forgiven? Why, Sir, you are, indeed, in a wretched bewilderment! You do not know if you were to die at this moment whether you would be in Heaven or Hell! How dare you sit in comfort in that seat? Dare you go to your bed in doubt about whether you are saved or not? How can you sleep? It seems to me to be profane presumption for a man to dare to be at peace till he is sure about his reconciliation to God. The presumption lies in settling on your lees, in resting short of the inheritance, and in saying, "Peace, peace" to one's soul, when you know not that you are a saved man! Oh, I beseech you, if you have any doubts, do not play with them! Do not trifle with your soul's affairs! This is a matter about which there should be no doubt whatever! No man would like to have a doubt as to whether there is a thief in the house when he goes to his bed at night!

You would not like to be in doubt as to whether a mortal disease is upon you; you are anxious to be sure of your safety and your health—will you not desire to be as sure about your *soul's safety,* and the health of your inner nature? Surely you ought to be! But can a man be sure? Yes, assuredly. See right here—the best evidence in all the world is the Witness of God, who cannot lie! Any number of men in the world bearing witness to a thing can never be equal to the Testimony of God! What He

says none may dare to question; God's Witness is much more reliable, and has much more weight in it than the most exact observations, and the most delicate inferences that can be drawn from them. Suppose I can see a thing with my eyes. Men say, "Seeing is believing"; yes, but eyes deceive, as everybody knows! There are many things we think we see which we do not see, after all. Eyes may deceive—God's Witness, therefore, is better than the sight of our eyes. "But surely," says one, "feeling will not deceive you." Alas, there is nothing in the world more deceptive as to a man's state than his *feelings!* Those who are worst will often imagine themselves to be best, and some of the best of God's children have often felt in their humiliation as though they were the worst. I say, *God's Witness* is to be preferred above our feelings, our eyesight, or the witness of men! What does God say? He says, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Do I believe in Jesus? Have I been obedient to the other part of the Command? God says I shall be saved, and therefore I shall be, despite all the devices of Satan, despite all the sins I ever have committed or shall commit, despite anything and everything, however unlooked for which may occur in time to come—for God's Witness must be true! "Let God be true, and every man a liar." God says it! "He that believes in Him is not condemned." Have I believed in Him, then? To believe is to trust—have I trusted my soul with Jesus? Yes, yes, I am sure of that; then I am equally sure that I am not condemned; equally sure that sin is forgiven, because as sure as I possess faith, so sure is it that, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us."

Who wants better evidence than God's Word? O, we may live on it! We may die on it! And we may stand before the Judgment Seat with it as our strong consolation! God has spoken it, and His Word cannot be impugned, or His Counsel invalidated! But because we sometimes are troubled and vexed within, there is another assurance which God is pleased to give to His children. Over and above His written Word, He gives them the *inward* witness. The man who has believed in Jesus feels a deep peace in his soul. "Jesus died for me," he says. "Then if Jesus died in my place, my sin is put away; God will not be so unjust or inconsistent as to punish me for the sin for which He put Christ, my Substitute, to grief. If Jesus suffered in my place, I shall not suffer! It is not *just*, that two should suffer for the same sin; the Believer, knowing this, finds satisfaction, smells a savor of rest, and feels peace. O, what a peace! Believe me, there is nothing like it in this world; it is the Peace of God which passes all understanding—a peace like that which rules amid angelic thrones! Then, in the midst of that deep calm, the Holy Spirit comes down like the dove brooding over the waters, the calm and quiet waters of the Believer's soul, and bears Witness with the man's own spirit that he is born of God! The man's own spirit bears witness in the peace it feels; then God's Spirit comes and sets a seal, and the man knows and is persuaded by the Witness of God in the Word, and the Living Witness of God in his soul, that

as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed his transgressions from him!

Some of us remember the very day and hour wherein our sins were put away, and can look back to the date and call it our spiritual birthday. It shall be to us the beginning of days, even as was that day in which Israel came out of Egypt. And others, who have not so distinct a recollection of the time; yet as they look to yonder Cross, and see the Incarnate God bleeding on it, feel that their transgressions are blotted out, and as they look, they get a renewed assurance of complete absolution. There are some, I know, who think it best always to gaze upon their Crucified Lord, as if they had never before looked upon Him; they stand and hug the Cross, kiss those bleeding feet, look up to that dear face bedewed with drops of grief, and that dear brow crowned with thorns, and say, "You are my Savior! Dear Lover of my soul, I rest in You; your pierced side yields for me my pardon; Your death is my life; Your life in Heaven is the guarantee of my immortality." O happy they who can so stand at the foot of the Cross and always feel that as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed their transgressions! None can sing so heartily and joyfully the high praises of God—

"Since I have found a Savior's Love,
To Him my hopes are clinging;
I feel so happy all the time
My heart is always singing!
A Light I never knew before
Around my path is breaking,
And cheerful songs of grateful praise
My raptured soul is making.
I feel like singing all the time,
I have no thought of sadness;
When Jesus washed my sins away
He turned my heart to gladness!"

Now, Brothers and Sisters, as we return to our Text, I would have you notice the comprehensiveness of it; I do not find any list of sins here; all I find about sin is contained in these two words, "our transgressions." I am not skillful in matters of common law, but I remember hearing a lawyer make this remark about a man's will, that if he were about to leave all his property to some one person, it would be better not to make a recapitulation of all that he had, but merely to state that he bequeathed all to his legatee, without giving a list of the goods and chattels, because in making out the catalog, he would be pretty sure to leave out something, and that which he left out might be claimed by someone else. He even gave us an instance of a farmer, who, in recounting the property he left to his wife, intending her to have had all, actually omitted to mention his largest farm, and the very house in which they lived. Thus his attempt to be very particular failed, and his wife lost a large part of the property. We do not need too many particulars, and I am thankful that in this verse

there is a broad way of speaking which takes in the whole compass of enumeration. "He has removed our transgressions." That sweeps them away all at once—"our transgressions." If it had said "our *great* transgressions," we would have been crying out, "How about the little ones?" We would have been afraid of perishing by our lesser faults, even if the huge crimes were pardoned! Suppose it had said "Our transgressions against the Law"? "Oh, but," we would have asked, "What shall we do with our transgressions against the Gospel?" Suppose it had said, "Our willful transgressions"? That would have been very gracious, but we would have said, "Ah, but what will become of our sins of ignorance?" Suppose it had said, "Our transgressions before we were converted"? Then we would have exclaimed, "Ah, but how shall we escape from our sins *since* our conversion?"

But here it is—"Our transgressions"—He has removed them all, all, ALL! From the cradle to the tomb; they are all gone! Sins in private and sins in public! Sins of thought, word, deed—they are all removed! The moment you believe in Jesus, they are all, all, all gone! I cannot help giving you a picture I have sketched before, when Miriam the Prophetess, Aaron's sister, with her timbrel in her hand went forth, the women of Israel following her, dancing by the Red Sea. As they looked over the dark waters of that mighty sea, there could not be discovered the crest of a single Egyptian captain; not one solitary horse straggling for its life, nor a chariot, nor a banner, nor any implement of war; not one solitary champion that had borne arms! Therefore she struck the timbrel, and the damsels sounded it out aloud—"The depths have covered them; there is not one of them left—not one! Not one! Not one! Not one of them left!" I think I hear their song; I think I see their feet twinkling like stars as they dance forth their joy and Jehovah's praise—"There is not one, not one, not one of them left!" Even thus do I look upon Jesus' precious atoning blood, and think of all my sins and yours, my Brothers and Sisters, who have believed in Him, and I shout with equal, if not greater joy, "The depths have covered them! There is not one, not one of them left! He has removed our transgressions from us." "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." Another thing which claims special note in the Text is the perfection—the absolute perfection of the pardon. The Text says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Can anybody tell how far the east is from the west? You begin to calculate, perhaps, upon the surface of the globe, but I say, "No, not so; the east is farther off than any distance you can travel on this globe; look to yon sun." Then you begin to measure within the bounds of the solar system towards the east. But I say, "No. The solar system is but a speck in the universe; I must have larger measurement than that." "We will measure space, then," says one. Space? What do you mean by that? Do you mean all that has ever been seen by the telescope of the astronomer when he has gazed at night upon the Milky Way? Ah,

but that is only a corner of boundless space! I must have the *infinite* measured, and you shall go that way with your line to the east, and I will go this way with my line to the west—and you shall tell me how far the two are asunder. Why, the interval is boundless! It means an infinite distance!

Now God has taken His people's sins away from them to an infinite distance, that is to say, there is no fear that their sins should ever return to them; they are gone, gone, gone, completely gone! I do not know how it is, but some of our friends of a certain school of theology believe that after men are pardoned, they may yet go to Hell. I will never quarrel with them about that doctrine; if it gives them any comfort, they are welcome to it. It does not seem to me worthy of a God, or even of a man! Poor is that pardon which may yet be followed by eternal torment! If God has pardoned His people, surely no fresh proceedings can be opened, no subsequent indictment preferred against them! "Who lays anything to the charge of God's elect?" "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." I have heard of the Duke of Alva pardoning a man, and then hanging him; but I do not believe God ever trifles thus, with His Mercy. If He has pardoned my soul, then I am saved! If He has done it once, He has done it forever! He has removed my transgressions not a little way, but, "As far as the east is from the west." I think that means just this, that the pardon of our sin is so complete that when a man is pardoned he never can be punished for his sin—not in any measure or degree; he becomes a child of God, and as a child, he may be chastened, but he will never have to stand before God as his Judge and be called to account for those sins, for they are not—they do not exist! "Strong language," you say. I say it again, they do not exist, for Jesus Christ has "finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness."

What does that mean? "Made an end of sin"? Why, it means what it says, and sin is made an end of! No soul, then, for whom Jesus bled, who has believed in Jesus, being Redeemed from sin, can ever be punished for his sin before the bar of Divine Justice! Christ has been punished for him, and his sins are gone. "But, though not punished for sin, may not a man suffer some disadvantage? If God will not send me to Hell, yet, at any rate, it may be He will not love me as much because I have been a sinner. He will not treat me as if I had never fallen." Yes, but when God wipes out sin, He puts away all the *consequences* of sin. "But do we not feel the consequences in our bodies?" Yes, assuredly, but it is for a season only, and for loving reasons; our mortal bodies are doomed to death, and they are full of pain, sometimes, but they shall not always be so. Our bodies shall rise again, and there shall be no detriment through sin upon those bodies! They will be just as glorious as they would have been had God made them perfect in the Garden of Eden! They will be even more so, for they shall be fashioned like the glorious

body of our Lord Jesus! But upon that I will not stay; at this day God loves us, and He will love us forever; He loves us infinitely, and He could not love us more than that if we had never fallen! At this time, in Christ Jesus, we are brought near; I will say it—as near as if we had never sinned, yes, and nearer! I do not see how, if we had never sinned, we could have been as near as we now are, for had we never sinned, there would never have been a Mediator, and Jesus might never have been, "Immanuel, God with us." But now we poor sinners have One who is our Brother, who is very God of very God, even Christ, the Son of Mary, and yet the Son of Jehovah!

This is a wonderful nearness which God has given us! We are made His children; we are made to come into His immediate Presence, and to taste of His Love! Our sins are so effectually removed that we shall not ultimately suffer any loss or damage through having sinned; that detriment was laid on Christ; His was the loss—ours is the gain. His was the tremendous suffering—ours is the unutterable joy!—

"Your blood, not nine, O Christ,
Your blood so freely spilt,
Has blanched my blackest stain
And purged away my guilt!
Your Righteousness
My soul does beautify,
Wrapped in that glorious robe
Your Father I draw near."

And, dear Brothers and Sisters, this is also what the Lord means when He tells us He has put sin away "as far as the east is from the west." He means that He has forgotten it! Can God forget? Well, we speak of the Nature of God, sometimes, after the manner of men, and rightly so if we adopt those forms of Revelation which have been vouchsafed to us. We rightly regard everything as in His remembrance, because He dwells in all ages, and everything is present with Him; and yet if He tells us He forgets, we may not venture to disbelieve Him. But I do not inquire just now what our conceptions of God may be; enough that we should cordially receive what He would have us believe. Here is a Text—"Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more forever." That is God's own assertion! He knows His own memory, and He has put it so. Let me repeat those words; they melt my own heart while I speak them, and therefore I hope every child of God will feel the sweetness of them. What inconceivable Love! What force, what pathos, what Grace there is in every syllable!—"And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more forever." O, blessings, blessings on His dear name for such a Word as that!

Has He not said, "I have blotted out, like a cloud, your transgressions"? Has He not said, in another place, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool"? That is, they shall *vanish as colors fade*—they shall *disappear* and shall no longer exist! These are glorious Truths of

God. I want every child of God to endeavor to realize the fact that at this very moment his sins are gone—effectually, completely, perfectly gone; through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ! Beloved, there is in the Text a ray of Divinity full of hope to us—"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." *God* is the great Remover of sin! There are some who, when they feel the guilt of sin weighing heavily on their conscience, go to a priest, and ask him to remove the burden. The theory they act upon is that the priest is ordained of God, and has received power from the Most High to declare and pronounce absolution in God's name. They think it too great a thing for God Himself to deal personally with men, and therefore, He employs some ordained person to speak in His name. Now, I have no doubt that there are many persons who get a good deal of comfort from the declaration of the priest that they are forgiven; I cannot understand how they can be so wretchedly duped, but I suppose the manner of administering a "sacrament" may be so imposing as to stifle any inquiry into the prerogative which the "Father Confessor" pretends to exercise!

And yet I know, on the other hand, that there are some who, after they have obtained that kind of absolution, are not as comfortable as they expected to be; they feel somehow or other as if it did not quite meet the case. Perhaps such a person may have dropped in here; you want to know that your sin is forgiven by a greater authority than the lips of any mortal can impart. O may the Lord Himself put away your sins and your heart will know it, and be at rest! To some people these scruples will cause the most agitation just when they looked for the most tranquility; and if they are God's people, and God is working in their hearts, I am sure of this—that 50,000 priests could never give them an assurance that could make them feel true peace or heart's ease! They would still be disquieted, still be troubled, even if Bishops and Popes should pronounce them absolved! God's Voice, alone, can still the tempest of their souls! See how the Romanist is pursuing phantoms all the while that he is following the directions of his church, and observing her laborious ordinances; he never reaches the goal of peace! He can never be free from anxiety in life, or apprehension in death because his church never speaks to him of perfection through the one Sacrifice offered once and for all. And when he dies, he does not know where he may go; he conceives himself to be really forgiven, after a sacerdotal fashion, but he is not so divinely pardoned but that he has to go to "Purgatory" for a time, to be purged from spots which still remain! He is never certain where he is with regard to the bar of Divine Justice. His pardon, at the best, is not worth having as a guarantee of Heaven; in most cases the most religious Papist only goes to "Purgatory," a place which certain of their ablest writers say is so cold on one side that they are all frozen like the inhabitants of the arctic regions; and then the victims are tossed to the other side, which is so extremely hot that it is as though they were being baked

alive! So they are tossed about from one side to another till sin is either frozen or dried out of them; this is a fine prospect for good religious Romanists! The statements of Romish theologians as to the purgatorial regions are even more grim and terrible, for in some such imaginary place the remainder of sin is to be put away!

But, Beloved we have it in the Text that God is to remove our transgressions! O what a removal is that! Hands off, you priests; you are too feeble for such weights as ours! Our sins are too stupendous for your puny strength, but the Lord comes with His own right hand of majesty, puts away our sins, and lifts them on to Christ—and Christ comes and flings them into His sepulcher, and they are gone and buried forever—"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."—

"He seized our dreadful load, our guilt sustained;
And heaved the mountain from a guilty world."

Our transgressions were against the Lord our God; to Him, therefore, belongs the right to pardon them! These transgressions had done dishonor to His Holy Name; He has a right, if He wills, to put them away if He can do so without tarnishing His Glory. By the Substitution of Jesus, Justice is satisfied, and God Himself blots out our sins! And here is the beauty of it—since the Lord has removed our transgressions from us, the thing is done completely, and it is done forever and forever! What a man does, he may undo; you know how some men are like children—they will give a thing, and take a thing back, and so play fast and loose with you; they will speak well of you today, and say, "Yes, they forgive," but they cannot forget! They remember again tomorrow, revive their old resentments, and in their anger, call up again past grievances! Not so, our God. "I am Jehovah! I change not," says the Lord, "therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." When God removes transgression, the work is so done that it never shall be undone—certainly not by Him, and if not by Him, who, then, can do it? My Brothers and Sisters, what consolations you have since you have believed in Jesus! I pray you feast upon them, and be satisfied to the fullest!

Our Text also has in it a touch of personality for each one of us. I was pondering upon this passage the other day, and it came to me with a peculiar sweetness—not on account of any of the thoughts I have given you, but on account of this: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from"—himself [David]? Yes, that is true, but it is "from *us,"* from *us*. And this was what passed through my mind—then my sins are gone away from me, from me! Here am I, fretting that I am not what I should be, and groaning, and crying before God about a thousand things; but for all that, there is no sin upon me for, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." From us the sins have gone! From us, as well as from His eyes; from His Book, and from His Memory—they have gone from us.

"But I committed them," says one. Ah, that you did! Your sins were yours, yours with a vengeance! It was like that fiery tunic which Hercules put on, which he could not tear off; let him do what he might, but which ate into his flesh and bones. Such were your sins; you could not tear them off! But God has taken them off, every one of them, if you have believed in Jesus. And where is that tunic of fire now, which would have devoured you forever? Where is it? You shall search for it, but it shall not be found, no, it shall not be, says the Lord. It is gone away from you! I sometimes see Believers troubling themselves as if all their sins were laid up in an iron safe in some part of the Lord's house. It is not so! It is not so!

They are fretting as though somewhere or other there were a horde of sins in ambush which would accuse them, and bear witness against them before God's bar, and so they would be condemned after all. It is not so! It is not so! They are all gone! They are all gone. Satan may stand and howl for accusers and say, "Come, gather together, and accuse the child of God!" And you may tremblingly fear that they will come, and therefore you will put on your filthy garments, and come in before God, and stand there like a poor wretched criminal about to be tried. But what does Jesus say when He comes into the court? He says, "Take away his filthy garments from him! What right has he to put them on, for I have taken them away from him long ago by My Substitution? Take them off! Set a fair miter on his head; this is one whom I have loved and cleansed—why does he stand in the place of condemnation when he is not condemned, and cannot be condemned, for there is now no condemnation since I have died?"

Ah, we many times go down into the hold of the vessel, and there we lie among the baggage, and our doubts and fears fasten down the hatches, and there we are—half stifled; when we might as well come up upon the quarter deck and walk there, full of delight and peace! We are moaning and fretting ourselves, and all about what does not really exist! I saw two men yesterday, handcuffed and marched to the carriage to be taken off to prison; they could not move their wrists. But suppose I had walked behind them, with my wrists close together, and had never opened my hands, nor stirred them, and said, "Alas! I committed, years ago, some wrong, and have handcuffs put upon me"? You would naturally say, "Well, but are they not taken off?" And I reply, "Yes, I have heard they are, but somehow, through habit, I go about as if I had them on." Would not everybody say of me, "Why, that man must be insane!"? Now you, child of God, once had the handcuffs on—your sins were upon you, but Jesus Christ took them off! When you believed in Him, He broke all your fetters, and now they are not there. Why do you go about trembling and saying, "I fear! I am afraid!" What do you fear? What do you fear? Are you a Believer, and afraid of your old sins? You are afraid of foes which do not exist! Your sins are so gone that they cannot be laid to your charge;

do you not believe this? Can you not rise to something like the true estimate of your position? You are not only pardoned, but you are a child of God! Go to your Father with joy and thankfulness, and bless Him for all His Love to you! Wipe those tears away, smooth those wrinkles from your brow, take up the song of joy and gladness, and say with the Apostle Paul, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies; who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Be glad in the Lord, you pardoned ones!—

"Shout, Believer, to your God!
He has once the winepress trod.
Peace procured by blood Divine,
Cancell'd all your sins and mine!
In your Surety you are free,
His dear hands were pierced for thee;
With His spotless vesture on,
Holy as the Holy One!
Oh the heights and depths of Grace!
Shining with meridian blaze;
Here the saved records show
Sinners black, but comely too."

As for you who have never received that pardon, does not the mention of it make you long for it, cry for it, and beg for it? O that you would, above all, *believe* for it, for it is to be had by you. The guiltiest of the guilty shall have forgiveness if they believe in Jesus! Whoever among you will trust in the Crucified Savior shall be pardoned this night! The moment you trust Him you shall have a full acquittal for all your sins and crimes! Yes, all transgressions, and you shall sing, as our poet Kent does—

"Here's pardon for transgressions past,
It matters not how black their cast!
And O my Soul, with wonder view,
For sins to come here's pardon too!"

God be praised! Let His Word be believed! Let His name be trusted, and then He shall be praised! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 103.

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THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD
NO. 1109

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 27, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"You are the light of the world."
Matthew 5:14.

THIS title had been given by the Jews to certain of their eminent Rabbis. With great pomp they spoke of Rabbi Judah, or Rabbi Jochanan, as the lamps of the universe, the lights of the world. It must have sounded strange in the ears of the Scribes and Pharisees, to hear that same title, in all soberness, applied to a few bronzed-faced and rough-handed peasants and fishermen, who had become disciples of Jesus. Jesus, in effect, said, "Not the Rabbis, not the Scribes, not the assembled Sanhedrim, but you, My humble followers, you are the light of the world." He gave them this title, not after He had educated them for three years, but at almost the outset of His ministry, and from this I gather that the title was given them, not so much on account of what they knew, as on account of what they were. Not their knowledge, but their character made them the light of the world. They were not yet fully trained in His spiritual school, and yet He says to them, "You are the light of the world," the fact being that wherever there is faith in Christ, there is light, for our Lord has said, "I am come a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not walk in darkness." "The entrance of Your Word gives light." Genuine faith in Christ turns a man from darkness to marvelous light, and transforms him into "Light in the Lord"—his aims and objectives, his desires, his speech, his actions become full of divine light, which illuminates all the chambers of his soul, and then pours forth from the windows so as to be seen of men. The believer is appointed to be a lighthouse to others, a cheering lamp, and a guiding star. It is true that his light will be increased as he learns more of Christ. He will be able to impart more instruction to others when he has received more. But even while he is yet a beginner, his faith in Jesus is in itself, a light. Men see his good works even before they discover his knowledge. The man of faith who aims at holiness is a light of the world, even though his knowledge may be very limited, and his experience that of a babe. I mention this at the outset in order that every Christian may see the application of the text to himself. It is not spoken to the apostles, or to ministers, exclusively, but to the entire body of the faithful—"You are the light of the world." You humble men and women whose usefulness will be confined to your cottages, or to your workshops, you whose voices will never be heard in the streets, whose speech will only be eloquent in the ears of those who gather by your firesides, you, even you, noiseless and unobserved as your lives will be—you are the true light of the world. Not only the men whose learned

volumes load our shelves, not only the men whose thundering tones startle the nations, or who, with busy care for God's glory, compass sea and land to find subjects for the kingdom of Jesus, but you, each one of you, who are humbly resting upon the Savior, and lovingly carrying out your high vocation as the children of God and followers of his dear Son.

Let us never forget that light must first be imparted to us, or it can never go forth from us. We are not lights of the world by nature; at best we are but lamps unlit until the Spirit of God comes. Inquire, therefore, my hearer, of yourself whether God has ever kindled you by the flame of His Spirit. Have you been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into light? Has the immortal flame of the divine life touched you? If so, you have light in yourself, and light towards others and your light will work effectually in many ways. It will reveal the darkness of those who are round about you. Your light will show the darkness how dark it is. Even as Christ's life judged upon the men of His age, so does the faith of Christians expose the evils of unbelief, and the holiness of believers reveals the wickedness of sin. Our light also reproves the deeds of darkness, and condemns them. Even though we were never to use a severe word, a godly life would be a stern rebuke of sin. Therefore it comes to pass that we must expect to be opposed, for "He that does evil fears the light." The world does not understand us, "For the light shines in darkness, and the darkness understands it not." And, therefore, it misrepresents us, and rages against us. In a certain sense the saints are, day by day, the judges of mankind. They avoid all censoriousness, for they know who has said, "Judge not, that you be not judged," but unconsciously to themselves their godly, holy, and devout lives accuse and condemn the wicked. And the Spirit of God, through them, full often convicts the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment.

The believer's light makes manifest great and important truths. We are light-bearers by bearing testimony to the Lord Jesus and His divine gospel. "You are My witnesses says the Lord." We have believed, and therefore speak; we have felt the healing power of the gospel, and therefore we proclaim it. It is the great objective of our lives to make known the gospel of Christ in every place, holding forth the Word of God, in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves, and laboring to enlighten every man as to the things which make for his peace. In this way we become instruments of comfort, for as light chases away gloom, and it is a pleasant thing to behold the sun, so are believers the gladdeners of the world. The wilderness and the solitary places are glad for them. Those who sit in the region of the shadow of death rejoice that to them light is brought by means of believers; when they come to the dying sons of men in the power of the Spirit their feet are beautiful upon the mountains, for they publish salvation. Saints are sons of consolation, lamps which cheer the night. Their light is a guiding light which leads wanderers to the place of rest, and a saving light, for it manifests Jesus to sinners. See your calling, my brethren, admire it, be humbled that you have not fulfilled it better, and ask for grace that, as the lights in the world, you may be all that such a figure signifies.

Many wide subjects are opening up before us, but I will not venture upon the open sea, for a narrow strait is before me through which I would steer your meditations with a practical purpose. The channel which your thoughts should follow is the inquiry—why is it that God has been pleased to make His people the lights of the world? He might have been the light of the world Himself without instrumentalities, or, if He must use agents, flaming seraphim would surely have been majestic golden lamps with which to illuminate the nations. For what purpose has Christ been pleased to make His disciples the light of the world? Why has He put this honor upon His church, and upon each one of His followers? That is the question we will talk of, but as even this is too wide a subject, we must narrow it down to one line of thought. God has purposes with regard to Himself to be answered by using men as His agents—these we will not touch upon. We will only think of those reasons which have reference to ourselves. We look at the question man-ward. Why does God make men to be lights to other men?

There are three answers. First, *it averts from the light-givers themselves many evils*. Secondly, *it bestows upon them many benefits*. And, thirdly, *it has an encouraging aspect towards the light-receivers*—those who are, meanwhile, sitting in darkness and needing the light.

I. At the outset we observe that, for God to make His people light-givers is THE MEANS OF AVERTING FROM THEM MANY EVILS. You will see this in a moment.

In the first place, *it purges true godliness from the taint of selfishness*. The very first thing we want a man to feel is a deep concern for his own personal salvation—we would have him think of his own sins, and repent of them. Think of Jesus, and personally believe on Him. Men love to hide in crowds, but grace brings them to be units—men are satisfied to condemn sin in the gross, but true conviction makes each man condemn sin in himself. God's minister aims to come home to the conscience with the words of Nathan, "You are the man." More and more we want to see our careless hearers anxious that they themselves should be saved, for what will it profit them to hear the gospel if they are only hearers? What will it profit them if their neighbors are converted, and they remain unregenerate? Of what value is a national religion if we have not a personal religion? It is necessary that men think about their own souls. Now this necessary anxiety might degenerate into selfishness, and a man might come to ask with Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Observe, then, how the truth of our text counteracts this tendency to selfishness. It shows that our personal salvation operates at once upon others. The lighted candle shines upon all comers. You get light, it is necessary to yourself, but you cannot have that light at all without its becoming immediately useful to those around you, for light is essentially diffusive and shines not for itself. If light could be kept to itself, it would cease to be light. Grace which you can keep under a bushel or under a bed, is not a candle of the Lord's lighting. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, *and your house,"* is the full gospel. The salvation which comes to the man personally affects his house, also, and he is to look at it as a

treasure with which he is put in trust for the benefit of those about him. If the believer grows in grace, his obtaining more light involves the giving of more light. If yonder light on the tower of the House of Commons could be made ten times more brilliant tomorrow, it would be brilliant for us, and we should share in its radiance. When the moon is at her fullest, her fullness is for us rather than for herself. Increase the light of even a penny candle, and you have increased the light which everybody enjoys who looks at the candle. Strengthen the illuminating power of the gas, and it is not to itself alone that it is so strengthened, but to all the eyes which are enlightened by it. It must be so. If a man should advance to the highest stage of Christian holiness, it is inevitable that his progress should be an increase to the means of enlightenment for others. Holy example in the world lifts the standard of morality; holy example in the church raises the platform of spirituality. Good men even unconsciously do much towards illuminating others, even as the watchman's lantern shines while the watchman sleeps. But above this, the better a man is, the more he longs and labors to benefit his fellow men. Therefore, there is no selfishness in a man's desiring to be holy, for intertwisted with his own personal holiness, so as to be inseparable, is his usefulness to those among whom he lives. To *do* good we must *be* good. The warp and woof cannot be separated here. To confer good you must possess good. If a man were divested of the last rag of selfishness and lived alone for others, it would be his highest wisdom to look well to his own personal condition before God—he must himself see or he will be a sorry guide, he must himself be strong or he will be a feeble helper. The using of the saints, therefore, as lights of the world is a most effectual remedy for selfishness.

A second evil thus averted is this; *it prevents the personality of religion from becoming isolation.* It is very important that religion should be a personal thing. On one of the foremost banners of our host is written this word, "Personality in religion." We as Baptists bear that testimony by our very peculiarity. We do not believe a person should be baptized unless it is by his own wish and request. We consider all religion by proxy to be an unmitigated farce, if not worse. The man must do it himself. It must be his personal repentance, his personal faith, his personal baptism, his personal everything, or else it is good for nothing. The tendency of that principle, if exaggerated, is towards isolation, so that a man forgets that he has any connection with other people. Now, our Lord says, "You cannot live alone; you are the light of the world." From that fact arise connections which look backwards, for we were brought into the family of light through the light of others. To most of us there is a spiritual father, to many of us a nursing mother. We came into the church not as orphans into an asylum, to find no relative there, but we found in the church brethren and fathers, true helpers of our weakness and instructors of our ignorance. We are linked to other Christians by the good which we frequently receive from them, for lights as we are ourselves, we also rejoice in the light of our brethren who are brighter than we are. Today we have also other links which bind us to our brethren in Jesus, for many of us have given light to others. We look with loving eyes upon

those who are our spiritual children, and they look back to us with affectionate esteem, as having received great benefit by our means. Throughout the church this process is going on. Men and women, by teaching in the Sunday school, by preaching in the street and in a thousand other ways, are putting forth their light and finding others who become members of the illuminated family. And so, by God using the members of the church, the one for the ingathering of the other, prevents each man from being a separate stone by himself, and aids in building us up together a spiritual house for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Therefore blessed be the Savior for making us lights in the world, since though we now maintain each man for himself, his personality before his God, yet we are linked in sacred brotherhood by the common service which our Lord has appointed us.

In the next place, this *preserves our separateness from the world from souring into mistrust*. As Christians are essentially nonconformists. The radical precept of our conversation is, "Be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your minds." We are in the world, but we are not of it. In a certain sense we love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If we loved the world the love of the Father would not be in us. Now, one might soon misunderstand this position, and by degrees look down from a Pharisaic elevation, and say, "I do not belong to this world, I am superior to it, and utterly despise it. I take no interest in its welfare; it is too base a thing for me to care about." We would soon grow to be man-haters, and say, "The world lies in the wicked one, therefore let it seethe in its own fat, and rot in its own corruption. If we can but hurry through its Vanity Fair, and get away, it is all we desire." I think I have seen something of this sort in certain brethren who promulgate the theory that a few are to be rescued from the wreck which is breaking up and going to pieces on the beach—just a few may be brought to shore, and all hope that the vessel itself will ever float again is gone. All idea that it will bear at its masthead the blood red banner of the cross is sheer delusion. We have nothing to do but to load the lifeboats with here and there a one, and pull away from the wreck with all speed. I do not believe in this theory, and I hope I never shall. I feel a yearning towards the blinded sons of men; I cannot take complacency in them, but I feel a love of benevolence towards them, and every Christian who has realized the love of Christ must, I think, feel the same. I believe that the kingdoms of this world will yet become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. "You are the light of the world," is a sure remedy for all man-hating, for now we feel such love to the world as that which the nurse has towards her foster child. It may be a very tiresome child, but she is entrusted with it and because its hunger cannot be appeased unless she feeds it, and its nakedness cannot be clothed unless she wraps it up, its needs and its weaknesses appeal to her pity and she cares for it till by degrees her heart warms into an intense affection towards it.

That is the sort of feeling which our Lord would have us cultivate towards mankind. Poor world, poor world, it is dark and gropes in midnight, and it cannot get light except it receives it through us! Poor world,

it is sick and none can give it healing medicine but the Lord's own people! It is dying and only through us will God say to it, "Live." Do you not feel an interest in sinners when you know that the way in which sinners are saved is by a saved sinner going after a lost sinner and bringing him to Jesus? When you feel that the Holy Spirit works by you to the salvation of men, will you not love them? I am sure some of us would give up preaching if we did not feel that God, in some way or other, had made our ministry necessary to the calling out of His chosen. He has given His Son power over all flesh, and He has divided, as it were, that all flesh into parts, and made us princes over a portion of it. And thus He has given to me power over some flesh, and He has given to my brother minister power over another portion, that through us, eternal life may be given to as many as God has given to His Son. This forbids us to look out upon mankind with the proud feeling of disgust, or the miserable feeling of despair. No, as the stars look down upon the night and cheer it, so we look upon our unenlightened race! As the disciples of Jesus looked on the hungry thousands who were to be fed by their hands, so we look on the masses around us. How can we frown on them, for we are lights to them! God means to bless them through us, therefore are they dear to us! Thus we have learned how to be separate from sinners as light is separate from darkness, and yet to be their best friends even as the moon is the best benefactor of the night.

Again, this arrangement *delivers our confidence in God's purposes from sinking into the indolence of fatalism.* We firmly believe that God will save His own elect—that Christ will never lose one whom His Father gave Him and that the purposes of God will all be accomplished. No fatalist can go further than I will go in the full and distinct affirmation that God's decrees shall be fulfilled. There are, however, persons who argue from this, that therefore we may sit down and do nothing as to the salvation of others. Such persons are very foolish, because they must be aware that the same logic which would drive them to do nothing spiritually, would require them to do nothing in other matters, so that they would neither eat, nor drink, nor think, nor breathe—do nothing, in fact, but lie like logs, passive under fate's iron sway. This is too absurd to need an answer. Believers are cured of that tendency by the belief that they are the lights of the world. God will accomplish His purposes, and give light to men, but we are the light of the world. He will accomplish His purposes of grace through His church; He will enlighten the Gentiles, He will give sight to the blind eyes, but He intends to do it through those whom He has already saved. Therefore, with the calm courage which reliance upon eternal purposes has given to us, we mingle a stern determination to be active in season and out of season, because we are predestinated by the eternal God to be the light of the sons of men. The tendency of the one doctrine, if looked at exclusively, might have been dangerous if it had not been balanced by the second doctrine.

Once more, *the natural longing of the believer to be with Christ is prevented from running to extremes by the truth now before us.* There is not a

Christian here who has not in high, holy, and happy times, sung with Dr. Watts—

"Father, I long, I faint to see
The place of Your abode;
I'd leave Your earthly courts and flee
Up to Your seat, my God."

As a holy man of old was known to count each year of his life a year of banishment from Christ, so have we reckoned that every hour we linger here is so much taken from our heavenly rest, and sometimes we have said, "Woe is me that I dwell in Mesech, and tabernacle in the tents of Kedar." But when we have heard the Master say, "You are the light of the world," ah, then we have understood it all. And we have felt content to stay if there is darkness which needs enlightenment by our means. Let us tarry, good Master, we do not wish to be gone if You have need of us here, for this is so honorable a position, that we do not envy the angels their celestial seats while we have the privilege of enlightening the unenlightened sons of men. If you, O Lord, can do anything good through us, extend our banishment, and make our 70 years into 70 centuries, if so it please You. Our heaven is where we can best glorify our God. I believe that the hope of usefulness is often a very effectual stay to the longings of believers, so that cheerfully they are enabled to wait their appointed time in this land of the dying.

So you see a great many evils are averted through the use which Christ makes of His people in setting them in their places as the light of the world.

II. Now, secondly, and concisely—IT BESTOWS MANY BLESSINGS UPON THE WORKERS THEMSELVES.

For first, to be a light to others keeps us constantly in mind of the benefits which we have received. We see sinners in darkness, and we remember when *we* were in darkness too. We hear their penitential cries, and we remember when we wept and mourned before the Lord. We note their struggles and observe their doubts and fears, suspicions and misgivings—and we see as in a mirror our own early history reproduced. When at last we are enabled to point them to the Savior, and they can say, "Christ is mine," we feel our youth renewed in them. We live over again our early days, and the love of our espousals is restored. Just as many a grandparent grows young again as his grandchildren climb his knee, so do we remember the joys of our youth in those dear ones who are begotten unto God, by His grace, through our labor of love. We are made to see ourselves in them, and so to return to those dear banquets of His love which marked the dawning of our life in Christ. The sight of new-born babes warms our cold blood—

"Blessed be the love that saved me!
Blessed be the love that washed me!
Blessed be the love that renewed me!"

Thus we cry when we see others saved, washed, and renewed.

Working for others, makes us tenaciously hold to the gospel. I have frequently remarked that the inventors of heresies are mostly editors of newspapers, essayists, writers for magazines, and other theorists who do

very little or nothing of practical work among the fallen and degraded. It is the rarest thing in the world to find city missionaries, evangelists, or working pastors up to their necks in work among the poor and sinful, which have any sympathy with modern intellectualism. Find a man who is pleading with sinners—really practically engaged in the work, and is bringing souls to Jesus Christ, and I will guarantee you that he will be orthodox. He believes in the doctrine of human depravity, for he sees it to be a fact. He believes in the work of the Holy Spirit, for he often sees his own work to be good for nothing. He believes in sovereign grace, for he often observes that some are saved whom he least expected to see, and those whom he looked for are left behind. There is nothing like work to keep a man soundly evangelical. When a fellow has nothing to do, the devil puts it into his head to write an essay against the orthodox faith. The man is a practical ignoramus, and therefore, he is wiser than seven men that can render a reason. His hands are unemployed, and therefore, he wanders about in Christ's halls, whittling the doctrines of truth, and inventing new notions to please his fancy. Get to work and you will be healthy. If God makes you a light to others, you will be bright yourself, as you are giving the light your shining will burn off the spots and blots. When iron is red hot, the blackness disappears. Streams, as they run, let fall their impurities and filter themselves—and so the working Christian is enabled, by God's Spirit, to purge himself from errors. He does God's will, and therefore he knows His doctrine.

To work for Jesus, also awakens all a man's faculties. Nobody knows what is in him till he is fired with a lofty ambition and moved by a glorious impulse. Many servants of God think they have but one talent, but they would soon discover ten if they would but bestir themselves. No man knows in business, or in trade, or in any department of science, what he is capable of till he has commenced the pursuit. When he has commenced, he finds that what was difficult becomes easy, that what was impossible becomes only a little difficult, and by-and-by is achieved. And so the Christian calls forth all his mental and spiritual faculties by diligently working for his Lord. Marvelous is the manner in which men will develop when they fall in love with souls! When a great passion seizes us, we are carried beyond ourselves. Look at those great bounds and mighty springs which yonder hound makes while in hot pursuit of the stag. He ran not thus at the first, but now that you would expect him to drop from very weariness, he is more impetuous than ever. Every muscle and sinew is in full play; his eagerness makes him alive with an intensity which you had not guessed before. So, in pursuing souls, men are marvelously quickened and filled with energy. They seemed dull in ordinary conversation—you could not imagine that they would have spoken so. Who dreamed that there was such fire in these flints? They are arguing for Jesus, and they do it well. Their wits are all awake. They give the right answer to an objection, they are so intensely worked up, that they seem more than they ever were before and they are so, indeed, for the Spirit makes all of us what we never could have been apart from His di-

vine influences. And so, in serving others, we rise to the fullness of manhood ourselves.

Giving light to others also develops and matures all our graces. If some of you had to preach every Sunday morning, it would exercise your faith; you would sometimes get to Saturday, and say, "What shall be the subject? How shall I again go before that mass of people? How shall I win their interested attention once again?" You would find that you have preached upon the easiest of the texts, and if, as in my case, you have had your sermons printed, you will say, "Where's the new subject to come from?" And you will look up, and say, "My God, Your message I have received before, and I shall receive it again, but help me, I pray you." Every kind of service for Christ exercises and strengthens faith. I only mention preaching as an instance of a general truth. Christian work also tries patience, love, hope, zeal, and all our graces, and in trying them, it perfects them. I do not know a worse thing that could happen to a Christian than to have nothing to do. It is enough to kill a man to be doomed to inaction. Many a man, in retiring from business, has retired into misery; he had better to have still gone to the shop, even if he had not taken a penny out of its earnings. I have heard of men who have given up all their avocations and have afterwards, desired to hire themselves out to their successors in order to have some occupation for their minds. A man cannot do better than retire from his business when he can, if he will then make it his business to serve Christ with all his might. But if he has nothing at all to do, not only will Satan lead him into mischief, but he will be quite sure to make a great deal of misery for himself. Faculties rust and graces wither in indolence. God has made us on purpose for service, and we must bow our neck to the yoke, or the prod will be in our flanks. Though the candle is consumed by shining, yet its shining is its truest life; all the light which lies concealed in it is fetched out and manifested by the process of light-giving.

To be the light of the world surrounds life with the most stupendous responsibilities, and so invests it with the most solemn dignity. Hear this, you humble men and women, you who have made no figure in society, you are the light of the world. If you burn dimly, dim is the world's light and dense its darkness. How wretched is a city at night if the lamps are unlit! How cheerless is a room when the candle is blown out! What would earth be without the sun? Shall we deny the lamp of life to men? Shall the world be left in darkness through our idleness? You are the lights not merely of your own households, and your own neighborhoods, but collectively you make up the entire light of the whole wide world. To you the present age must look, and upon you even future ages depend. For good or ill every man among us will affect all time. If any one man knows a truth and does not tell it to his fellows, there will be so much less light in the world, and consequences little dreamed of may follow his traitorous silence. If any Christian here is not living consistently, his follies will lessen the brightness of the church, and the operation of that mischief may never be stayed. We are links of an endless chain—each one affects all the rest. If there is one within my reach from whom I with-

hold instruction, and upon whom I exercise no holy influence, the loss may be far more than I imagine—for he in his turn might have taught others, and so on without end. I may shine afterwards, but all the shining which should have come from me during the period in which I was dim is a dead loss—an irretrievable loss to the world; so much less light forever through my neglect for immortal souls.

I will not enlarge upon illustrations so hackneyed as those which might be gathered from the lighthouse-keeper who must keep his lantern trimmed or vessels will be wrecked; nor would I do more than remind you of the Cornish wreckers whose false lights have lured so many to destruction, but pray remember that you are practically the lighthouse-keepers of the world, or else you are wreckers of the souls of men. You are either your brother's keeper, or your brother's murderer. Your failure to be lights will not end with you—it will curse others endlessly. A solemn sermon earnestly preached may affect not merely the people, who hear it, but through them their children, and their children's children. A good thought dropped into a child's heart may change the child's entire career, and that boy may afterwards influence a nation for good. You never know how far a spark of holy fire will burn. The responsibilities and the possibilities of the most humble among us are incalculable. Since we are the lights of the world, to this world we are more important than cherubim or seraphim. I reckon that the responsibilities of emperors, kings, members of Parliament, and judges are trifling compared with the responsibilities of Christians, for these great ones are not the lights of the world—they do but sweep its house and arrange its furniture; but ours is the light without which men cannot truly live—ours is light for immortality and for heaven, without it men fall into judgment and hell. Therefore responsibilities press upon us which are beyond all measure.

Furthermore, out of this it arises that the light-giver feeling his responsibility, flies to the Lord Jesus Christ for help, and anything that drives us to Jesus is a great blessing to us. The tremendous need which the Christian's position puts upon him makes him cry out to the strong for strength, saying, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And by that very cry, a blessing comes into his soul.

But more, the desire to win souls to Christ drives men to self-denial, for they feel that if the world is to be blessed by them, they can do anything in order to accomplish the purpose—they can put up with rough usage, with misrepresentations, with slanders, with ingratitude, with malice, yes, and endure imprisonment and death itself, if they can but fulfill their destiny, and be lights to the world. By such self-denials and abounding love they are educated into the likeness of Christ. They are called lights of the world, and that name is all His own. You have seen the marvelous picture by Holman Hunt, and noted its masterly teachings; he calls it, "The Light of the world." It is the Master who stands there, and that same sorrowful king bearing the mystic lantern speaks to us now, and says, "You are this lantern; you are the light of the world." O, take care beloved, since such an honor is put upon you, that you discharge your mission aright. And if you live for that end, it will create in

you all those qualities which make the saints like the great Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

III. I had much more to say, but there is no time, therefore I must close with the last reflection that for God to use men to give light to other men has AN ASPECT OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SINNERS. Beloved hearers, you who know not Christ, it ought to encourage you to believe that God means well towards you, since He sends your fellow men to say to you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Ambassadors are not usually chosen from the offending side. A great king will generally send one of his own friends, not one of the rebel race, to negotiate peace; but God has chosen us, who were rebels, ourselves, and has sent us to you, who were our fellow rebels, and we say, "Turn unto the Lord and live." Doesn't it look as if He meant His love, and His kindness, and His tenderness to you?

Note, also, that every Christian who speaks to you about Jesus is, himself, an example of God's power as well as His love. He can save you from your sins, for He has saved these men and women. Those who speak to you about the Savior bear witness that they were lost in sin as you are, as little able to shake off the chains of sin as you are, yet are they set free. Yet are they turned from darkness unto light! And He who has saved them gives you a pledge that He can save you. If He does this to one, why can He not do it to another?

It shows His tenderness with you. He thought that if He sent an angel to preach to you, you might be afraid; perhaps as you saw the glitter of his countenance you might have started back with alarm. When the face of Moses shone, the Israelites could not bear to look upon it—therefore are there no glories upon the face of ministers now, and those who talk to you about your souls are just like yourselves, that they may give you confidence, and win your hearts. We cry to you, "Come with us to the cross! Come with us to the great Father! Come with us and say, "Father, I have sinned." It was a tender thoughtfulness of God that there should be nothing to scare His sheep away, but that the shepherds who seek them should come in humble, tender guise to them.

Frequently there is a special suitableness in the light-bearers whom God sends to men. For instance, your mother has pleaded with you; your father has spoken to you about your soul. Will you reject such an embassy? If my God chooses my father to plead with me to be reconciled to Him, I will think of the message for my father's sake as well as for the sake of my God. Some of you have lately received letters of entreaty from your sisters—you have been earnestly pressed by converted brothers—and other kind friends not related to you have shown very special desire for your conversion. Now that these good people should so selflessly care about you, ought it not to affect your mind? It will not deprive them of heaven if you are lost. If you are saved, I do not know that one of the trials of their life will be softened to them, yet they love your soul. Give them a patient hearing. Think over what they have to say. Do not treat them harshly. I think it could not be in the heart of a true man to act unkindly towards one who meant him well, even if he reckoned that the

friend was mistaken. Remember, if your counselors are God's people, and are living by faith in Jesus, there is a sacred authority about the poorest and meanest of them—and in rejecting their message you may be rejecting Christ. I claim no priesthood; neither would I tolerate it in any man, save only this, that every Christian is a priest before God. Listen to the priests of God, then, as they speak to you. God, by them, would draw you to Himself; by their hands He would cast around you the bands of love, and the cords of a man.

Lastly, remember if God speaks to you by honest, earnest hearts which care for your soul, and if you put the message of salvation far from you, you will be without excuse, both now and at the last day; and among the witnesses at your judgment whom you will most blush to see, will be the men and women who earnestly sought your good. I see your mother coming, and if she is asked, "Did this son of yours know the gospel? Did he sin against light and knowledge?" What can she say, but, Amen, to your condemnation? Against many of you I fear I shall be forced to be a swift witness at the last. I have told you the gospel in words as plain as I could find. I have often flung away a metaphor, and given up a period which might have sounded well, because I thought it would not have been understood, or would have missed your consciences. I have tried to keep to the greatest plainness of speech that none might misunderstand me. I have kept back no unpalatable truth from you. I have not hesitated to speak with great boldness. I have told you that if you believe in Jesus, you shall live, but if you will not believe in Him you must be lost. If you will not trust in my Lord Jesus Christ, your blood is on your own heads. I am clear of you. In the last day this shall be a terrible part of your reflections, that not only God will be clear, and Christ will be clear, but even your fellow men who loved you best will have to admit that you deserved your doom. God grant it may never be so, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
MATTHEW 5:1-32.

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MIRACLES OF LOVE
NO. 1110

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 4, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"You have loved my soul out of the pit of corruption."
Isaiah 38:17 (Marginal reading).

THE means used for the restoration of Hezekiah's body to health was a lump of figs laid as a plaster upon the boil, but the means used for the renewal of his soul from the disease of despondency was something equally effectual and far sweeter. What if I say that the Lord laid to the sore of Hezekiah's heart some of the leaves of the tree of life which are for the healing of the nations? The fact is that Hezekiah, under such a mass of troubles, had sunk very low in doubts, fears, and dark forebodings until he almost despaired, and therefore, the Lord shed abroad in his heart a sense of divine love—deep, true, and mighty—and as Hezekiah's body recovered, so Hezekiah's spirits also rose; and instead of chattering like a crane, he began to sing the praises of the Host High. The remedy for his soul's sickness was love. His heart was fetched up from the grave of its despair by love—love was the hand of power that drew him up, and love the cords by which he was lifted.

Now, what was true of Hezekiah with regard to his sickness and depression is true in the fullest sense of all believers. See, dear brethren, where we lay by nature—in the grave of death. Yes, and more—in the pit of corruption. We were so destroyed by sin that we were like men who had rotted in a pit, and were corrupt, for sin is a foul putrefaction of our nature, and it has worked in us to the most dreadful degree. We are like the slain upon the battlefield, rotting with foul decay—obnoxious to God, corrupt, and abominable. At this present moment, by sovereign grace, those of us who have believed in Jesus have been brought up out of the horrible pit; our standing, now, is a blessed one, for our feet are upon the Rock of Ages; immutable promises, and eternal purposes are now the bases of our confidence. Now shall our head be lifted up above our enemies round about us, and therefore, with joy will we offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy. We will sing, yes, we will sing praises unto the Lord. It is hardly necessary that I remind you that it was the love of God which moved Him to have compassion upon us when we were in the pit of corruption. The Lord loved us even when we were in that loathsome condition. This is a deep mystery of love. Well does the apostle speak of "His great love wherewith He loved us even when we were dead in trespasses

and sins." To love us when there was no good in us, but every evil in us; to love us when we were unlovable, and even hateful—this was not after the manner of man, but is worthy of the infinite heart of God. Now we know that this ancient, primeval love which had no cause except itself, devised the way of lifting us up out of the pit. We were to be brought up by substitution, by the sacrifice of another in our place; we were to be brought up by the operations of the divine energy—that same power which brought our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead was to bring us up from our death in sin. Love planned this admirable method of mercy, and we are equally ready to admit, this morning, and to exult as we admit it, that it was love which supplied all the provisions necessary for carrying out the plan. Love brought the Savior to the cross. Love made Him bear our sins in His own body on the tree; love led Him to give up His precious life on our behalf, and to become a hostage in the tomb. Love sent the Holy Spirit to quicken us, to illuminate us, to strengthen us, and to dwell in us forever. Love found the materials for our redemption, and love applied the redemption when it was completed. Love led us to the Savior's cross; love regenerated us; Love has supported us till this day, and will keep us to the end.

I shall not, however, call your attention to this great truth, but to one of the same order. The text sets forth a charming fact which I desire to insist upon as God's Spirit shall help me. It is this—not merely that love desired our salvation, planned it, and provided it, and so on—but that the instrument which love has used has been *love.* In order to get us out of the pit, we have not been drawn out of it by power, nor driven out of it by terror, but we have been loved out of it! *"You have loved my soul out of the pit of corruption."* The other Sunday morning—(See #1096, Volume 19—DIVINE LOVE AND ITS GIFTS—by the grace of God, for all 63 volumes of C. H. Spurgeon sermons in Modern English, and 574 Spanish translations, visit: www.spurgeongems.org) I spoke to you upon our loving souls into Christ, and tried to show in a few sentences the power of love to lead sinners to Jesus. Now that is what the text means—that God's love has loved us out of the pit of corruption. It has been the energetic means which has brought the saved ones to be what they are. This subject has carried my own soul away in my private contemplations, but I fear I cannot set it forth to you as I would wish. I am like the child which said to its mother, "Mother, I will bring the sea to you," and the little one went down to the shore and filled its little palm with the water, but before it reached its mother, it had spilt ten times as much as it had carried, and if it had carried all it had taken up, it would only have brought a few drops, and left behind it the great and wide sea altogether undiminished. I am hopeless of being able to convey to your souls a tenth of what I feel. I could have danced with David before the ark while I was drinking the new wine out of the golden cup of the text. I am hopeless of transferring my joy to you, and if I could succeed in it, I would have accomplished little compared with the glory of the text before me. I

pray that many of you may, however, get enough out of this sermon to make you sing—

"In the heavenly Lamb
Thrice happy I am,
And my heart it does dance
At the sound of His name."

May the Spirit of God love you, this morning, into a sense of the Savior's love, love you into a ravishing enjoyment of the love of God. We shall consider first of all, that we were loved into an *entrance into grace;* we are loved into *advance in grace,* and we shall be *loved from grace into glory*.

I. We were, in the beginning, LOVED INTO GRACE. What brought us to be converted men and women? We know it was the power of the Holy Spirit, but of that we shall not now speak. Our question is—what instrumentality did the Spirit use? The answer is, in most cases—in mine, certainly, and I do not doubt in the case of you all, in some degree—love was the compelling power. The love of Christ to sinners was the topic which *arrested our solemn attention* to the gospel. That Jesus Christ would die, "The just for the unjust, to bring us to God," is a thought which commands attention, and compels men to hear. As the ancient mariner laid hold upon the wedding guest, and held him spell-bound by his strange story, so have myriads of men been held fast by the wondrous news of the love of God in Christ Jesus. If we desire attention from sinners, we must preach Christ to them; all else will be flat and mindless compared with Christ crucified. The first missionaries to Greenland thought that the natives were too debased to understand at once the doctrine of the atonement. Therefore they began to tell them of the existence of a God, and so on. No effect was produced by such stale information, but when translating the chapter of John in which the passage occurs, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," a Greenlander said, "Is that true?" When the missionary affirmed that it was, "Why then," he said, "did you not tell us that at first, for that is good news, indeed." That there is a God, the heavens are telling it; that God will punish injustice and wrong, conscience affirms it. The visible creation and the inner consciousness of man sufficiently declare that there is a God, and that He is just. But that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them—this is a novelty, a thing which never was spelt out yet by the wisdom of human nature. And so, if attention is to be arrested, it must be through the news, the blessed news, of redeeming love. It was so with many of us. We were loved out of indifference, loved into attentive hearing; love won our ears to the sweet tale.

Having come to listen with interest, we were, nevertheless, but little anxious to become doers of the Word. To be saved did not seem to us to be very important, but when we heard, again and again, from our minis-

ter, and from our Bibles of the "great love wherewith He loved us," we began to feel *awakened.* Love touched our hearts as well as our ears. When the sun visits the flowers which have hid themselves away in the cold earth to escape from hungry winter, he begins to call them out of their hiding places by shining upon them; and then by-and-by they say unto themselves, "Let us break our bands of sleep. Let us lift up the mold which covers us, and let us peep forth that we may see the blessed sun, for full surely he is calling us." Even so, when the warm beams of love began to fall upon us in the form of invitations, expostulations, entreaties, and instructions, we felt their sweet influence, and at last we said, "We will arise and seek Him who loves our souls, if haply we may be saved by Him." The Lord loved us out of our neglect of salvation. Our face was set towards sin, and our back was towards Him, but He loved us right round till we could not help turning our faces towards Jesus, and our backs upon our sins.

Do you remember, brethren, when you began to seek the Lord? Love had brought you as far as that, but you were hampered with the idea that it was of no use to hope for mercy—doubt hung like a head shroud upon you. You sat in the region of the shadow of death, and you would have remained there had you not been loved into *faith.* You were bid to believe in Jesus—it was the gospel's standing message—"Believe and you shall be saved." But how did you come to believe, my brethren? I know your answer will be, "He loved me into faith." As for myself, I saw the great Lover of men hanging on a tree in agony and blood—they told me it was love to miserable sinners, love to those who hated Him, love to His murderers which made Him bleed, and as I understood that it was God who hung there to die a felon's death for unworthy men—I know not how it was, my brethren, but all of a sudden I felt that I could not help believing. Love compelled me to believe. Unbelief in the presence of a dying Savior, if that dying Savior's love is really understood, must surely be impossible. He, the Lord of heaven, without whom was not anything made that is made, humbling Himself to become a servant unto God and man—and then laying down His life a substitute for the ungodly, and all out of love! What a miracle is here! Who can disbelieve in the presence of such love? Savior, we must believe You! It is inevitable that we do so! Your love has loved us into faith, and at the foot of the cross we hope and trust in You.

At the time when faith came into our hearts, there came with it the sister grace which always attends it, namely, *repentance.* Beloved, you must remember, I think, the days of your hardness of heart. Some of us were very hard—adamant itself is wax compared with what our nature was. A mother's tears could not melt us, or a father's careful anxiety. How could we repent of sin? How could a millstone feel, or a flint weep? Why, when we heard the gospel say to us, "Repent, and be converted,"

that command might as well have been spoken to dry bones or to marble statues. We could not repent. We were in love with our sins. We thought them sweet; we could not turn from them. But, oh, do you remember when you did repent? Can you tell how it was brought about? I remember when my soul was like the rock in Horeb, for it gushed with living streams. Yet it was not because Moses' rod had struck it, but because Christ's voice of love spoke to it, and the rock dissolved into floods at once! See the summer's sun assail and vanquish the iceberg which has floated from its northern home. Winter's rudest storms could not dissolve the monstrous mountain of ice, nor could a thousand hurricanes and storms break it in pieces—but the sun shot a strange tremor through its heart as soon as he smiled on it, and every beam that fell from the fair orb of day shot through it like a dart, till at last, yielding to the mysterious glow, the iceberg lost its hardness of heart, bowed itself from its chilly loftiness, fell into the warm gulf stream, and was no more to be found. Was it not so with you when the eyes of Jesus darted love into your heart? How irresistible were His blissful arrows! How deadly to your sins! How mortal to your pride! You were soon vanquished! Well does John Newton describe our case in his hymn—

"Lord, You have won, at length, I yield.
My heart, by mighty grace compelled,
Surrenders all to Thee!
Against Your terrors long I strove
But who can stand against Your love?
Love conquered even me!
If You had bid Your thunders roll,
And lightning flash, to blast my soul,
I still had stubborn been;
But mercy has my heart subdued,
A bleeding Savior I have viewed,
And now I hate my sin!"

Truly we were loved into repentance. There were other agents used, of course; the law thundered, and conscience smote us, but still the master weapon in all the armory of God against our unregenerate hearts was love. We admit that it is more than a match for us—we confess that we are conquered by its might. The Lord has loved our souls out of the pit of corruption into that state of salvation in which we are now found.

II. Secondly, let us consider that we have been LOVED INTO GROWTH IN GRACE. The great motive power urging us onward has always been the same love of God.

Let us turn aside for a few minutes to meditate upon the love of God to us. Our hearts will burn within us while we think upon it. It is quite certain, my dear brethren, that you who believe in Jesus are personally the objects of the love of the Triune Jehovah. You are loved as much as you love your children, or as the bridegroom loves his bride—no, those are very feeble images, for you are loved by God infinitely. The heart of God

never does anything weakly—His love is strong and powerful, for it is the affection of an omnipotent spirit. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus—"As the Father has loved Me, even so have I loved you." Do you know how much the Father loves His Son? Can you form any conception? Are you not baffled in the attempt? "Even so," says Jesus, "have I loved you." There is another text from which I never expect to preach till I get to heaven, and I would like to preach from it there if a pulpit might be had. It is this—"That the love wherewith you have loved Me may be in them, and I in them." O, you are not dealing with trifles when you are dealing with the love of God to you. It is not a spare corner of the heart of God that He gives to you, as you may give a little love to the poor Arabs in the street, or the criminals in the jails—the great, inconceivably vast heart of God belongs as much to every Christian as if there were not another being in the world for God to love! Even as Jehovah loves His Only-begotten, so does He love each one of His children.

Remember, too, for this is sweet to think of, the Lord always did love you. It is no novelty for God to love His people. He loved you before you were born—in the mirror of His purposes, He saw you. In His book all your members were written, which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there were none of them. Is it not written, "The Lord has appeared of old unto me, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love"? Divine love had no beginning. Yon stars are babes whose eyes but yesterday were opened to the light, and yonder mountains are infants newly born. But as for God's love, it is coeval with His own existence, and the objects of it are always the same. Beloved, the love of God to you has never changed. He could not love you more; He will not love you less. The Lord's love will never vary. O, believe it, my brethren, it is still the same. Whatever may happen to you, or through whatever trials you may pass, with the same love which He has loved you, He will love you world without end. In life, in death, and in eternity you are the beloved of the Lord who changes not. That same love which had no beginning shall never know an end. If it were in my power only to make my brethren realize the fact that they are thus loved, it would elevate them, comfort them, and set them all in a blaze with love to God. Think it over, and then say, each one to himself, "Jehovah, the Eternal, Self-existent One loves me. Jesus, the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace loves me. The Holy Spirit, the Wonderworker, the Comforter, the Illuminator loves me. What bliss is this!" O, you would not need a sermon if you realized this—you would far rather need a place to weep, and to sing, and mix tears and songs together as you bathed in unspeakable delight!

Having thus brought the love of God to your remembrance, I want to come back to the text, and consider, again, that a sense of this love has up to now been the cause of all our advances in the divine life, for first,

after we were saved, we were still in the pit of corruption in the sense that our natural depravity struggled with us for the mastery; it would have made us captives to the love of sin if grace had not stepped in. Our hearts were tempted by vanity and wantonness, and the pleasures of sin, like Sirens, tried to fascinate us to our sure destruction. Have you never been in such a condition as a Christian that you were compelled to doubt whether you were a Christian at all because of the seething and raging of your innate depravity? It may be you have never yet looked into the crater of that volcano of sin which, believe me, is not extinct in any one of us. If you have ever peered into its horrid depths, and seen the blackness, and heard the boiling up of murders, envy, and lusts, you have said—"O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Now, I ask you, how have you, up to now, escaped from the love of sin and its enchantments? I think I can tell you. God has loved you out of them; loved you right away from sin's beauties and temptations. When the dear love of God comes into the soul, the man has no more heart for sin—"Sin! How can I love you? I cannot endure you, you hateful thing! My God, I need perfection. I pine after holiness, now that I know that I am Your child, Your blood-bought one, a member of the body of Your dear Son, as dear to You as He is—I feel that I hate every false way. Away sin; I cry revenge against you! I would gladly slaughter you all."—

"When the wounds of Christ exploring,
Sin does like itself appear."

Sin becomes black and hideous, and abhorred in proportion as Jesus becomes lovely in our eyes. If you love sin, it is because you do not feel the love of God, for when that love fills your soul, you must hate sin. Thus the Lord loves you out of that love to sin.

Again, we get into the pit of corruption through the tendency of our souls to go after idols. Who among us has not been tempted to idolatry? It may be the partner of our bosom, or a dear child has engrossed our hearts. Sometimes our life's ambition or the pursuit of our business has almost become our God. Our feet have almost gone; we have set up Dagon or Mammon in our heart. It is not easy to live in this world, and especially to enjoy prosperity, and yet be clear from worshipping idols. How have you and I been saved from idols? Not always by having them broken—that is a remedy which God is slow to use, though He will use it if we are obstinate. The most effectual, as well as the most delicious medicine to cure idolatry is to have the love of God shed abroad in the heart by Jesus Christ. Get a sight of the glory of God in the face of Christ, and then you will say—

"Farewell all you mean creatures
For in Him is every store!
Wealth, or friends, or darling beauty,
Shall not draw me anymore!
In my Savior I have found a glorious whole!"

"He is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely." We cannot see the stars when the sun is shining. Our dear ones are still dear, but Christ is far dearer. I am not afraid for you, dear brethren, that you will get worldly if you know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. I am not afraid for you, dear sisters, that the marriage bond will lead you away from holiness, or that your maternal love will ever rival your love to Jesus if you know how sweet and dear He is. Relationships are precious things, but they are nothing compared with Him. We love them, but as compared with Him, we could hate father and mother, and sister and brother for His name's sake. When a certain martyr was about to be burned, they brought out his wife and his 11 little children, and bade them kneel in one long row to ask their father, for their sakes, to consent to deny the faith and live. But as he kissed them one by one, and lingered longest over the dear mother of them all, and he said, "I would do anything for your sakes, my dear ones that I might live with you; but since it is for Christ, my Lord's sake, I must tear myself away even from you." When Jesus is in the soul, the idols leave their thrones. He loves us out of the pit of idolatry.

There is another pit of corruption into which children of God sometimes fall, namely, that of sluggishness. We do not always feel equally alive towards the Lord and divine things. Indifference is very apt to steal over us. There is a portion of the road to heaven which John Bunyan describes as the Enchanted Ground, where a tendency to sleep is very strong upon all pilgrims. Some pilgrims of my acquaintance are pretty constantly traversing that part of the road, and are never quite awake. Very few Christians are quickened into diligence and fervor by the scourge. Sometimes I do a little bit of whipping, and I think I do right, for my Master would not clear me if I allowed believers to sleep without warning them. But I am certain that the only effectual cure for a slumbering Christian is to let him have the love of Christ shed abroad in his heart—and here I speak by experience, for I have found that it is the only thing which can quicken me. I think over my duties, but I am none the more in love with them. I look over my responsibilities, but I am scarcely the more impressed by them; but when I feel that my Lord has chosen me from before the foundation of the world, loved me, and given Himself for me, then am I awakened. When I have a sight of His thorn-crowned brow; when I see His majesty of misery; when He shows me His hands and feet, and side, and says, "I have done all this for you, and I am prepared to do yet more, for you shall be with Me where I am, that you may share My glory"—then I need neither scourge nor spur to awake me; then for the love I bear His name, my heart becomes like the chariots of Amminadib, swift in duty, with axles red hot with fervor. My soul would fly like the chariot of God when He rides on the wings of the wind. Have you not felt it? What blessed preaching it is when the heart glows with a

sense of love! What happy Sunday school teaching it is when you know that Jesus loved you! What a delightful thing it is to make sacrifices, to give your substance, to bear and to suffer, if once you feel the love of Christ burning within your soul!

The same is true of that abominable pit of selfishness, self-esteem, pride, and self-seeking into which our feet so easily glide. Beloved, we are always something when Christ is nothing; we are always nothing when Christ is all-in-all to us. We cannot do Christ's work when our base hearts are puffed up with conceit; but when we once see His beauty, then we feel that the laces of His shoes, we are not worthy to unloosen. We know right well that we have no business to be proud, nor to shirk hard work, and seek our own ease. We know that, and we condemn ourselves for this wrong, but we go on with it till the moment the love of God enters the soul—and then we are rid of it—then we do, indeed, hate ourselves for ever having imagined that anything that could be done for Christ was difficult. I am ashamed to be speaking to you coolly on a theme which is like fire within my own bones. I pray the Master, however, also to make it like fire in your souls. The love of Christ is the very best cure for selfishness.

And it is equally a cure for despondency and unbelief. What a pit of corruption unbelief is—a pit in which we hear strange noises of terrors to come, while unseen fears as to the present, rush to and fro with horrible sounds. "I cannot believe, I cannot trust," says the man, but when God's love is shed abroad in his heart, it is easy enough to believe. He asks himself, "How can I distrust? I know what Jesus did for me upon the cross—how can I doubt? The Lord cannot be unkind to me in providence, for it is impossible that He can forsake those whose names are engraved upon the palms of His hands!" God does not chide His people out of their unbelief, but loves them out of it. He indulges them with such sweet festivals in the banqueting house of communion—He does so sweetly stay them with flagons, and comfort them with apples, that they soon shake off the sickness of unbelief.

Many a child of God can bear witness that the Lord has loved him out of his impatience. When he has been full of pain, he has thought that God dealt harshly with him—but when love has told him that all things work together for his good, he has endured pain with cheerfulness, and gloried in his infirmities. In one word, are any of you suffering today under any spiritual malady? Is any sin too strong for you? Does any virtue appear to be so high that you cannot attain to it? Behold, I will be a guide to you this morning, and point you out a path by which you may escape from your sin, and rise to the greatest heights of grace. Do you see that narrow line that blessed pathway? It is a path which love has made. Follow it, and you shall come where you should be. Not there, not there where Moses says you *must*; not there, not there where fear says if

you do not, you will be destroyed; not there where conscience alarms and terrifies, but here where Jesus shows Himself to you, and says, "I am married to you; you are My spouse, you are all My own. I love you better than I love Myself, for I did not spare Myself, but I died for you. I will love you whatever your infirmity and sin may be; I will love you till I have washed you and made you clean, and then I will present you to Myself without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. I am drawing you, but you do not come as you should. However, I will still draw you till I have drawn you away from yourself, your sin, and your folly. I will draw you, and draw you, and draw you till I draw you up to My right hand, and there you shall be with Me forever!" Beloved, you can do anything when you feel this. You can do nothing if you do not feel it. Lose your sense of Jesus' love, and the power of your religion is gone. You have stolen the life if you have taken away the love. Oh, believe it. Know it. Pray for it. Spirit of God, make them feel it, and anything shall be possible, whether of sin slain or duty worked. I have often felt myself to be a mere expanse of foulness, like the mudflats by the seashore when the tide is out. As far as the eye can see is a continent of mud, with black rocks, rotting seaweed, pieces of wreck, innumerable creeping things, and such foul matters as the eye might never wish to see again. What is to be done with this dismal region? Here lies the fishing boats embedded in the mud, what shall float them? It would be impossible to drag them down to the sea—must they lie there and decay? What is to be done with this mud and weed? Wait and lo, at the appointed time, the sea advances from its bed. Ripple by ripple, wave by wave it rises, spreading out itself like a molten mirror, where just now all was foul; and lo, yonder ships are lifted—they walk the waters like things of life, while all that rotted in the noonday sun is forgotten, and the waves follow each other with continuous flashes of silver sheen. O Lord, You are that sea of love—Your mercies are Your waves of loving kindness. Let them come up and flood my soul. With infinite power of love, arise and cover all my nature. I hope the Lord will deal so with all of you, if not by means of this sermon, yet by some other agency. Never rest until you enjoy this love, and when you do enjoy it, keep it. If you find my Beloved, hold Him and do not let Him go till you bring Him into His mother's house among His brethren. When it is well with you, I pray you speak for me to the King, that He would keep me, His servant, for the sake of His people to whom I minister, living ever in the light of His countenance, for there is strength, and there is power for ministry, and everything else besides.

III. That love which loved us out of nature into grace has yet another work to do. The Lord will LOVE US OUT OF GRACE INTO GLORY. I know what troubles you in your quiet moments. You are thinking about the passage of that "narrow stream of death," as we call it in our hymn. You are advanced in years, and you know that death must come very soon.

The thought of death depresses you, and you need not be surprised that it should, for God has planted a law of self-preservation in us all which makes us love life. Nature shudders at the grave, but whenever your nature starts back from dying, think of your faithful God, and be assured that He will love you through death. You shall be carried through it by the force of love. One of the points about death which alarms you is this—you dread pain. Now, remember there is no pain in death—the pain is in life. When a man dies, there is an end of life's pain. Death is the pain killer, not the pain maker. Do you fear the pains associated with death? Have you not already endured pain, and been made to forget it through being divinely sustained by love? The love of God, I do avow it, has often acted as a sovereign remedy for anguish. The bitter has been forgotten in the sweetness of fellowship with God. Who says that there is no God, no Christ, no heaven? We have seen them all. Our eyes have seen them—not these poor optics which were only meant to spy out a few things in this dark world—but our inner eyes which see best in the blessed sunlight of eternity—with those eyes we have seen God, and the enjoyment of the ravishing vision has subdued all the feebleness of the flesh, and removed the pangs of the body. Now Christian, that is what God will do with you when you come to die—He will bear you up on eagles' wings, so that you will say with one of the old saints, "Is this dying? Why it is worthwhile to live only to enjoy the pleasure of such a death as this," and yet he was not free from pain—he was loved above pain.

But you say, "My trouble is about parting from dear friends." You think it will be a very sharp pinch to be separated from the wife, and from your friends. So it would be, but when Jesus shall stand at your bedside, and reveal Himself in a more apparent manner than He has ever done before—you will turn away from wife, and children, and friends, and say, "O Lord, let me be with You where You are, for my soul is taken up with You rather than with these." You had a little medicine to give your boy the other night, and it had a bad flavor, but you mixed it with some sweet confection, and he never tasted the bitter. Thus the pangs of separation will be mixed up with the sweetness of seeing Christ, so that you will not mourn. That is a blessed passage, "Death is swallowed up in victory," as though it were dropped like one black, cruel drop into the cup, and then victory was poured in as generous wine, and you drank the bitter drop right up before you knew it. Saints shall not know that they die, but only that they have gained the victory!

"O, but I am afraid of death, itself," says one, "it is not parting with friends, or the pain, but I dread death, itself." O, soul, when Jesus comes to meet you, you will know nothing at all about death. He will love you into heaven. In a moment He will embrace you, and you shall be with Him. Those dear lips which are like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh shall kiss you away, and you will be among the songs of angels in an in-

stant! You shall not see death—you shall only see your Master! There shall be no skeleton with a scythe to cut you down, but a dear hand of love to gather you and place you in the Father's bosom—

"One gentle sigh, the fetter breaks,
We scarcely can say he's gone,
Before the ransomed spirit takes
Its mansion near the throne!"

The Rabbis say that God took Moses' soul away with a kiss. So it was, I doubt not, for so He does with all His saints—He kisses them into heaven. "You have loved my soul out of the pit of corruption."

Now, when you and I stand in heaven, with these poor heads enriched with the crown, and waving the palm branch in these hands, what bliss will be ours. Here, let us stand upon this crystal rock a moment, and gaze down the precipice of light. There, lean over, my brother spirit, and look steadily down. See where stars and suns are glistering like glow-worms far below? How small their grandeur compared with ours in these sublime abodes! Look further down, and peer into that awful darkness, that profound abyss, across which flash the flames of infinite wrath, kindling evermore afresh the fires of punishment. Oh, as we stand upon these heavenly heights, and gaze upon the Eternal without fear, and then see far below us the outer darkness, and the unquenchable fire, shall we not sing aloud unto Him who has "loved our soul from the pit of corruption"? Yes, we will sing louder, and louder, and louder, and louder, and no cherubim or seraphim shall ever excel us in the fullness of our grateful praise. Blessing and honor, and glory and power be unto Him whose name is love, who has poured forth all His love upon us, His chosen, and saved us from the abyss of woe. To His name be praise forever and ever. O, sirs, will you all know this love? Will you all sing of it? Will you all be able to say, "He loved me out of the pit of corruption"? You may say it—you shall say it if you believe in Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 38.

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MOTIVES FOR STEADFASTNESS
NO. 1111

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 11, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."
1 Corinthians 15:58.

THE apostle had been putting forth all his strength to prove the doctrine of the resurrection, yet he was not diverted from his habitual custom of making practical use of the doctrine which he established. He proves his point, and then he goes on to his, "therefore," which is always an inference of godliness. He is the great master of doctrine; if you want the Christian creed elaborated, and its details laid out in order, you must turn to the epistles of Paul. But at the same time he is always a practical teacher. Paul was not like those who hew down trees, and square them by rule and system, but forget to build the house. True, he lifts up a goodly axe upon the thick trees, but he always makes use of that which he hews down. He lays the beams of his chambers, and forgets not the carved work. He brings to light the great stones of truth, and cuts them out of the live rock of mystery, but he is not content with being a mere quarryman—he labors to be a wise master builder, and with the stones of truth to erect the temple of Christian holiness. If I shift the figure, I may say that our apostle does not grope among the lower strata of the truth, hunting out the deep things, and spending all his force upon them, but he plows the rich upper soil. He sows, he reaps, and he gathers in a harvest and feeds many. Thus should the practical ever flow from the doctrinal like wine from the clusters of the grape. The Puritans were known to call the end of the sermon, in which they enforced the practical lessons, the "improvement" of the subject, and truly, the apostle Paul was a master in the way of "improvement." Therefore in this present chapter, though he has been dealing with the fact of the resurrection and arguing with all his might in defense of it, he cannot close till he has said, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

My brethren, this is a lesson for us. Let us never reckon that we have learned a doctrine till we have seen its bearing upon our lives. Whatever we discover in God's Word, let us pray the Holy Spirit to make us feel the sanctifying influence of it. You know not a man because you recognize his features—you must also know his spirit, and so the mere acquaintance with the letter of truth is of small account—you must feel its influence and know its tendency. There are some brethren who are so enamored of doctrine that no preacher will content them unless he gives them

over and over again, clear statements of certain favorite truths. But the moment you come to speak of practice, they fight shy of it at once and either denounce the preacher as being legal or they grow weary of that which they dare not contradict. Let it never be so with us. Let us follow up truth to its practical *"therefore."* Let us love the practice of holiness as much as the belief of the truth, and though we desire to *know,* let us take care when we know, that we *act* according to the knowledge, for if we do not, our knowledge itself will become mischievous to us. It will involve us in responsibilities, but will bring to us no effectual blessing. Let everyone here who knows anything, now pray God to teach him what He would have him to do as the consequence of that knowledge.

This morning our subject will be the practical outflow of the resurrection, and the great inference which should be drawn from the fact that death is swallowed up in victory. There should be fine flour from the grinding of such choice wheat.

The text has in it two things—first, it mentions *two great points of Christian character*—"steadfast, unmovable," and "always abounding in the work of the Lord." And, secondly, it gives us *a grand motive for the cultivation of these two characteristics*—inasmuch as the doctrine of the resurrection is true, "You *know* that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

I. First, then, let us consider THE TWO GREAT POINTS OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER here set before us.

1. The first one is "be you steadfast, unmovable." Two things are needed in a good soldier—steadiness under fire, and enthusiasm during a charge. The first is the more essential in most battles, for victory often depends upon the power of endurance which makes a battalion of men into a wall of brass. We need the dashing courage which can carry a position by storm—that will be used up in the second characteristic—"always abounding in the work of the Lord." But in the commencement of the attack, and at critical points all through the campaign, the most essential virtue for victory is for a soldier to know how to keep his place, and "having done all, to stand."

The apostle has given us two words descriptive of godly firmness, and we may be sure that as Holy Scripture never uses a superfluity of words, each word has a distinct meaning. "Steadfast," alone, would not have sufficed, but, "unmovable" must be added. Let us look at the word, "steadfast," first. "Beloved brethren, be you *steadfast.*" By this the apostle means, first, be you steadfast in the doctrines of the gospel. Know what you know, and knowing it, cling to it. Hold fast the form of sound doctrine. Do not be as some are, of doubtful minds, which know nothing, and even dare to say that nothing can be known. To such the highest wisdom is to suspect the truth of everything they once knew, and to hang in doubt as to whether there are any fundamentals at all. I would like an answer from the Broad Church divines to one short and plain question. What truth is so certain and important as to justify a man in sacrificing his life to maintain it? Is there any doctrine for which a wise man should yield his body to be burned? According to all that I can understand of

modern liberalism, religion is a mere matter of opinion, and no opinion is of sufficient importance to be worth contending for. The martyrs might have saved themselves a world of loss and pain if they had been of this school, and the Reformers might have spared the world all this din about Popery and Protestantism. I deplore the spread of this infidel spirit. It will eat as does a canker. Where is the strength of a church when its faith is held in such low esteem? Where is conscience? Where is love of truth? Where, soon, will be common honesty? In these days with some men in religious matters, black is white, and all things are whichever color may happen to be in your own eye—the color being nowhere but in your eye, theology is only a set of opinions, a bundle of views and persuasions. The Bible to these gentry is a nose of wax which everybody may shape just as he pleases. Beloved, beware of falling into this state of mind. For if you do so, I boldly assert that you are not Christian at all, for the Spirit which dwells in believers hates lies, and clings firmly to the truth. Our great Lord and Master taught mankind certain great truths plainly and definitely, stamping them with His, "Verily, verily." And as to the marrow of them, He did not hesitate to say, "He that believes shall be saved, but he that believes not shall be damned"—a sentence very abhorrent to modern charity, but infallible, nevertheless. Jesus never gave countenance to the base-born charity which teaches that it is no injury to a man's nature to believe a lie. Beloved, be firm, be steadfast, and be positive. There are certain things which are true—find them out, and grapple them to you as with hooks of steel. Buy the truth at any price and sell it at no price.

Be steadfast also in the sense of not being changeable. Some have one creed today, and another creed tomorrow, variable as a lady's fashions. Indeed, we once heard a notable divine assert that he had to alter his creed every week. He was unable to tell on Monday what he would believe on Wednesday, for so much fresh light broke in upon his receptive intellect. There are crowds of persons nowadays of that kind described by Mr. Whitefield when he said you might as well try to measure the moon for a suit of clothes as to tell what they believed. Always learning but never coming to knowledge of the truth. Shifting as sandbanks are their teachings, and as full of danger. The apostle says to us, "Be you steadfast." Having learned the truth, hold it, grow into it, let the roots of your soul penetrate into its center, and drink up the nourishment which lies there, but do not be forever transplanting yourselves from soil to soil. How can a tree grow when perpetually shifted? How can a soul make progress if it is always changing its course? Do not sow in Beersheba, and then rush off to reap in Dan. Jesus Christ is not yes and no—He is not today one thing, and tomorrow another—but the "same today, yesterday, and forever." True religion is not a series of guesses at truth, but, "We speak what we do know, and testify what we have seen." That which your experience has proven to you, that which you have clearly seen to be the Word of God, that which the Spirit bears witness to in your consciousness, that hold you with an iron grasp. Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has, he will give for his life, and to us, the holding of the truth is essential to our

life. The Holy Spirit has given His unction unto the people of God, and they know the truth and moreover they know that no lie is of the truth. Were it not for this anointing, the very elect would have been deceived in this age of falsehood. Brethren, be you steadfast.

But the apostle meant much more, he intended to urge us to be steadfast in *character*. Right in the middle of the chapter upon the resurrection, he speaks about character. He shows that a change of view upon the doctrine of the resurrection would legitimately lead to a change of action, for if the dead rise not, then it is clearly wisdom to say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." But inasmuch as the resurrection doctrine is true, he urges us to keep to that holy living which is the natural inference from belief in eternal life, and the judgment to come. As you have looked to the recompense of the reward hereafter, and have sought to order your conversation by a sense of the coming judgment, so do you still, and be you steadfast. Alas, we might preach tearful discourses to many Christians upon steadfastness of behavior, for they have started aside as a deceitful bow. There was a time when their integrity was unquestioned, but now they have learned the ways of a faithless world. Truth was on their lips, but now they have learned to flatter. They have lost the pure speech of the New Jerusalem, and speak in the Babylonian tongue. How many professors were once exceedingly zealous, but are now careless! The fire of their love burns dimly, its coal is all but quenched. Prayer was their delight, but now it wearies them. The praises of God were perpetually in their mouths, but now they forget their Benefactor. They labored abundantly in the Redeemer's service, but now they can scarcely be stirred out of their luxurious indolence. Beloved, if God has sanctified you by His Spirit, be you steadfast in character. Suffer not your divinely-worked sanctity to be stained. Be not sometimes watchful, but always so, by the help of the good Spirit. What you have attained in the things of God, walk by that rule still. Be not corrupted by evil communications. Make your private and public life the same. Let not the worldling peep into your house and discover that your godliness is an article intended only for foreign consumption. Be such that if you are watched anywhere and at any time, your sincerity will be manifested. O for consistency among professors! Its absence is the weakness of the church, and its restoration will bring to us unnumbered blessings.

In addition to being steadfast in doctrine and character, we need to be exhorted to steadfastness in *attainments*. O brethren, if we were now what we sometimes have been, how ripe for glory should we be! If we could but keep the ground which we conquer, how soon would all Canaan be ours! But is not Christian life, with a great many, much like the condition of the sea? The sea advances, it gradually gains upon the beach—you would think it was about to inundate the land, but after it has reached its highest point, it retires, and so it spends its force in perpetual ebb and flow. Are not ebb-and-flow Christians common as seashells? Life to them is the unprogressive change of advance and recede—today all earnest, tomorrow all indifferent, today generous, tomorrow mean—today filled with the fullness of God, tomorrow naked, poor, and

miserable. What they build with one hand, they pull down with the other. It is sad that it should be so. I must confess I find it far easier to climb the greatest heights of grace, and especially of communion, than to maintain the elevation. For a flight, now and then, our wings are sufficient. We mount, we soar, we rise into the spiritual regions, and we exult as we rise. But our pinion droops, we grow weary of the heights, and we descend to earth like stones which have been thrown into the air. Alas, that it should be so! Be you steadfast. When you climb, ask for grace to stay there. When your wing has borne you up, ask that you may be poised there till the Lord shall call you to your nest in heaven. Is your faith strong? Why should it decline again? Is your hope vivid? Why should those bright eyes of yours grow dim and look no more within the golden gates? Is your love fervent? Why should it be chilled? Cannot the breath of the Eternal Spirit keep the fire at full blaze? Why is it that we run well, and then are hindered? We are short-winded, we cannot watch with our Lord one hour; we grow weary and faint in our minds. Alexander could not thus have won a world if, after fighting the battle of Issus, he had stopped short of the Granicus. If the Macedonian hero had said, "I have done enough; I will go back to Greece and enjoy my victories," his empire had never become universal. Nor would Columbus have discovered a new world, if he had sailed a little way into the unknown ocean and then had turned his timid prow towards port. "Onward!" is the motto of the earnest all the world over, and should it not be the watchword of the Christian? Shall we be content with a wretched poverty of grace? Shall we be satisfied to wear the rags of inconsistency? God forbid. Let us bestir ourselves, and when we make headway along the river of life. May God grant us grace to cast anchor and hold our place, lest we drift back with the next tide, or be blown back by the next change of wind. "Be you steadfast."

We shall not have brought out the full force of the text unless we say that the apostle evidently refers to *Christian work,* for he says, "Be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord". So that he means be steadfast in your work which the Lord has laid upon you to do. Perseverance is at once the crown and the cross of service. It is very easy to preach for a little while, but I can assure you that preaching to a congregation year after year involves no little toil. Yet are we bound to be steadfast in this ministry. A spurt, a leap, a bound—these are easy, but to press on continually is the difficulty. Have you taken a class in the Sunday school? The novelty of it may carry you through a month or two, but, dear friend, be steadfast, and hold on year after year, for there will lie your honor and success. If you should be discouraged because you meet with no present success, yet persevere, yes, endure to the end. If God has given you any work to do, it is yours to press forward in it, whether you prosper in it or not. The young convert said, you remember, that if God bade him jump through a wall, whether he could go through it or not was no business of his. "Here I go," he says, "right at it!" We may rest assured that the Lord never did command us to leap through a wall without causing it to give way when our faith brought us to the test. We

have to obey the precept, and leave the consequences. If God says, "Do it," the command is both the warrant for our act, and the security for our being aided with all necessary help. Noah preached for 120 years, and when his term of warning ministry was over, where were his converts? He may have had a great many, but they were all dead and buried. And with the exception of himself and family, after 120 years of ministry there remained not one that God would preserve alive. And into the Ark he went, the grandest unsuccessful preacher that ever lived! Noah was faithful unto death, to be rewarded of his God as much as if he had induced half the world to flee from the wrath to come. Let us, therefore, remain steadfast in doctrine, in character, in attainment, and in labor. To this end help us, O Holy Spirit.

But the apostle adds *"unmovable."* He supposes that our steadfastness will be tried, and he bids us remain *unmovable*. Be "steadfast" in times of peace, like rocks in the midst of a calm and glassy sea. Be "unmovable" if you are assailed like those same rocks in the midst of the tempest when the billows dash against them. Brethren, when you are assailed by *argument* be unmovable. I say, "Argument," but I am complimenting our adversaries—their objections do not deserve the name. It will never be possible for any man living to answer all the queries which others can raise, or reply to all objections which may be brought against the most obvious facts. If any person here were skeptical as to my standing at this present moment upon this platform, I am not certain that I should be able to convince him that I am here. I am quite sure of it myself, but I have no doubt a skeptic would be able to advance objections which would require a keener wit than mine to remove, notwithstanding that the matter would be plain enough if the objector would throw away his logic, and use his common sense. Now the arguments against the resurrection which the apostle mentions were such as he could easily remove. Such a one as this, for instance—"How are the dead raised up?" Paul seems to have lost his patience in answering it, and he called the man a fool, and you may depend upon it, he was a fool, or else the apostle would not have called him so. Granted the existence of a God, you need never ask, "How?" If there is omnipotence, there is no room for the question, "How?" God the Almighty can do what He wills, and he is a fool who asks, "How?" after once he has believed in God. Most of the objections against the articles of our holy faith are contemptible, yet none the less difficult to answer because contemptible, for an argument is not always apparently strong in proportion to its reasonableness. It may be easier to answer an objection which has some force in it, than to overthrow another which has positively no force at all. In fact, the most difficult arguments to answer are those which are insane at the core, for you must be insane, yourself, before you can quite catch the thought which insanity has uttered. And as you do not wish to qualify for controversy with fools by becoming a fool yourself, you may not be able to reply to your antagonist. It will be your right course to be steadfast and unmovable, that your adversary may see that his deceptions are of no avail. Whatever may be said against our faith, we can afford to ignore it, since we know that our

Lord Jesus Christ has risen from the dead—the evidence of that fact is beyond dispute, and that being proven, our faith rests on a rock. Prove the resurrection (and we say it is proved by the best witnesses, and plenty of them), then our faith is true, and we will hold it in the teeth of all opposition. Do not be carried away, therefore, by the sophistry of cunning men, neither be cast down. When it is rumored at any time that a learned man has found out some very wonderful thing which is to put an end to the Bible, you should calmly reply—"Let him find out another wonderful thing, if so it pleases him." If our wise men have discovered a new origin for the human race, or if they have invented a new way of making a world, we hope their new toy will please them, but such things are of no concern to us. We have other and weightier concerns besides fiddling or philosophizing. We have no more reverence for these profane dreamers than they have for the Bible, they are nothing to us. Christ has risen from the dead; nothing in physiology or geology can ever contradict that. And if He has risen from the dead, they also, who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him, and in that faith we abide.

We shall be met, in addition to argument, by what is far more powerful, namely, by surrounding *example*. The world never overcame the church, yet, by argument, for it has always refuted itself. When let alone, the unbelieving world has eaten its own words, like Saturn devouring his own children. Whenever any smith in the world's armory has forged a weapon against the truth, there has always been another smith at work in the same smithy preparing another weapon with which to break the first in pieces. The man has done it not in the interests of the gospel, but in his own interest, and with desire only for his own honor, but he has done the work of the Lord, not knowing that he did. The bad example of the world has often told upon the soldiers of Christ with far more powerful effect. What the arms of Rome could not do against Hannibal, his Capuan holidays are said to have accomplished—his soldiers were conquered by luxury, though invincible by force. When the church lies down at ease, she is apt to feel the diseases of abundance. The current of the world runs furiously towards sin, and the fear is lest the Lord's swimmers should not be able to stem the flood. It is sad when professors of our holy religion do as others do. It is folly to be singular except when to be singular is to be right—but it often happens that we forget the rightness of the thing in the fear of being singular. Brethren, care nothing about custom, for custom is no excuse for sin. Be you steadfast, and if all men are turned to this or that, listen not to their, "Lo, heres," and, "Lo, theres," but stand inflexible for holiness, and God and truth. "Be you steadfast, unmovable."

And as you are not moved by the world's custom, so take care not to be moved by its *persecutions.* Today the persecutions which we meet with are very petty. They amount to little more than here and there the loss of a situation, the denial of trade, the being turned out of a farm or more commonly they go no further than a sneer, a bad name, or a slander. But be you steadfast, unmovable, whatever may be. Never let a man, who is but a worm, frown you away from your God. Bid defiance to his fierce

looks and angry words, and like a man of God, continue in the right way whether you offend or please.

And equally be unmovable to the world's *smiles*. It will put on its sweetest looks, and tempt you with its painted cheeks and artful fascinations. Like Jezebel it will attire its head and look out of the window, but like Jehu, you say, "Fling her down!" You are to hold no peace or truce with this crooked and perverse generation. If God prospers you in business, let not your riches make you proud. If you have to toil, and there should come in your way an easy escape from hard labor by some crooked path, accept it not, be unmovable. Let neither the soft south wind, nor the boisterous north wind stir you from your foothold. God help you to be faithful unto death.

If ever there was a period in the Christian church when professors needed to be exhorted to be "steadfast, unmovable," it is just now, for the foundations are removed and all things are out of course. Men have removed the old landmarks; they have broken down the pillars of the house. All things reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and only He who keeps the feet of His saints can preserve our uprightness. I see the tackling loosed, and the mast unstrengthened, and the brave vessel of the church is in an evil case. Many have left their moorings, and are drifting here and there, their helmsmen all amazed. No longer does the squadron of the Lord sail in order of battle, but the lines are broken, and the vessels yield to the tossing of winds and waves. Alas, that it should be so. O where is He that trod the sea? Where is the pilot of the Galilean lake! I see Him walking the waters, and He cries to us who still stand true to the one Lord, the one faith, and the one Baptism, "Be you steadfast, unmovable." Whatever other denominations of Christians do, be you true to your Lord in all things, for those who forsake Him shall be written in the dust. Beloved, never stir away from the truth! Some are changeable by constitution like Reuben, "Unstable as water, they shall not excel." A mind on wheels knows no rest; it is as a rolling thing before the tempest. Struggle against the desire for novelty, or it will lead you astray as the will-o'-the-wisp deceives the traveler. If you desire to be useful; if you long to honor God; if you wish to be happy, be established in the truth, and be not carried about by every wind of doctrine in these evil days, "Be you steadfast, unmovable."

2. The second characteristic of a Christian, however, we must speak upon. He is described as *"always abounding in the work of the Lord,"* in which we will briefly show that there are four things.

First, dear brethren, every Christian ought to be engaged "in the work of the Lord." We should all have work to do for our divine Master. True, our everyday labor ought to be so done as to render honor to His name, but in addition to that, every Christian should be laboring in the Lord in some sphere of holy service. I shall not enlarge, but I shall pass the question round to each one—"What are you doing for Jesus Christ?" I pray each one here who makes a profession of faith in Jesus will answer the question, "What am I doing in the work and service of the Lord?" If you

are doing nothing, I pray you bewail your slothfulness, and escape from it, for talents wrapped in napkins will be terrible witnesses against you.

Then the Apostle says, secondly, we are not only to be, "In the work of the Lord," but we are to *abound* in it. Do much, very much—all you can do, and a little more. "How is that?" asks one. I do not think a man is doing all he can do if he is not attempting more than he will complete. Our vessels are never full till they run over. The little over proves our zeal, tries our faith, casts us upon God, and wins His help. That which we cannot do of ourselves leads us to call in divine strength, and then wonders are worked. If you are only aiming at what you feel able to accomplish, your work will be a poor one, lacking in heroism, and deficient in the noble element of confidence in the unseen Lord. Abound, then, and super-abound in the work of the Lord.

Next, note that the apostle says, "*Always* abounding." Some Christians think it enough to abound on Sundays—Paul says, "Always abounding." That has reference to Mondays—to which day does it not refer? When you are young and in your vigor, abound in service. I recommend all young men to work for God with all their might while they can, for all too soon our energies flag, and the dry and yellow leaf forbids any more young shoots. I would equally urge every man of middle age to use all his time, gifts, and energies at once for the Lord—"Always abounding." Nor should the old man retire—he is to bring forth fruit in old age. The apostle says nothing about retiring from the work of the Lord, but "Always abounding." "Oh, but we must give the young people an opportunity of doing something for God!" Do you mean that you will give the young people an opportunity of doing *your* work? Because if you do, I am in arms against so gross an error, for Christian work can never be done by proxy. Throw such an idea away with abhorrence. This is the age of proxy. People are not charitable, but they beg a guinea from somebody else to be charitable with. It is said that charity nowadays means that A finds B to be in distress, and therefore asks C to help him. Let us not, in this fashion, shirk our work. Go and do your own work, each man or woman bearing their own burden, and not trying to pile a double load on other's shoulders. Brethren, from morn till night, sow beside all waters with unstinting hand.

The text calls this service *"the work of the Lord,"* and we must always bear this in mind, so that if we are enabled to abound in Christian service, we may never become proud, but may remember that it is God's work in us rather than our own work—and whatever we accomplish is accomplished by God in us rather than by us for God. Jesus tells us, "Without Me you can do nothing." "Always abound," my brethren, not only in work *for* the Lord, but in the work *of* the Lord in yourselves, for only as He works in you to will and to do, will you be able to work in His name acceptably.

Put these two things together, the man is to be steadfast, and to abound in work. To come back to my figure of a soldier, these two things are needed—we need a soldier who can hold his position under a galling fire, but we also need him to dash to the front and lead on a forlorn hope.

We need many spiritual cavalrymen who can ride ahead and pioneer for others with dauntless courage, but we cannot dispense with the heavy-armed infantry who hold their own and wait till the battle turns. It is said that the French had courage enough on the spur of the moment to have rushed up to the cannon's mouth, but that the German was the victor, because he could quietly abide the heat of the battle, and when affairs looked black, he doggedly kept his post. In the long run *stay* is the winning virtue. He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved. He who can wait with hope is the man to fight with courage. He crouches down until the fit moment comes, and then he leaps like a lion from the thicket upon the foe. God grant that we may have in this place a body of Christian people who shall be steadfast and unmovable, yet at all times as diligent as they are firm, as intensely zealous as they are obstinately conservative of the truth as it is in Jesus; "Steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

II. Our last point is THE MOTIVE WHICH URGES US TO THESE TWO DUTIES. There are a great many other motives, but the one mentioned in the text is: "knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." If we derive our motives for Christian labor or steadfastness from the things which we see, our spirit will oscillate from ardor into coldness—it will rise and fall with the circumstances around us. It is comparatively easy for a successful man to go on preaching or otherwise laboring for the Lord, but I admire the perseverance of the man who remains faithful under defeat. To get such faithfulness we must disentangle ourselves from the idea of being rewarded here—we must be steadfast and unmovable though nobody praises us, and abound in the work of the Lord though no fruit should come from it, because we have looked beyond this present realm of death, and have gazed into another world where the resurrection shall bring with it our reward.

Dear brethren, let us be steadfast, for our principles are true. If Christ has not risen from the dead, then we are the dupes of an imposition, and let us give it up. Why should we credulously adhere to that which is false? But if Christ has risen from the dead, then our doctrines are true, and let us hold them firmly and promulgate them earnestly. Since our cause is a good one, let us seek to advance it. Only that which is true will live. Time devours the false—the death warrant of every false doctrine is signed. A fire is already kindled which will consume the wood and hay and stubble of error, but our principles are gold and silver and precious stones, and will endure the flames. "Therefore, let us be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, therefore what we do is not done for a dead Christ. We are not fighting for a dead man's cause. We are not contending for an effete dynasty or a name to gather by, but we have a living captain, a reigning king, one who is able both to occupy the throne and to lead on our hosts to battle. Oh, by the Christ in glory, I beseech you, brethren, be you steadfast! If it could be proven tomorrow that Napoleon still lived, there might be some hope for his party, but with the chieftain dead, the cause faints. Now Christ Jesus lives. As surely as He died, He rose and

lives again, and His name shall endure forever. His name shall be continued as long as the sun and men shall be blessed in Him. All generations shall call Him blessed. The colors of that grand old red-cross flag, which your fathers bled to defend, have not in any degree become faded. It has braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze, but its history is as yet in its infancy.

Our grand cause is imaged this day, not by a baby in the Virgin's arms, nor by a dead man in the hands of His enemies, but by a living, reigning, triumphant, glorified Christ, full of splendor and of majesty. Let us rally to His call, for He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. Behold, He comes! Even now the angels bring forth the white horse adorned for the conqueror—He who is called The Faithful and True One shall ride at the head of His elect armies. Even at this moment we see the ensign gleaming above the horizon. The Lord is on His way. Our Captain puts on His vesture dipped in blood, while on His head are many crowns. He shall smite the nations, and rule them with a rod of iron, and He has on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Let us continue true to Him, for evil would be our case if we were to desert His cause, and then we should see Him come in the glory of His Father, attended by cohorts of angels. It would be a dreadful thing to have deserted the army just when the shout of "victory" was about to be raised. Be you steadfast, unmovable, for He is risen, and He ever lives to secure the victory.

Our work of faith is not in vain, because we shall rise again. If what we do for God were to have its only reward on earth, it would be a poor prospect. Strike out the hope of the hereafter, and the Christian's reward would be gone, but, beloved, we shall rise again. Our work is ended when our eyes are closed in death, but our life is not ended with our work. We shall preach no more, we shall no more teach the little children, we shall no more talk with the wayfarer about the Savior, but we shall enjoy better things than these, for we shall sit upon our Savior's throne even as He sits upon His Father's throne. Our heads shall have crowns to deck them. Our hands shall wave the palm of victory. We shall put on the white robe—the victors apparel. We shall stand around the throne in triumph, and shall behold and share the glories of the Son of God. O brethren, shrink not, for the crown is just within your reach. Never think of diminishing your service, rather increase it, for the reward is close at hand. And remember that as you will rise again, so those whom you come in contact with will also rise again. When I have preached the gospel on a Sunday I have thought, "Well, I shall never see many of these people again," and the reflection has flashed across my mind, "Yes, I shall. And if I have faithfully, as God's servant, preached the truth, I shall not need to be afraid to see them." If they have received benefit and found Christ through the witness I have borne, they shall be my reward hereafter in the land of the living. And even if they reject the testimony, yet shall they bear their witness to my faithfulness in having preached to them the Word of God, for they shall rise again.

O beloved, what is this poor world? There, shut your eyes to it, for it is not worth your gaze. What is there here below? What do I see but fleeting shadows, dreams, and phantoms? What shall I live for? What is there worth living for beneath yon stars? What if I hoard up wealth, I shall have to leave it to ungrateful heirs! What if I get fame, yet how can the breath of man add to my comfort when I lie tossing on the verge of eternity? What is there worth living for, I say, beneath yon stars? But there is a something that makes it worthwhile existing and makes life grand and noble. It is this—if I may crown with praise that head which for my sake was crowned with thorns, if I may honor Him who was dishonored for my sake, if to the manifestation of the glories of Jehovah I may have contributed a share, if at the reading of the records of all time it may be found that I put out my talent as a faithful servant, and gained interest for my Master, it shall be well. Saved not of debt—far from the thought! But of grace alone, yet shall it be no small thing, out of a sense of indebtedness to grace, to have lived, and loved, and died for Jesus.

What more can I say? Are there no ambitions among you? I know there are. Young men, consecrate yourselves to God this day. If you have looked to Jesus and trusted Him, serve Him forever. Preach Him if you can. Go abroad into the foreign field if you may. If you cannot do that, make money for Him that you may give it to His cause. Open your shop for His sake; let everything be done for Jesus. Take this from now on, for your motto—"All for Jesus; always for Jesus; everywhere for Jesus." He deserves it. I should not so speak to you if you had to live in this world only. Alas, for the love of Jesus, if you were all, and nothing beside, O Earth! But there is another life—live for it. There is another world—live for it. There *is* a resurrection, there *is* eternal blessedness, there *is* glory; there *are* crowns of pure reward—live for them! By God's grace live for them. The Lord bless you, and save you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
1 CORINTHIANS 15.

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SOUL-SATISFYING BREAD
NO. 1112

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 18, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that comes to Me shall never hunger; and he that believes on Me shall never thirst."
John 6:35.

OUR Savior used expressions concerning Himself which might be turned to another meaning than He intended; He did not guard His words by saying, "I am like bread, and faith is like eating and drinking," but He said, "I am the bread of life," and, "Except a man eat My flesh, and drink My blood there is no life in him." He did this not only because from His own sincerity of heart it was not in Him to be forever fencing around all His speeches, but also with a set purpose, because His speech was so plain that if any man misunderstood Him, it would be the result of his own perversity of mind and not the effect of any obscurity in the Lord's language. Thus by fixing a low and sensual meaning upon elevated spiritual language, the men of His time would be discovered to be none of the Lord's chosen, and the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. While He was preaching, His words were like a refiner's fire, bringing out the pure metal, but separating it from the dross, and making that dross to appear the worthless thing which it really was. It would clearly appear that men hated the light when they perverted the clearest expressions of the Lord of light into foolishness or mystery. Our Lord's mission was not so much to save all whom He addressed, as to save out of them as many as His Father gave Him. And He used His mode of speaking as a test; those who were His, understood Him. Those who were not His, and were not taught of the Father, viciously put a literal meaning upon His spiritual words, and so missed His divine teaching. To this day the memorable expressions of our Lord in this chapter remain a stumbling block to some, while they are full of glorious instruction to others. We see the world every day parting more and more definitely into two camps, the camp of the chosen of God, to whom is made known the mystery of the kingdom, the babes in grace who read the simple teaching of the gospel, and rejoice in it—and on the other side the carnal host who hear the Word, but look no deeper than its outward letter; to whom it becomes a "savor of death unto death," because they pervert the Lord's spiritual word to a carnal meaning, and straightway heap unto themselves abounding ceremonies and pierce themselves through with deadly errors. I scarcely think that the prominence of sacramentarianism nowadays is to be altogether regretted. It is only a clearer and manifest sever-

ing of the precious from the vile. There is a division as marked as between death and life, and as deep as hell, between the spiritual church which believes in Jesus, and the carnal church which believes in sacraments, between the regenerate who look to Christ upon the cross—and the twice-dead who worship a piece of bread and pay reverence to a wine cup. The Savior spoke in symbols, that the proud might hear in vain, that hearing they might not hear, and seeing they might not perceive. Executing upon that self-conceited generation which rejected Him, the judicial sentence of the Lord, for their hearts were waxen gross, their ears were dull of hearing and their eyes were closed.

But now, speaking to those to whom the Lord has given to understand His meaning, let me say, our Savior uses very simple figures. Think of His calling Himself bread! How condescending, that the most common article upon the table should be the fullest type of Christ! Think of His calling our faith an eating and a drinking of Himself! Nothing could be more instructive. At the same time nothing could better set forth His gentleness and humility of spirit, that He does not object to speak thus of our receiving Him. God be thanked for the simplicity of the gospel. The longer I live, the more I bless God that we have not received a classical gospel, or a mathematical gospel or a metaphysical gospel. It is not a gospel confined to scholars and men of genius, but a poor man's gospel, a plowman's gospel, for that is the kind of gospel which we can live upon and die upon. It is to us not the luxury of refinement, but the staple food of life. We need no fine words when the heart is heavy, neither do we need deep problems when we are lying upon the verge of eternity, weak in body, and tempted in mind. At such times we magnify the blessed simplicity of the gospel. Jesus in the flesh made manifest becomes our soul's bread. Jesus bleeding on the cross, a substitute for sinners, is our soul's drink. This is the gospel for babes, and strong men need no more.

Again, it strikes me as being very noteworthy, and especially very worthy of thanks, that our Savior has taken metaphors of a very common character, so that if our hearts are but right, we cannot go anywhere but what we are reminded of Him. At our tables we are very apt to forget the best things. The indulgence of the appetite is not very promotive of spirituality, yet we cannot sit down to table but what the piece of bread speaks to us and says, "Poor soul, you need even bread to be given you. You are so needy that your bread must be the gift of heavenly charity. Jesus has come down from heaven to keep you from absolute starvation. He has come down to be bread and water to you." As you take up that loaf and think of the processes through which it has passed before it has become bread, it preaches a thousand sermons to you concerning; the sowing of Jesus as a grain of wheat in the earth, His grinding between the millstones of divine wrath, His passing through the fiery oven. We see the sufferings of Jesus in every crumb we put into our mouths. Why, the Lord has hung the heavens with His name, and made them tell of His Love. Yon sun proclaims the Sun of Righteousness, and every star

speaks of the Star of Bethlehem. You cannot walk your garden or go into the streets or open a door or put on your clothes, without being reminded of the Lord Jesus. I remember once visiting a poor Christian in the hospital, who had often attended my ministry, and he said, "Why, sir, you have given us so many illustrations, that as I lie in bed everything I see, or hear, or read of, brings to mind something in your sermons." How much more true is this of our Great Teacher; we are glad that He has hung up the gospel everywhere, till every dewdrop reflects Him and every wind whispers His name. Day and night talk to each other of Him, and the hours commune concerning things to come.

With this as a preface, let us come to our subject. Our text in a very simple way tells us, first, that *Jesus Christ is to be received.* That reception is here described—"I am the bread of life: he that comes to Me shall never hunger and he that believes on Me shall never thirst." The second teaching of the text is that *when Jesus Christ is received, he is superlatively satisfying to the soul*—"Shall never hunger"—"Shall never thirst."

I. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS TO BE RECEIVED BY EACH ONE OF US PERSONALLY FOR HIMSELF. An unappropriated Christ is no Christ to any man. Bread which is not eaten will not stop our hunger. The water in the cup may sparkle like purest crystal, but it cannot slake thirst unless we drink it. To get a personal hold of the Savior is the main thing, and the question is, how is this to be done? How is Jesus Christ to become a Savior to me? You will observe that in this chapter, and indeed, everywhere else, the mode of obtaining an interest in Christ is never mixed up with the idea of fitness, merit, preparation or worth. The text says, "He that comes to Me." It says nothing of preparation before coming or of any meritorious actions connected to it. It is a simple coming, as a beggar for alms or a child for its father's help. The other description is, "He that believes on Me." There is nothing there of merit. In fact, faith stands in direct opposition to meritorious working. And if we read of eating Christ, and drinking Christ, the act is entirely a receptive one, nothing given forth, but everything received, reminding us of that memorable passage, "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on His name." It is all a matter of receiving, not of bringing to Christ. We come to Him empty-handed. We believe in Him without any deserving of our own, and in that way, and in that way only, Jesus Christ becomes our Savior. Let us dwell on these expressions for a few minutes.

The first is that *we come to Him.* "He that comes unto Me shall never hunger." I suppose this represents the first act of faith, by which men enter into spiritual life—we are alienated from Christ, but after hearing the gospel, we are, by the Holy Spirit, led to think of Him, to consider Him, to study Him and to judge that He is the Savior whom we need. Our alienation from Him is turned into desire for Him and we come to Him beseeching Him to be our Savior. We come to Him. It is a motion of the heart towards Him, not a motion of the feet, for many came to Jesus in body,

and yet never came to Him in truth. They were close to Him in the crowd, but they never touched Him so that virtue came out of Him. The coming here meant is performed by desire, prayer, assent, consent, trust, obedience. It means that I hear what Christ is, and learn what God says He is, that He is God, and that He is Man, that He came into the world to take the sins of men upon Himself, and to be punished in their place. I hear all this, and assent to it. I believe in Jesus, and I say, "If He died for all those who trust Him, I will trust Him. If He has offered so great a sacrifice upon the tree for guilty men, I will rely upon that sacrifice, and make it the basis of my hope." That is coming to Jesus Christ. The term is very simple, yet it is not so very easily explained to others because of its being so simple. If you are taught of the Father, you will know full well what it is, but if not, I fear that the plainest words will not make you understand. Perhaps I may illustrate coming to Jesus by an incident connected with the hymn which we sang just now. I think I have read somewhere that Mr. Wesley was one morning dressing, his window looked out towards the sea and there was a heavy wind blowing, the waves were very boisterous, and the rain was falling heavily. Just then a little bird, overtaken by the tempest, flew in at the open window and nestled in his bosom. Of course he cherished it there and then bade it go on its way when the storm was over. Impressed by the interesting occurrence, he sat down and wrote the verse—

"Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to your bosom fly
While the raging billows roll,
While the tempest still is high!
Hide me, O my Savior, hide me
Till the storm of life is past."

Imitate that poor little bird if you would have Christ—fly away from the wrath of God, fly away from your own convictions of sin, fly away from your dark forebodings of judgment to come—right into the bosom of Jesus which is warm with His love to sinners—

"Come, guilty souls, and flee away
Like doves to Jesus' wounds;
This is the accepted gospel day
Wherein free grace abounds."

The second description given us of the way in which Christ becomes ours is by *believing on Him*. Here, again, I have to explain a word which needs no explanation except one flash of the light from the Holy Spirit. And I question whether any other light was ever sufficient to make it clear, and that not because of any real obscurity, but because of the willful blindness of unrenewed nature. To believe on Christ means to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Savior of men. But it includes far more than that. You may be very orthodox in your notions about Christ; in fact, you may believe what the Bible states about Him, and yet you may not have saving faith in Him. "He that believes on Me." What if I put the word "trusts" instead? "He that trusts in Me." Or he who

leans all his weight on Me, who, knowing such and such things to be true, acts as if they were true, and shows the reality of his belief by the simplicity of his reliance. Knowing that Christ came to save sinners, the believer says, "Then I depend upon Him to save me"; knowing that Jesus was the substitute for human guilt, he says, "He is the substitute for my guilt. If He came and took sin upon Himself, then I trust Him, and therefore know that He took my sin, that He bore, that I might never bear, His Father's righteous ire." And is Christ really a man's Savior the moment he believes? Yes, the moment he believes. But suppose his former life has been scandalous? It is forgiven him for Christ's sake. But suppose that the moment before he so trusted Christ, there was no good thing in him whatever? Jesus Christ died for the ungodly, and He is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him." But suppose he should be imperfect afterwards? It is no supposition, he will be. But, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleanses us from all sin." A very blessed text assures us that, "There is a fountain opened for the house of David, and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin, and for uncleanness." It is not a fountain merely for common sinners, but for those who are God's people and yet sin. They still find cleansing where they found it at the first. "If any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Faith is an act of reliance upon Christ's great sacrifice, and wherever the Holy Spirit works it in men, it makes Christ to be theirs, so that they shall never hunger and shall never thirst.

But I pass on to the third way in which we are said to receive Christ. It is not in the text in so many words, but we must consider it, because, though not there literally, it is there spiritually. It is *eating and drinking*. We are to eat Christ and to drink Christ. Oh, it is monstrous; it is monstrous that out of bedlam there should live men who should dream that Jesus taught us to literally eat His flesh, and to drink His blood! I am more and more astounded at this 19th Century. I have heard it praised for its enlightenment and progress till I am sick to death of the 19th Century, and I am right glad that it is nearing its close. I hope the 20th century will be something better. Surely no period of time has been more given to superstition. Even the age of witchcraft bids fair to be outdone by the age of Ritualists. Here you have idiots in high places, absolute, stark, staring idiots, who preach to men that they are to turn cannibals in order to be saved. Surely such an act, if it could be perpetrated, must rather be the nearest way to be damned. What greater crime could there be than for men literally to eat the flesh of their own Savior? I cannot speak too strongly against so extraordinary, so monstrous a perversion of the teaching of our Lord. What He meant by our eating His flesh and blood is just this—we believingly receive Him into our hearts, and our minds feed upon Him. We hear of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and as the Substitute for sinners—we believe it, and so receive the truth as men receive bread into the mouth.

Now, in eating we first put the food into our mouths. As a whole it goes into the mouth, and even thus, as a whole, Christ Jesus is received into our belief and trust. The food being in the mouth, we proceed to chew it; it is broken up; it is dissolved; our taste finds out its secret essence and flavor—and even in this way the believing mind thinks of Jesus, contemplates Him, meditates upon Him, and discovers His Preciousness. We see far more of our Lord after conversion than we did at first. We have believed in Him knowing but little of Him. But by-and-by we comprehend with all the saints what are the heights, and depths, and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. Jesus becomes more comforting, and more delightful as we comprehend more clearly who and what He is. Our faith, which we placed implicitly upon Him, now sees a thousand reasons for a yet fuller confidence, and so is strengthened. For instance, the ordinary believer believes in Jesus Christ because He is a divine Savior. But the instructed believer sees in Jesus Christ fitness, fullness, variety of offices, glory of character, completeness of work, immutability, and a thousand other things which endear Him. In this way the truth concerning the Lord is, as it were, masticated and enjoyed. But the process of eating goes further; the food descends into the inward parts to be digested, and there is a further breaking up and dissolving of it. So the great truths of incarnation and sacrifice are made to dwell in the memory, to lie upon the heart, to rest in the affections till their essence, comfort, and force are fully drawn forth. Oh, it is unbelieveably refreshing to let these grand truths dwell in us richly, to be inwardly digested!

Have you ever chewed the cud with the truths of the gospel, turning them over, and over, and over again as delicious morsels for your spiritual taste? Can you say with David, “How precious, also, are Your thoughts unto me, O God”? If so, you know what spiritual eating is. When that is done, the food is next assimilated and taken into the substance of the body. It passes from the digesting organs to those which assimilate it. Each portion of the body draws forth, in its turn, proper nutriment from the food, and so the whole man is built up. It is just so with the great truths, that Christ became man, and died in man’s place—these are inwardly received by us till our whole nature draws from them a satisfying and strengthening influence. By a sort of mystic sympathy, the truth is being fitted to the mind, and the mind requiring just such truth, our whole nature drinks in Christ, and His person and work become our mind’s joy, delight, strength, and life. As a man thinks in his heart, so he is, and therefore our thoughts of Jesus, and faith in Him, build us up into Him in all things.

Now, as a man who has feasted well, and is no more hungry, rises from the table satisfied, so we feel that in Jesus our entire nature has all that it needs! Christ is all and we are filled in Him, complete in Him! This is to receive Christ! Beloved, if you want to have Christ altogether your own, you must receive Him by this process. Merely to trust Him gives you

Christ as food in your mouth; to contemplate, to meditate, to commune with Him is to understand Him, even as food is digested and is ours. Further prayer, and fellowship, and meditation assimilate Christ so that He becomes part and parcel of our very selves. Christ lives in us, and we in Him!

We ought not to forget, as we are dwelling upon this, that the two points about Jesus Christ which He says are to us meat and drink, are His flesh and his blood. We understand by His flesh, His humanity—our soul feeds upon the literal, real, historical fact that "God was in Christ." That "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," and men beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. My soul's main comfort today is not a doctrine. I get a great deal of comfort out of many doctrines, but the bottom comfort of my soul is not a doctrine but a fact. And it is this fact—that He who made the heavens and the earth, and without whom was not anything made that was made, was born of the Virgin Mary at Bethlehem, and for 30 years and more did actually, not in fiction or romance, but in very deed, dwell as a man among men. That fact is my soul's food. The historical fact that Christ Jesus was flesh and blood, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, a man like ourselves—this, I say, is nourishment to our spirits, and believing it we feel an unutterable joy, for we know that He who sits upon the throne of God is a man. Man was made "a little lower than the angels," but now, in the person of Christ, He is crowned with glory and honor. We now know that God cannot hate manhood, because Christ is a Man. Christ has reconciled God to manhood because He represented manhood, and the thoughts of God towards man are, for Christ's sake, thoughts of love, and not of evil.

The other point in which Jesus is food to our mind is His blood. This most clearly refers to His sufferings, and to His vicarious death. Bread and wine are put upon the communion table as separate symbols—not bread and wine mixed together—that would destroy the teaching. The wine is distinct from the bread, because when the blood is separated from the flesh, there is before you the sure evidence of death. Now the true drink of a thirsty sinner is the fact that Christ died in his place. I will repeat what I said—my great hope as a sinner does not lie in a doctrine, and my consolation as a trembling criminal before the bar of God is not founded in any opinion or doctrinal statement, but in a fact. He who is very God of very God did hang upon a cross of wood, upon the little mount of Calvary just outside the gates of Jerusalem, and there in unutterable agonies beneath the wrath of God, made expiation for the sins of all who believe in Him. There is my hope. There is yours, my brothers and sisters. Yes, there is all our hope. Very well, then, do you not see that the way to obtain the benefits of the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe in His being God and man, to believe in His dying as the God-man, and to rest upon this, and to contemplate this, and to turn to it again, and again, and again, so that, having marked and learned, you may also in-

wardly digest those unspeakably glorious mysteries of incarnation and of sacrifice?

I have set the gospel before you now, for if any man among you will do this, Christ is yours. Here is Christ to be had for nothing. Christ to be had simply by trusting Him, by coming to Him. As the vessel obtains its fullness by its emptiness being placed under the flowing stream, as the beggar's needs are relieved by putting out his empty hand to accept an alms, so you are to obtain Christ by coming to Him as empty sinners. He is given to you for nothing—freely given to you of God, and whoever will, may have Him. And if you have Him not, it is not because *He* has rejected you, for He has never rejected one that has come to Him, but because *you* have rejected Him. Dear fellow sinners, may God the Holy Spirit grant you grace to receive Jesus, and to be saved by Him.

II. The second part of our subject is this. WHERE JESUS IS RECEIVED HE IS SUPREMELY SATISFYING. He is supremely satisfying mark you, to our highest and deepest needs, not to mere fancies and whims. Christ compares the needs of men to hungering and thirsting. Now, hungering is no sham. Those who have ever felt it know what a real need it indicates, and what bitter pangs it brings. Thirst, also, is not a sentimental matter; it is a trial indeed. What pain can be worse beneath the skies than thirst? Now, Jesus has come to meet the deep, real, pressing, vital needs, and pains of your nature. Your fear of hell, your terror of death, your sense of sin, all these Jesus has come to meet, and all these He does meet in the case of all who come to Him, as everyone who has tried Him will bear witness.

Jesus Christ meets the hungering of conscience. Every man with an awakened conscience feels that God must punish him for sin, but as soon as he perceives that the Son of God was punished instead of him, his conscience is perfectly appeased, and will never hunger again. Until men know the truth of the substitution of Jesus, you may preach to them what you will and they may go through all the sacraments, and they may suffer much bodily mortification, but their conscience will still hunger. My God, whom I offended, became a man, and for my sake He suffered what I ought to have suffered, therefore my conscience rests gratefully contented with so divinely gracious a way of satisfying justice.

Men, when once awakened, have a hunger of fear. They look forward to the future, and they scarcely know why, but they feel a dread of something indefinable, and full of terror. And especially if they are near to death, horror takes hold upon them, for they know not what is yet to come, but when they find that Jesus Christ, who is God, became man, and died for men, that whoever trusts Him might be saved, then fear expires, and love takes its place. The dove in the cleft of the rock feels no more rude alarms. Terror cannot live beneath the cross, for there hope reigns supreme. Nor shall fear ever return, for the work of Jesus is finished, and therefore, no hiding place for fear is left.

The heart also has its hunger, for almost unknown to itself it cries, "O that someone loved me, and that I could love someone whose love would fill my nature to the brim." Men's hearts are gluttons after love, yes, like death and the grave they are insatiable. They hunt here and there, but are bitterly disappointed, for earth holds not an object worthy of all the love of a human heart. But when they hear that Jesus Christ loved them before the world was, and died for them, their roving affections find rest. Like as Ruth found rest in the house of a husband, do we come to peace in Jesus! The love of Jesus casts out all hankering for other loves and fills the soul. He becomes the bridegroom of our heart, our best beloved, and we bid the meaner things depart. In the love of the Father, and the Son, we dwell in sweet content, hungering and thirsting no more. If the ocean of divine love cannot fill us, what can? What more can a man need or wish for?—

"My God, I am Thine;
What a comfort divine,
What a blessing to know
That my Savior is mine!
In the Heavenly Lamb
Thrice happy I am,
And my heart, it does dance
At the sound of His name."

The heart's hunger is removed eternally by Jesus.

Then there are vast *desires* in us all, and when we are quickened, those desires expand and enlarge. Man feels that he is not in his element, and is not what he was intended to be. He is like a bird in the shell; he feels a life within him too great to be forever confined within such narrow bounds. Do you not, dear friends, feel great longings? Does not your soul seethe with high ambitions? Our immortal nature frets beneath the burden of mortality! Its spiritual nature is weary of the chains of materialism. That hungering will never be hushed into content till we receive Christ, but when we have Him, we learn that we are the sons of God, heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ, and that it does not yet appear what we shall be, but when He shall appear, we shall be like He is, for we shall see Him as He is. This opens up before us a splendid future of unfading glory and unbounded bliss. And we feel that we need no more. Since we are Christ's, and Christ is God's, all things are ours, and our hunger is forever over. The only contented man in the whole world is he who has believed in Jesus, and he is contented just because he has obtained all that his nature needs—

"Let others stretch their arms like seas,
And grasp in all the shore;
Grant me the blessings of Your grace,
And I desire no more."

Because I could not desire more than all, and Christ is all!

My beloved, this perfect satisfying of our nature is to be found nowhere else but in Christ. Some have tried to be satisfied with themselves,

and their own doings. They have despised the bread of heaven, for they dreamed that they could live without bread—they would be self-contained men—they would make themselves happy with themselves. But it is a wretched failure. The poor Bushmen, when they have nothing to eat, tie a belt around them, and call it the hunger belt. And when they have gone a few days, they pull it tighter and tighter still, in order to enable them to bear hunger. So any man who has to live upon himself will have to draw the hunger belt very tight indeed. A soul cannot be persuaded by philosophy to content itself without its necessary food. Eloquence may try all its charms to that end, but it will be in vain. Who can convince a hungry man that he needs not eat? Some have gone to Moses for bread, and mark you, the two greatest bread-givers in the world are Moses and Christ. Moses fed the tribes in the wilderness for 40 years, and Jesus feeds His people always. But Moses' bread never satisfies; those who eat it, before long call it light bread, and if they have been satisfied with it for a time, yet there is the mournful reflection that their fathers did eat it and are dead. There is no life in the bread of the law, but he who gets Christ has bread of which he shall eat forever and ever, and shall never die. I am told that there is a country—I think it is Patagonia—where men in times of need eat clay in great lumps, and they fill themselves with it, so as to deaden their hunger. I know that many people in England do the same. There is a kind of yellow clay which is much cried up for staying spiritual hunger—heavy stuff it is, but many have a vast appetite for it. They prefer it to the choicest dainties. When a man fills his heart with it, it presses him down to the very earth, and prevents his rising into life. Some have tried to stay their hunger by the narcotics of skepticism, and have dosed themselves into lethargy; others have endeavored to get ease through the drugs of fatalism. Many stave off hunger by indifference, like the bears in winter which are not hungry because they are asleep. Such persons come to the house of God asleep. They would not like to be awakened, for if they were to be so, they would wake up to an awful hunger. I wish they could be awakened, for that hunger which they dread would drive them to a soul-satisfying Savior. But, depend upon it, the only way to meet hunger is to eat bread, and the only way to meet your soul's need is to get Christ, in whom there is enough and to spare, but nowhere else.

I shall close by saying that all believers bear witness that Jesus Christ is satisfying bread to them. When do you get most satisfied on a Sunday, beloved? I do not know whom you may happen to hear, but what Sundays are the best to you? When your minister rides the high horse, and gives you a splendid oration, and you say, "Dear me, it is wonderful"—have you ever felt satisfied to think it over on Monday? Have you ever felt satisfied with sermons composed of politics and morality, or very nice essays which would suit the *Saturday Review* if they were a little more caustic? Do you enjoy such meat? I will tell you when I enjoy a Sunday most—when I preach Christ most, or when I can sit and hear a humble

village preacher exalt the Lord Jesus. It does not matter if the grammar is poor, so long as Jesus is there. What some call platitudes, are dainties to me if they glorify my Lord Jesus Christ. Anything about Him is satisfying to a renewed spirit—cannot you bear witness to that? When I have preached up Jesus Christ, and I think I generally do so, for the fact is I do not know anything but Him, and I am determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified—I know you go away and say, "After all, that is what we need—Christ Crucified, Christ the sinner's substitutionary sacrifice, no sham Christ, no mere talk about Christ as an example, but His flesh and blood, a dying, bleeding, suffering Christ—that is what we need." Now I have the witness of every Christian here to that! You are never satisfied with anything but that—are you? No matter how cleverly the doctrine might be analyzed, or however orthodox it might be, you cannot be content with it; you must have the person of Christ, the flesh and the blood of Christ, or else you are not content.

And, beloved, those who have once eaten and drunk Christ never seek additional ground of trust beyond Christ. They never say, "I am resting upon Christ, but still I would like to be able to depend a little on my Baptism." I never heard a Christian talk in that fashion in my life. I never heard a man say, "I rest in the blood of Jesus, but still, I wish that I could have a bishop's hands put upon my head so as to give me a confirmation of my faith." I never heard that in my life, and I do not expect I ever shall. We are perfectly satisfied without priests, and without sacraments. Jesus Christ is the one sole foundation upon which we build. Again, I have never found those who rest in Christ needing to shift their confidence. Those who need something new every Sunday are those who know not the Savior. Truly, if you have not the bread from heaven, you may well cry out for all manner of dishes, for each one will soon spoil. But if you have the bread of heaven, you need Christ on the first of January, and every day till the last of December. I have never heard a Christian assert that Christ did not satisfy them in the days of sickness, or in the hour of death.

I came to you this morning fresh from the sick bed of a venerable Christian man, close upon his 80th year, and I said to him, "Now, dear sir, here are three or four young people around your bed; we are going forth on our pilgrimage relying on Christ, believing that He is faithful and true. You have gone a great deal further than we have, will you, therefore, kindly correct us if we are under a mistake? Have you found that the Lord has not fulfilled His word? Have you found that He has not been true?" It was a blessed sight to see the man of God, and hear him say, "Not one good thing has failed of all that the Lord God has promised." And then he added, "I will sing of His mercy, for it has been mercy, all mercy, all the way through." "Do you feel any fear about departure?" I asked him. "Oh, dear, no," he said. "I am willing to wait, or willing to go. But I am full of the expectation of beholding Him who loved me, and gave

Himself for me." Ah, the bridge of grace will bear your weight, brothers and sisters. Thousands of big sinners have gone across that bridge; yes, tens of thousands have gone over it. I can hear their tramping, now, as they traverse the great arches of the bridge of salvation. They come by the thousands, by the myriads. Ever since the day when Christ first entered into His glory, they have come, and yet never a stone has sprung in that mighty bridge. Some have been the chief of sinners, and some have come at the very last of their days, but the arch has never yielded beneath their weight. I will go with them trusting to the same support. It will bear me over as it has borne them. They, who have eaten Christ, and drunk Christ shall not hunger or thirst in their last hour, trying as it will be.

Saints have died saying, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff they comfort me; You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over." God grant us grace to live upon Christ forevermore. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 6:26-63.

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ROMANS, BUT NOT ROMANISTS
NO. 1113

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
[PROBABLY NEAR FIRST OF YEAR, 1873,]
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: that you receive her in the Lord, as becomes saints, and that you assist her in whatever business she has need of you: for she has been a succorer of many, and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ. Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us. Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles who also were in Christ before me. Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord. Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household. Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that are of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord. Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which labored much in the Lord. Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them. Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them. Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you."
Romans 16:1-16.

THIS chapter contains Paul's loving salutation to the various Christians dwelling at Rome. Remember that it is an inspired passage. Although it consists of Christian courtesies addressed to different individuals, yet it was written by an apostle, and written not as an ordinary letter, but as a part of the inspired volume. Therefore there must be valuable matter in it, and though when we read it, it may appear to be uninstructive, there must be edifying matter beneath the surface, because all Scripture is given by inspiration, and is meant to benefit us in one way or another. It shows to us one thing, at any rate, that Paul was of a most affectionate disposition, and that God did not select as the apostle of the Gentiles a man of a coarse, unfeeling, selfish turn of mind. His memory, as well as his heart, must have been in good condition to remember so large a number of names, and these were but a few of his many beloved brethren and spiritual children all over the world whom he mentions by name in his other epistles. His warm heart, I doubt not, quickened his memory, and secured to his remembrance the form, condition, history, character, and name of each one of his friends. He loved them too well to forget them. Christians should love one another, and should bear one another's names upon their hearts, even as the great High Priest wears

the names of all His saints upon His jeweled breastplate. A Christian, because of the love he bears to others, is ever anxious to please by courtesy, and desires never to pain by rudeness. Grace makes the servant of God to be in the highest sense, a true gentleman. If we learn nothing more from this passage than the duty of acting lovingly and courteously, one to the other, we shall be all the better for it, for there is none too much tender consideration, and gentle speech among professors at this time.

I. Beyond this, our text is singularly full of instructive matter, as I shall hope to show you. Without preface, let us notice, first, that THIS PASSAGE REMARKABLY ILLUSTRATES THE VARIOUS RELATIONS OF FAMILIES TO THE CHURCH.

Note in the third verse that the apostle says, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus." Here you have a household in which both the father and the mother, or say, the husband and the wife, were joined to the church of God. What a happy circumstance was this! Their influence upon the rest of the household must have been very powerful, for when two loving hearts pull together, they accomplish wonders. What different associations cluster around the names of "Priscilla and Aquila" from those which are awakened by the words, "Ananias and Sapphira"! There we have a husband and a wife conspiring in hypocrisy, and here a wife and a husband united in sincere devotion. Thrice happy are those who are not only joined in marriage, but are one in the Lord Jesus Christ. Such marriages are made in heaven. This couple appears to have been advanced Christians, for they became instructors of others, and not merely teachers of the ignorant, but teachers of those who already knew much of the gospel, for they instructed young Apollos, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures. They taught him the way of God more perfectly, and therefore we may be sure were deep-taught Christians themselves. We must usually look for our spiritual fathers and nursing mothers in those households where husband and wife are walking in the fear of God. They are mutually helpful, and therefore grow in grace beyond others.

I do not know why Paul, in this case, wrote, "Priscilla and Aquila," thus placing the wife first, for in Acts we read of them as, "Aquila and Priscilla." I should not wonder but he put them in order according to quality rather than according to the rule of sex. He named Priscilla first, because she was first in energy of character and attainments in grace. There is a precedence which, in Christ, is due to the woman when she becomes the leader in devotion, and manifests the stronger mind in the things of God. It is well when nature and grace both authorize our saying, "Aquila and Priscilla," but it is not amiss when grace outruns nature, and we hear of, "Priscilla and Aquila." Whether the wife is first or second matters little if both are truly the servants of God. Dear husband, is your wife unconverted? Never fail to pray for her. Good sister, have you not yet seen the partner of your joys brought in to be a partaker in grace? Never bow your knee for yourself without mentioning that beloved name before the throne of mercy. Pray unceasingly that your life companions may be

converted to God. Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers, and were thus of the same trade with the apostle, who for this reason lodged with them at Corinth. They had lived in Rome at one time, but had been obliged to leave owing to a decree of Claudius which banished the Jews from the imperial city. When that decree was no longer carried out, they seem to have gone back to Rome, which from the vast awnings used in the great public buildings, must have afforded a fine sphere for the tent-makers' craft. It is very likely that their occupation of tent making necessitated their having a large room in which to carry on their work, and therefore they allowed the Christians to meet in it. Paul spoke of the church that was in their house. It is a great privilege when a Christian family can accommodate the church of God. It is well when they judge that the parlor will be honored by being used for a prayer meeting and considers that the best room in the house is none too good for the servants of God to meet in. Such a dwelling becomes like the house of Obededom, where the ark of God tarried and left a permanent blessing behind.

To pass on; in the 7th verse you have another family. "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles who also were in Christ before me." Now, if I understand this passage right, we have here a case of two men, perhaps they are both male names, Andronicus and Juni*us,* or else a husband and wife, or a brother and sister—Andronicus and Juni*a,* but at any rate they represent part of a household, and part of a very remarkable household too, for they were kinsmen of Paul, and they were converted to God before Paul was, which interesting fact slips out quite incidentally. I have wondered in my own mind whether the conversion of his relatives helped to irritate Paul into his murderous fury against the church of Christ; whether when he saw Andronicus and Junia, his relatives, converted to what he thought to be the superstition of Nazareth—whether that excited in him the desperate animosity which he displayed towards the Lord Jesus Christ. I may leave that as a matter of question, but I feel certain that the prayers of his two relations followed the young persecutor, and that if you were to look deep into the reason for the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus, you would find it at the mercy seat in the prayers of Andronicus and Junia, his kinsmen, who were in Christ before him. This should act as a great encouragement for all of you who desire the salvation of your households. Perhaps you have a relative who is very much opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ; for that very reason pray the more persistently for him! There is none the less hope for him because of his zealous opposition, for the man is evidently in a thoughtful condition, and the grace of God is able to turn his ignorant zeal to good account when his heart has been enlightened and renewed. There is something to be made out of a man who has enough in him to be opposed to the gospel—a good sword will make a good plowshare. Out of persecutors God can make apostles. Nowadays the world swarms with milksops of men, who neither believe in the gospel, nor thoroughly disbelieve it. They are neither for nor against, neither true to God nor the devil. Such men of straw will never be worth their salt even if they should

become converted. An out-and-out honest hater of the gospel is the man who with one touch of divine grace may be made into an equally sincere lover of the truth which once he despised. Pray on, pray hard, pray believingly for your relatives, and you may live to see them occupy the pulpit, and preach the faith which now they strive to overturn. It is a happy and hopeful token for good to a family, when a part of the household is joined to the church of God.

Passing on again, we meet with a third family in relation to the church, but in this case the master of the house was not a Christian—I suppose not, from the 10th verse, "Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household." Not, "Salute Aristobulus," no, but they that are of his household. Why leave Aristobulus out? It is just possible that he was dead, but far more likely that he was unsaved. He was left out of the apostle's salutation because he had left himself out; he was no believer, and therefore there could be no Christian salutation sent to him. Alas for him, the kingdom of God was near to him, yes, in his house, and yet he was unblessed by it! Am I not speaking to a man in this condition? Where are you, Aristobulus? That is not your name, perhaps, but your character is the same as that of this unregenerate Roman, whose family knew the Lord. I might speak in God's name good words, and comfortable words to your wife, and to your children, but I cannot so speak to you, Aristobulus! The Lord sends a message of grace to your dear child, to your beloved wife, but not to you—for, you have not given your heart to Him. I will pray for you, and I am happy to know that those of your household who love the Lord are interceding for you both day and night. It is a hopeful connection that you have with the church, though, perhaps, you do not care much about it, yet be sure of this—the kingdom of God has come near unto you. This fact will involve dreadful responsibility if it does not lead to your salvation, for, if like Capernaum, you are exalted to heaven by your privileges, it will be all the more dreadful to be thrust down to hell. It is a sad thing in a family when one is taken, and another left. Oh, think how wretched will be your condition if you continue in unbelief, for when your child is in heaven, and your wife is in heaven, and you see your mother who is there already, and you, yourself, are cast far off into hell—you will remember that you were called, but refused; were bid, but would not come. You shut your eyes to the light and would not see; you rejected Christ, and perished willfully, a suicide to your own soul.

Another instance of this, and I think a worse one, is to be seen further on in our text where the apostle speaks of the "household of Narcissus," in the 11th verse—"Greet them that are of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord." Now I fancy that Narcissus was the master of the house, and that the converts in the house were his servants or his slaves. There was a Narcissus in the days of Nero, who was put to death by Nero's successor. He was Nero's favorite, and when I have said that, you may conclude that he was a man of no very commendable character. It is said of him that he was extremely rich, and that he was as bad as he was rich. Yet while the halls of the house of Narcissus echoed to blas-

phemous songs, and while luxurious gluttony mingled with unbridled licentiousness, made his mansion a very hell, there was a saving salt in the servants' hall and the slaves' dormitory. Perhaps under the stairs, in the little place where the slave crept in to sleep, prayer was made unto the living God. And when the master little dreamed of it, the servants about his house sang hymns in praise of one Jesus Christ, the anointed Savior, whom they adored as the Son of God. Wonderful are the ways of electing love, which passes by the rich and great, to have respect unto the man of low degree. It may be there is some bad master within reach of my voice. He is utterly irreligious, but yet in his house there are those who wait upon the Lord in prayer. He who blacks your shoes may be one of the beloved of the Lord, while you who wear them may be without God and without hope in the world. The little maid in your house fears the Lord, though you are forgetful of His praises; an angel received unawares waits upon you at table.

There was a good man some years ago who used to sit up for a certain king of ours of wretched memory—let his name rot! This king was called a gentleman, but other titles might better describe him. And while his master would be rioting, this man was communing with God, and reading Boston's, "Crook in the Lot," or some such blessed book, to while away the weary hours. There are still at this day in the halls of the great and wicked, and in the abodes of transgressors of all classes, God's hidden ones, who are the salt of the earth, and they cry unto God day and night against the iniquity of their masters. There shall be an inquisition concerning all this—the godly shall not always be forgotten; the golden nuggets shall not always lie hidden in the dust. Think, O Masters, how will it fare with you when your humblest menials shall be crowned with glory, and you shall be driven into the blackness of darkness forever? Seek you also the Lord, you great ones and He will be found of you.

We cannot afford to stay with Narcissus. Let us turn to the 12th verse. Here we have another instance of a family in connection with Christ's people. Paul writes, "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord." I suppose two sisters, the names sound like it. Where were their brothers? Where was their father? Where was their mother? "Tryphena and Tryphosa," how often have I seen them in the church; two humble, earnest, faithful women, the lone ones of the family, and all the rest far off from God! O brother, let not your sister go to heaven alone. Father, if your daughters are children of God, do not remain His enemy. Let the examples of your godly children help you, O parents, to be yourselves decided for the Redeemer! Hail to you, you gracious women who keep each other company on the road to heaven! May the Lord make you a comfort to one another! May you shine both here and hereafter like twin stars, shedding a gentle radiance of holiness on all around! There is work for you in your heavenly Father's House, and though you may not be called to public preaching, yet, in spheres appropriate, you may with much acceptance, "labor in the Lord."

Further down, in the 15th verse, we have a brother and his sister, "Nereus, and his sister." It is pleasant to see the stronger and weaker sex

thus associated. "They grew in beauty side by side" in the field of nature, and now they bloom together in the garden of grace. It is a sweet relationship, that of a godly brother and sister; they are as the rose and the lily in the same bouquet, but had they no other relatives? Were there no others remaining of their kindred? Had they no trouble in spirit concerning others dear to them? Depend upon it, they often prayed together and sighed because their relatives were not in Christ, for concerning all the rest of the family the record is blank. God hear your prayers, my dear friends, when you, like Nereus and his sister, unite in brotherly prayer and sisterly intercession.

One other very beautiful instance of a family connection with the church is in the 13th verse, "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Now, this is a case of a mother and her son. I would not wish to say anything that is far-fetched, but I think there is no vain conjecture in supposing that this good woman was the wife of Simon the Cyrenian, who carried the cross of Christ. You will remember he is said by Mark to be the father of Alexander and Rufus, two persons who evidently were well-known in the church of God at that time. And here we have familiar mention of Rufus and his mother. Whether she was the wife of Simeon or not, she seems to have been a kind, good, lovable soul, one of those dear matrons, who are at once an ornament and a comfort to the Christian church. And such an excellent woman was she that Paul, when he calls her the mother of Rufus adds, "And mine"—she had been like a mother to him.

I do not wonder that such choice mothers have choice sons—"chosen in the Lord." If those whom we deeply love carry their religion about with them set in a frame of affectionate cheerfulness, it is hard to resist the charms of their lovely piety. When a godly woman is a tender mother, it is no wonder if her sons, Rufus and Alexander, become believers in Jesus Christ too, for their mother's love and example draw them towards Jesus. There is a legend connected with Rufus and Alexander. I have never read it, but I have seen it set forth in glowing colors by an artist in a cathedral in Belgium. I saw a series of paintings which represented Christ bearing His cross through the streets of Jerusalem. Among the crowd the artist has placed a countryman looking on, and carrying with him his pick and spade, as if he had just come into the town from laboring in the fields. In the next picture this countryman is evidently moved to tears by seeing the cruelties practiced upon the Redeemer, and he shows his sympathy so plainly that the cruel persecutors of our Lord, who are watching the spectators, observe it, and gather angrily around him. The countryman's two boys are there too, Alexander and Rufus. Rufus is the boy with the red hair; he is ardent and sanguine, bold and outspoken, and you can see that one of the rough men has just been cuffing him about the head for showing sympathy with the poor cross-bearing Savior. The next picture represents the father taken and compelled to bear the cross, while Alexander holds his father's pick, and Rufus is carrying his father's spade, and they are going along close by the Lord Jesus, pitying Him greatly. If they cannot bear the cross, they will at least help their father

by carrying his tools. Of course it is but a legend, but who marvels if Alexander and Rufus saw their father carry Christ's cross so well that they too, should afterwards count it their glory to be followers of the Crucified One? And that Paul should say, when he wrote down the name of Rufus, that he was a choice man, for so we may translate the passage, "Chosen in the Lord," or, "The choice one of the Lord"! He was a distinguished Christian with great depth of Christian experience, and in all respects a fit descendant of a remarkable father and mother.

Thus have we observed the different ways in which families come in contact with Christ, and I pray God that every family here may make up a part of the whole family in heaven and earth, which is named by the name of Jesus! May all your sons and your daughters, your brothers and your sisters, your servants and kinsfolk, but chiefly yourselves, take up the cross of Jesus, and be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

II. The interesting passage before us shows WHAT ARE POINTS OF INTEREST AMONG CHRISTIANS.

Now, among worldly people, points of interest are very many and characteristic. In any worldly community one very important point of interest is how much is a man worth. That is an important point with Christians, too, in the right sense, but the worldly man means by that, "How much money has the man scraped into his till?" He may have gained his riches in the worst way in the world, but nobody takes account of that. The one all-important question among Mammonites is—"What is his balance at the bankers?" Now, Paul does not, in his salutation, make a single reference to anyone on account of his wealth or poverty. He does not say, "To Philologus, our brother, who has 10,000 pounds a year, and Julia, our sister, who keeps a carriage and pair"—nothing of the sort. He makes no account of position or property, except so far as those may be implied in the service which each person rendered to the cause of God. Neither is there any allusion made to their holding important offices under government, or being what is called exceedingly respectable people or persons of good family. The points of interest with Paul, as a Christian, were very different from those.

The first matter of which he made honorable mention was their service for the church. Phebe, in the first verse, is, "A servant of the church, which is at Cenchrea. She has been a succorer of many, and of myself also." It is a distinction and honor among Christians to be allowed to serve; the most menial employment for the church of God is the most honorable. Every man who seeks honor after God's fashion seeks it by being abased, by undertaking that ministry which will involve the most self-denial, and will secure the greatest reproach. Foremost in the ranks of the divine peerage are the martyrs, because they were the most despised; they suffered most, and they have the most of honor. So Phebe shall have her name inscribed in this golden book of Christ's nobility, because she is the servant of the church, and because, in being such, she succored the poor and needy. I doubt not she was a nurse among the poorer Christians, or as some call them, a deaconess, for in olden times

it was so, that the elder women who had need were maintained by the church. And they, in return, occupied themselves with the nursing of sick believers. And it would be well if such were the case again, and if the old office could be revived.

Another special point for remark among Christians is their *labor*. Kindly refer to your Bibles, and read the 6th verse: "Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us." This is the sixth Mary mentioned in the Bible. She appears to have been one who laid herself out to help the minister. "She bestowed much labor *on us,"* says the apostle, or, *"on me"*—she was one of those useful women who took personal care of the preacher because she believed the life of God's servant to be precious, and that he should be cared for in his many labors and perils. What she did for Paul and his fellow laborers, we are not told, but it was something which cost her effort, amounting to "much labor." She loved much, and therefore toiled much. She was "always abounding in the work of the Lord." Sister Mary, imitate your namesake.

Then follow the two good women, Tryphena and Tryphosa, of whom it is said, "Who labor in the Lord," and Persis, of whom it is written, she "Labored *much* in the Lord." I do not suppose Tryphena and Tryphosa were angry because the apostle made this distinction, but it is certainly a very plain and explicit one—the first two "labored"—but Persis "labored much." So there are distinctions and degrees in honor among believers, and these are graduated by the scale of service done. It is an honor to labor for Christ; it is a still greater honor to labor much. If then, any, in joining the Christian church, desire place or position, honor or respect, the way to it is this—labor, and labor much. Persis had probably been a slave, and was of a strange race from the far-off land of Persia, but she was so excellent in disposition that she is called, "The beloved Persis," and for her indefatigable industry she receives signal mention. Among believers the rewards of affectionate respect are distributed according to the self-denying service which is rendered to Christ, and to His cause. May all of us be helped to labor much, by the power of the Holy Spirit!

At the same time, another point of interest is *character,* for as I have already said, Rufus in the 13th verse is said to be "Chosen in the Lord," which cannot allude to his election since all the rest were chosen too, but must mean that he was a choice man in the Lord, a man of peculiarly sweet spirit, a devout man, a man who walked with God, a man well instructed in the things of God—and a man whose practice was equal to his knowledge. "Salute" him, says the apostle. He who would be noted in the church of God must have real character—there must be holiness unto the Lord, there must be faith. A man must have it said of him, "He is full of faith, and of the Holy Spirit." This shall get him commemoration, but nothing else will do it. Apelles is described as "Approved in Christ," a tried, proved and experienced believer. Christians value those who have been tested and found faithful; tried saints are had in honor among us.

Character, you see, is the one noteworthy point in the society of the church, and nothing else. Yes, there is one thing else. I find one person here noted in the church as a person around whom great interest cen-

tered, because of the time of his conversion. It is in the 5th verse. "Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ." You know what that means. When Paul began to preach in Achaia, Epaenetus was one of his first converts, and while every minister feels a peculiar attachment to all his converts, he has the tenderest memory of the first ones. What parent does not prize, above all others, his first child? I can speak from experience. I remember well the first woman who professed to be brought to Christ when I began to preach the gospel. I have the house in my mind's eye at this moment, and though I cannot say that it was a picturesque cottage, yet it will always interest me. Great was the joy I felt when I heard that peasant's story of repentance and of faith. She died and went to heaven a short time after her conversion, being taken away by consumption, but the remembrance of her gave me more comfort than I have ordinarily received by the recollection of 20 or even a hundred converts since then. She was a precious seal set upon my ministry to begin, and to encourage my infant faith. Some of you were the first fruits of my ministry in London, in Park Street, and very precious people you are. How gladly would I see some of you in this Tabernacle become the first fruits of this present year—there would be something very interesting about you, for it would encourage us all through the year! If you are brought to seek the Lord just now, I shall always view you with love and think of you as I read this chapter so full of names. I shall be as thankful for those born to God tonight as for those regenerated at any other time, for my heart is earnestly going out after you.

So I have shown you that there are points of interest about individual persons in the church of God, and what they are.

III. But as time has fled, though I have much to say, I must close with the third point, which is this. This long passage REVEALS THE GENERAL LOVE WHICH EXISTS (must I say which ought to exist?), IN THE CHURCH OF GOD.

For, first, the whole passage shows the love of the apostle towards the saints and brethren at Rome. He would not have taken the trouble to write all this to them if he had not really loved them. And it shows that there were Christians in those days that were full of love for each other. Their salutation, the holy kiss, marked their fervor of love, for they were by no means a people given to use outward signs unless they had something to express thereby. O that Christian love reigned among all Christians to a greater extent! "Ah!" says one, "There is very little of it." I know you, my friend, very well, indeed; you are the man who is forever grumbling at others for lack of love, when the truth is that you are destitute of it yourself. I always find that those who say, there is no love among Christians, judge by what they see at home in their own hearts, for those who love Christians believe that Christians also love one another. You shall find the man of a loving heart, though he will say, "I wish there were more love," will never be the man to say that there is none. Brethren, it is a lie that there is no love among Christians. We still love each other and we will show it, by the grace of God, even more, if the Spirit of God shall help us.

Note according to this passage the early Christians were accustomed to show their love to one another by practical help. In the second verse Paul says of Phebe, "Receive her in the Lord, as becomes saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you, for she has been a succorer of many, and of myself also." I do not think that the apostle alluded to any church business, but to her own business, whatever that may have been. She may have had moneys to gather in, or some complaint to make at headquarters of an exacting tax-gatherer. I do not know what it was, and it is quite as well that Paul did not tell us. It is no part of an apostle's commission to tell us other people's business. But whatever business it was, if any Christian in Rome could help her, he was to do so. And so if we can help our Christian brethren in any way or shape, as much as lies in us, we are to endeavor to do it. Our love must not lie in words alone, or it will be unsubstantial as the air. Mark you, you are not called upon to become sureties for your brethren, or to put your name on the back of bills for them—do that for nobody, for you have an express word in Scripture against it—"He that hates suretyship is sure," says Solomon, and, "He that is a surety shall smart for it." I could wish that some brethren had been wise enough to have remembered the teaching of Scripture upon that point, for it might have saved them a sea of troubles. But for your fellow Christians do anything that is lawful for you to do. Do it for one another out of love to your common Lord, bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ.

We are bound to show our love to each other, even when it involves great sacrifices. In the fourth verse the apostle says of Priscilla and Aquila that for his life, "they laid down their own necks." They went into great peril to save the Apostle. Such love still exists in our Churches. This is denied, but I know it is so. I know Christians who could say honestly that if their minister's life could be spared, they would be willing to die in his place. It has been said by some here, and I have heard it, and have felt that they who said it meant what they said. I know the prayer has gone up from some lips here that they might sooner die than I should. When your pastor has been in danger, many of you have lovingly declared that if your life could stand for his life, it should be freely rendered before God. Christians still love each other, and they still make sacrifices for one another. I speak this to the honor of many of you, that your love to your pastor has not been in word only, but in deed and in truth, and for this may the Lord reward you.

Christian love in those days had an intense respect for those who had suffered for Christ. Read the 7th verse. Paul says that Andronicus and Junia were his fellow prisoners, and he speaks of them with special unction because of that. No one was thought more of among the early Christians than the prisoner for Christ, the martyr, or the almost martyr. Why there was even too much made of such sufferers, so that while Christians were in prison, expecting to be martyred, they received attentions which showed almost too great a reverence for their persons. Now, brethren, whenever any man in these times is laughed at for fully following Christ, or ridiculed for bearing an honest testimony for the truth, do not

be ashamed of him, and turn your backs upon him. Such a man may not expect you to give him double honor, but he may claim that you shall stand shoulder to shoulder with him, and not be ashamed of the reproach which he is called to bear for Christ his Lord. So was it with the church in the olden times—the men who went first in suffering, were also first in their love and esteem. They never failed to admit that they were brothers in Christ to the man who was doomed to die. On the contrary, the Christians of the apostolic times used to do what our Protestant forefathers did in England. The young Christian people of the church, when there was a martyr to be put to death, would go and stand with tears in their eyes to see him die—and why, do you think? *To learn the way!* One of them said, when his father asked him why he stole out to see his pastor burned, "Father, I did it that I might learn the way." And he did learn it so well that when his turn came, he burned as well, and triumphed in God as gloriously as his minister had done. Learn the way, young man, to bear reproach. Look at those who have been lampooned and satirized, and say, "Well, I will learn how to take my turn when my turn comes, but as God helps me, I will speak for the truth faithfully and boldly."

Again, that love always honored workers, for Paul says, "Mary, who bestowed much labor on us." And, he speaks of the laborers over and over again with intense affection. We ought to love much those who do much for Christ, whether they are Christian men or women. Alas, I know some, who, if anybody does a little more than another, straightway begin to pick holes in his coat. "Mr. So-and-So is very earnest, but, ah, yes, but...! And Mrs. So-and-So, yes, God blesses her, but, but..." For lack of anything definite to say, they shrug their shoulders and insinuate. This is the reverse of the spirit of Paul, for he recognized holy industry and praised it. Dear friend, do not become fault-finders—it is as bad a trade as a pickpocket. Till you can do better, hold your tongue! Did you ever know a man or woman whom God blessed that was perfect? If God were to work by perfect instruments, the instruments would earn a part of the glory. Take it for granted that we are all imperfect—but when you have taken that for granted, love those who serve God well, and never allow anybody to speak against them in your hearing. Silence quibblers at once by saying, "God honors them, and whom God honors, I dare not despise!" We cannot be wrong in putting our honor where God is pleased to place His.

Still, Christian love in Paul's days—though it loved all the saints—had its specialties. Read down the chapter and you will find Paul saying, "My well-beloved Epaenetus," "Amplias, my beloved in the Lord," "Stachys my beloved," and, "Urbane our helper in Christ." All these were persons whom he especially esteemed. There were some whom he liked better than others, and you must not blame yourself if you judge some Christians to be better than others, and if you therefore love them better. For even the Lord, Himself had a disciple whom He loved more than the rest. I desire to love all the Lord's people, but there are some of them whom I can love best while I know the least about them, and feel the most comfort in them when I have not seen them for a month or so. There are

Christian people whom you could live with in heaven comfortably enough, but it is a severe trial to bear with them on earth, although you feel that they are good people—and since God puts up with them, so ought you. Since there are such peculiar people, do not be always getting in their way to irritate them—leave them alone, and seek peace by keeping out of their way. Brethren let us love one another. By all means let us love one another, for love is of God. But let us all try to be loveable, so as to make this duty as easy as possible for our brethren.

Once more, love among Christians in those early days was known to respect seniority in spiritual life; for Paul speaks of some who were in Christ before he was. Among us I hope there will always be profound esteem for those who have been longest in Christ, for those who have stood the test of years, for our aged members, the elders and the matrons among us. Reverence to old age is but a natural duty, but reverence to advanced Christians is a privilege as well. Let it always be so among us.

And the last word is this—love to all Christians should make us remember even the most obscure and mean members of the church. When the Apostle Paul wrote, "Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas," why, many of us say, "Whoever were these good people?" And when he goes on to mention, "Patrobas, Hermes," we ask, "And who were they? What did these men attempt or perform? Is that all? Philologus, who was he? And who was Olympas? We know next to nothing about those good people." They were like the most of us, commonplace individuals, and they loved the Lord, and therefore, as Paul remembered their names, he sent them a message of love which has become embalmed in the Holy Scriptures. Do not let us think of the distinguished Christians exclusively, so as to forget the rank and file of the Lord's army. Do not let the eyes rest exclusively upon the front rank, but let us love all whom Christ loves. Let us value all Christ's servants. It is better to be God's dog, than to be the devil's darling. It is better to be the meanest Christian, than to be the greatest sinner. If Christ is in them, and they are in Christ, and you are a Christian, let your heart go out towards them.

And now, finally, may grace, mercy, and peace be with all them who love our Lord Jesus Christ; and may we labor to promote unity and love among His people. The God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly, may we, therefore, in patience possess our souls. O that those who are not yet numbered among the people of the Lord may be brought in through faith in Jesus Christ to His glory! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 16.

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ONWARD!
NO. 1114

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 25, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 3:13, 14.

SO far as his acceptance with God is concerned, a Christian is complete in Christ as soon as he believes. Those who have trusted themselves in the hands of the Lord Jesus are saved, and they may enjoy holy confidence upon the matter, for they have a divine warrant for so doing. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." To this salvation the apostle had attained. But while the work of Christ for us is perfect, and it would be presumption to think of adding to it, the work of the Holy Spirit in us is not finished—it is continually carried on from day to day, and will need to be continued throughout the whole of our lives. We are being "conformed to the image of Christ," and that process is in operation as we advance towards glory. The condition in which a believer should always be found is that of progress; his motto must be, "Onward and upward!" Nearly every figure by which Christians are described in the Bible implies this. We are plants of the Lord's field, but we are sown that we may grow—"First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." We are born into the family of God, but there are babes, little children, young men, and fathers in Christ Jesus. Yes, and there are few who are perfect or fully developed in Christ Jesus. It is always a growing process. Is the Christian described as a pilgrim? He is no pilgrim who sits down as if rooted to the place. "They go from strength to strength." The Christian is compared to a warrior, a wrestler, a competitor in the games; these figures are the very opposite of a condition in which nothing more is to be done. They imply energy, the gathering up of strength, and the concentration of forces, in order to the overthrowing of adversaries. The Christian is also likened to a runner in a race, and that is the figure now before us in the text. It is clear that a man cannot be a runner who merely holds his ground, content with his position; he only runs aright who each moment nears the mark. Progress is the healthy condition of every Christian, and he only realizes his best estate while he is growing in grace, "adding to his faith, virtue," "following on to know the Lord," and daily receiving grace for grace out of the fullness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus.

Now, to this progress the apostle exhorts us—no, he does more than exhort, he allures us. He stands among us; he does not lecture us, *"ex*

cathedra," standing like a learned master far above his disciples, but he puts himself on our level, and though not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles, he says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended." He does not give us the details of his own imperfections and deficiencies, but in one word he confesses them in the gross. And then he declares that he burns with eager desire for perfection, so that it is the one passion of his soul to press onward towards the great goal of his hopes, the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. We cannot desire to have a better instructor than a man who sympathizes with us because he humbly considers himself to be of the same rank as ourselves. Teaching us to run, the apostle runs; wishing to fire our holy ambition, he bears testimony to that same ambition flaming within his own spirit. I desire so to speak from this text that every believer may pant for progress in the divine life.

Paul's statements in the text call us to look at him under four aspects: first, as *forming a just estimate of his present condition*—"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended;" secondly, as *placing his past in its proper position*—"forgetting the things which are behind;" thirdly, as *aspiring eagerly to a more glorious future*—"reaching forth unto those things which are before;" and fourthly, as *practically putting forth every exertion to obtain that which he desired*—"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

I. First, admire our apostle as PUTTING A JUST ESTIMATE UPON HIS PRESENT CONDITION.

He was not one of those who consider the state of the believer's heart to be a trifling matter. He was not indifferent as to his spiritual condition. He says, "I count"—as if he had taken stock, had made a careful estimate, and had come to a conclusion. He is not a wise man who says, "I am a believer in Christ, and therefore it little matters what are my inward feelings and experiences." He who so speaks should remember that keeping the heart with all diligence is a precept of inspiration, and that a careless walk usually comes to a very sorrowful ending. The apostle took account, but when he had done so he was dissatisfied—"I count not myself to have apprehended." Nor was that dissatisfaction to be regretted; it was a sign of true grace, a conclusion which is always arrived at when saints judge themselves rightly. Most weighty is that word of Chrysostom, "He who thinks he has obtained everything, has nothing." Had Paul been satisfied with his attainments, he would never have sought for more. Most men cry, "Hold," when they think they have done enough. The man who can honestly write, "I press forward," you may be quite sure is one who feels that he has not yet apprehended all that might be gained. Self-satisfaction rings the death-knell of progress. There must be a deep-seated discontent with present attainments, or there will never be a striving after the things which are yet beyond.

Now, beloved, mark that the man who in our text tells us that he had not apprehended was a man vastly superior to any of us. Among them that were born of women there has never lived a greater than Paul the apostle; in sufferings for Christ, a martyr of the first class; in ministry for

Christ, an apostle of foremost degree. Where shall I find such a man for revelations? He had been caught up into the third heaven, and heard words which it was not lawful for him to utter. Where shall I find his match for character? A character splendidly balanced, as nearly approximating to that of his divine Master as we well expect to see in mortal men. Yet, after having duly considered the matter, this notable saint said, "I count not myself to have apprehended." Shame, then, on any of us poor dwarfs, if we are so vain as to count that we have apprehended! Shame upon the indecent self-conceit of any man who congratulates himself upon his own spiritual condition, when Paul said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." The injury which self-content will do a man would be hard to measure—it is the readiest way to stunt him, and the surest method to keep him weak. I would be sorry, indeed, if I should be addressing one who imagines that he has apprehended, for his progress in grace is barred from this time forth. The moment a man says, "I have it," he will no longer try to obtain it; the moment he cries, "It is enough," he will not labor after more.

Yet, brethren, far too often, of late, have I come across the path of those who speak as if they have apprehended—brethren whose own lips praise themselves, who sing upon their own fullness of grace with an unction rather too exaggerated for my taste. I am not about to condemn them; I cannot say I am not about to censure them, for I intend to do so, from a deep sense of the necessity that they should be censured. These friends assure us that they have reached great heights of grace, and are now in splendid spiritual condition. I would be very glad to know that it is so, if it were true, but I am grieved to hear them act as witnesses for themselves, for then I know that their witness is not true. If it were so, they would be the last to publish it abroad. There are brethren abroad whose eminent graciousness is not very clear to others, but it is very evident to them; and equally as vivid is their apprehension of the great inferiority of most of their brethren. They talk to us, not as men of like passions with ourselves and brethren of the same stock, but as demigods, thundering out of the clouds—giants discoursing to the little men around them. If it is true that they are so superior, I rejoice! Yes, and will rejoice; but my suspicion is that their glorying is not good, and that the spirit which they manifest will prove a snare to them. I meet, I say, sometimes with brethren who feel content with their spiritual condition. They do not ascribe their satisfactory character to themselves, but to the grace of God; but for all that, they feel that they are what they ought to be, and what others ought to be but are not. They see in themselves a great deal that is good, very much that is commendable, and a large amount of excellence which they can hold up for the admiration of others. They have reached the "higher life," and are wonderfully fond of telling us so, and explaining the phenomena of their self-satisfied condition. Though Paul was compelled to say, "In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells no good thing," their flesh appears to be of a better quality. Whereas he had spiritual conflicts, and found that without were fights, and within fears, these very superior persons have already trod Satan under their feet, and

reached a state in which they have little else to do but to divide the spoil. Now, brethren, whenever we meet with persons who can congratulate themselves upon their personal character; or whenever we get into the state of self-content ourselves, there is an ill savor about the whole concern. I do not know what impression it makes upon you, but whenever I hear a brother talk about himself, and how full he is of the Spirit of God and all that, I am distressed for him. I think I hear the voice of that stately professor who said, "God, I thank you that I am not as other men are." I feel that I would prefer to listen to that other man, who said, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and went down to his house justified, rather than the other.

When I hear a man crow about himself, I think of Peter's declaration—"Though all men should deny You, yet will not I," and I hear another cock crow. Self-complacency is the mother of spiritual declension. David said, "My mountain stands firm: I shall never be moved." But before long the face of God was hidden, and he was troubled. In the presence of a professor who is pleased with his own attainments, one remembers that warning text—"Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." Great I! Great I! Wherever you are, you must come down. Great I is always opposed to great Christ. John the Baptist knew the truth when he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." There is no room in this world for God's glory and man's glory. He who is less than nothing magnifies God, but he "who is rich, and increased in goods, and has need of nothing," dishonors God, and he "is naked and poor and miserable."

Furthermore, we have observed that the best of men do not talk of their attainments; their tone is self-depreciation, not self-content. We have known some eminently holy men, who are now in heaven, and in looking back upon their lives, we note that they were never conscious of being what we all thought them to be. Everybody could see their beauty of character except themselves. *They* lamented their imperfections while *we* admired the grace of God in them. I remember a minister of Christ, now with God—I will not mention his name—if I did, it would be as familiar to your ears as household words. It was proposed by some of us, when he left the ministry in his old age, that we should hold a meeting to bid him farewell, and testify our esteem for him. It was my duty to propose the fraternal act, but I hesitated as I saw the blush mantle his cheek, and I paused when he rose and besought us never to think of such a thing, for he felt himself to be one of the most unworthy of all the servants of the Lord. Every man of the associated ministers, that day assembled, felt that our venerable friend was by far the superior of us all, and yet his own estimate of himself was lowest of the lowly. He had sacrificed much, but I never heard him speak of his sacrifices. He lived in habitual fellowship with God, but I never heard him declare it, much less glory in it. Shallow streams brawl and babble, but deep waters flow on in silence. Of all the departed saints whom it has been my lot to esteem highly in love for their works' sake, I do not remember one who dared to praise himself, though I can remember several poor little spiritual babes who did so to their own injury. If ever true saints speak of what God has

done by them, they do it in such a modest way that you might think they were talking of someone 500 miles away, rather than of themselves. They have scrupulously laid all their crowns at the Savior's feet, not in word only, but in spirit. When I remember these sacred names of the great departed, I feel it hard to have patience with the unspiritual, unholy boastings of personal holiness, and high spirituality which are getting common in these days. Drums make much noise, but we know by observation that it is not their fullness which makes the sound.

Again, we have noticed that we, ourselves, in our own holiest moments, do not feel self-complacent. Whenever we get near to God, and really enter into fellowship with Him, the sensations we feel are the very reverse of self-congratulation. Job, in this, was the type of every believing man. Till he saw God, he spoke up for his innocence, and defended himself against the charges of his friends, but when the Lord revealed Himself to him, he said, "My eyes see *You* therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." We never see the beauty of Christ without at the same time, perceiving our own deformity. When we neglect prayer and self-examination, we grow into mighty vain fellows, but when we live near to God in private devotion and heart-searching, we put off our ornaments from us. In the light of God's countenance we perceive our many flaws and imperfections, and instead of saying, "I am clean," we cry out, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips." Now if this is our own experience, we infer from it that those who think well of themselves must know little of that revealing light which humbles all who dwell in it.

My observation of personal character has been somewhat wide, and I cannot help bearing my testimony that I am greatly afraid of men who make loud professions of superior sanctity. I have had the misfortune to have known, on one or two occasions, superfine brethren who were, in their own ideas, far above the rest of us, and almost free from human frailties. I confess to have felt very much humbled by their eminent goodness until I found them out. They talked of complete sanctification, of a faith which never staggered, of an old nature entirely dead until I wondered at them. But I wondered more when I found that all the while they were rotten at the core, were negligent of common duties while boasting of the loftiest spirituality, and were even immoral while they condemned others for comparative trifles. I have now become very suspicious of all who cry up their own wares. I had rather have a humble, timid, fearful, watchful, self-depreciating Christian to be my companion than any of the religious exquisites who crave our admiration. I fear these great-winged eagles that fly so loftily will turn out to be unclean birds, for the excessive verdure of a super finely flourishing religiousness often covers a horrible bog of hypocrisy.

Let me add, once more, that whatever shape self-satisfaction may assume—and it bears a great many—it is at bottom nothing but a shirking of the hardship of Christian soldierhood. The Christian soldier has to fight with sins every day, and if he is a man of God, and God's Spirit is in him, he will find he needs all the strength he has, and a great deal more to maintain his ground, and make progress in the divine life. Now, self-

contentment is a shirking of the battle, I do not care how it is come by. Some people shirk watchfulness, repentance, and holy care by believing that the only sanctification they need is already theirs by imputation. They use the work of the Lord Jesus *for* them as though it could thrust away the necessity of the Spirit's work *in* them. Personal holiness they will not hear of—it is legal. If they come across such a text as, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," or, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatever man sows, that shall he also reap," they straightway force another meaning upon it, or else forget it altogether. Another class believes that they have perfection in the flesh, while a third attain to the same complacent condition, by the notion that they have overcome all their sins by believing that they have done so, as if believing your battles to be won was the same thing as winning them. This, which they call faith, I take the liberty to call a lazy, self-conceited presumption. And though they persuade themselves that their sins are dead, it is certain that their carnal security is vigorous enough, and highly probable that the rest of their sins are only keeping out of the way, letting their pride have room to develop itself to ruinous proportions.

You can reach self-complacency by a great many roads. I have known enthusiasts reach it by sheer intoxication of excitement, while Antinomians come at it by imagining that the law is abolished, and that what is sin in others is not sin in saints. There are theories which afford an evil peace to the mind by throwing all blame of sin upon fate, and others which lower the standard of God's demands so as to make them reachable by fallen humanity. Some dream that a mere dead faith in Jesus will save them, let them live as they like. And others think that they are already as good as needs be.

Many have fallen into the same condition by another error, for they have said, "Well, we cannot conquer all sin, and therefore we need not aim at it. Some of our sins are constitutional, and will never be gotten rid of." Under these evil impressions they sit down and say, "It is well, O soul, you are in an excellent condition. Sit still and take your ease, there is little more to be done, there is no need to attempt more." All this is evil to the last degree.

I have used few theological terms, because it does not matter how we get to be self-satisfied, whether by an orthodox or a heterodox mode of reasoning, it is a mischievous thing in any case. The fact is, my brethren, the Lord calls us to this high calling of contending with sin, within and without, until we die. It is of no use of our mincing the matter; we must fight if we would reign. Our sins will have to be contended till our dying day, and probably we shall have to fight upon our death-bed. Therefore every day we are bound to be upon our watchtower against sin around and within us. It is of no use our deluding ourselves with pretty theories, which act only as spiritual opium to cause unhealthy dreams. Sin is a real thing with each one of us and must be daily wrestled with—there is an evil heart of unbelief within us, and the devil without us, and we must watch, and pray, and cry mightily, and strive, and struggle, and admit that we have not yet apprehended. If we dream that we are already at the

goal, we shall stop short of the prize. The full soul loathes the honeycomb; a man full of self cares for nothing more. Shake off these slothful bands, my brethren. Be strong. You are as weak as others, and as likely to sin; watch, therefore, and pray lest you enter into temptation.

What is it, at bottom that makes men content with themselves? It may be, first of all, a forgetfulness of the awful holiness of the law of God. If the law of the ten commandments is to be read only as its letter runs, I could imagine a man's judging himself, and saying, "I have apprehended." But when we know that the law is spiritual, how can we be self-complacent? My dear brethren, if you think you have reached its perfect height, I ask you to hear these words—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with your entire mind and with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself." Can you say, in the sight of a heart-searching God, "I have fulfilled all that"? If you can, I am staggered at you, and think you the victim of a strong delusion which leads you to believe a lie.

Brethren who can take delight in themselves must have lost sight of the heinousness of sin. The least sin is a desperate evil, an assault upon the throne of God and an insult to the majesty of heaven. The simple act of plucking the forbidden fruit cost us Paradise. There is a bottomless pit of sin in every transgression, a hell in every iniquity. If we stay clear of sins of action and if our tongue is so bridled that we avoid every hasty and unadvised speech, yet do we not know that our thoughts and imaginations, our looks and longing of heart, have in them an infinity of evil? If, after having learned that sin can only be washed out by the death of the Son of God, and that even the flames of hell cannot make atonement for a single sin, a man can then say, "I am content with myself," it is to be feared that he has made a fatal mistake as to his own character.

Is there not a failure, in such cases, to understand the highest standard of Christian living? If we measure ourselves among ourselves, there are many believers here who might be pretty well satisfied. You are as generous as other Christians are, considering your income. You are as prayerful as most other professors, and as earnest in doing good as any of your neighbors. If you are worldly, yet you are not worldlier than most professors nowadays, and so you judge yourself not to be far below the standard. But what a standard! Let us seek a better. Brethren, it is a very healthy thing for us who are ministers to read a biography like that of M'Cheyne. Read that through, if you are a minister, and it will burst many of your windbags. You will find yourselves collapse most terribly. Take the life of Brainerd among the Indians or of Baxter in our own land. Think of the holiness of George Herbert, the devoutness of Fletcher, or the zeal of Whitefield. Where do you find yourself after reading their lives? Might you not peep about to find a hiding place for your insignificance?

When we mix with dwarfs we think ourselves giants, but in the presence of giants we become dwarfs. When we think of the saints departed, and remember their patience in suffering, their diligence in labor, their ardor, their self-denial, their humility, their tears, their prayers, their

midnight cries, their intercession for the souls of others, their pouring out their hearts before God for the glory of Christ—why, we shrink into less than nothing, and find no word of boasting on our tongue. If we survey the life of the only perfect One, our dear Lord and Master, the sight of His beauty covers our whole countenance with a blush. He is the lily, and we are the thorns. He is the sun, and we are as the night. He is all good, and we are all evil. In His presence we bow in the dust, we confess our sins, and count ourselves unworthy to unloose His shoe laces.

It is to be feared that there is springing up in some parts of the Christian church a deceitful form of self-righteousness, which leads even good people to think too highly of themselves. It is a fashionable form of fanaticism, very pleasing to the flesh, very fascinating, and very deadly. Many, I fear, are not really living so near to God as they think they are—neither are they as holy as they dream. It is very easy to frequent Bible readings, conferences, and excited public meetings, and to fill one's self with the gas of self-esteem. A little pious talk with a sort of Christian who always walks on high stilts will soon tempt you to use the stilts yourself. But indeed, dear brothers and sisters, you are a poor, unworthy worm, a nobody, and if you get one inch above the ground, you get just that inch too high. Remember, you may think yourself to be very strong in a certain direction because you do not happen to be tried on that point. Many of us are exceedingly good-tempered when nobody provokes us. Some are wonderfully patient because they have a sound constitution, and have no racking pains to endure, and others are exceedingly generous because they have more money than they need. A ship's seaworthiness is never quite certain till she has been out at sea. The grand thing will be to be sound before the living God in the day of trial. I pray every believer here to get off his high horse, and to remember that he is, "Naked and poor and miserable" apart from Christ—and only in Jesus Christ is he anything, and if he thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself, but does not deceive God.

II. In the second place, look at Paul as PLACING THE PAST IN ITS TRUE LIGHT. He says, "Forgetting those things which are behind." What does he mean? Paul does not mean that he forgot the mercy of God which he had enjoyed; far from it. Paul does not mean that he forgot the sins which he had committed; far from it—he would always remember them to humble him. We must follow out the figure which he is using, and so read him. When a man ran in the Grecian games, if he had run half way and passed most of his fellows, and had then turned to look around and to rejoice over the distance which he had already covered, he would have lost the race. Suppose he had commenced singing his own praises, and said, "I have come down the hill, along the valley, and up the rising ground on this side. See, there are one, two, three, four, five, six runners far behind me." While thus praising himself, he would lose the race. The only hope for the runner was to forget all that was behind, and occupy his entire thoughts with the piece of ground which lay in front. Never mind though you have run so far—you must let the space which lies between you and the goal engross all your thoughts and com-

mand all your powers. It must be so with regard to all the sins which we have overcome. Perhaps at this moment you might honestly say, "I have overcome a very fierce temper," or, "I have bestirred my naturally indolent spirit." Thank God for that. Stop long enough to say, "Thank God for that," but do not pause to congratulate yourselves as though some great thing had been done, for then it may soon be undone. Perhaps the very moment you are rejoicing over your conquered temper it will leap back upon you like a lion from the bush, and you will say, "I thought you were dead and buried, and here you are roaring at me again." The very easiest way to give resurrection to old corruptions is to erect a trophy over their graves—they will at once lift up their heads and howl out, "We are still alive."

It is a great thing to overcome any sinful habit, but it is still necessary to guard against it, for you have not conquered it as long as you congratulate yourself upon the conquest. In the same light we must regard all the grace we have obtained. I know some dear friends, who are mighty in prayer, and my soul rejoices to join in their supplications, but I should be sorry indeed, to hear them praise their own prayers. We love yonder brother for his generosity, but we hope he will never tell others that he is generous. Yonder dear friend is very humble, but if he were to boast of it, that would be the end of it. Self-esteem is a moth which eats the garments of virtue. Those flies, those pretty flies of self-praise, must be killed, for if they get into your pot of ointment, they will spoil it all. Forget the past! Thank God who has made you pray so well! Thank God who has made you kind, gentle or humble! Thank God who has made you give generously, but forget it all and go forward, since there is yet very much land to be possessed!

And the same is so with all the work for Jesus which we have done. Some people seem to have very good memories as to what they have performed. They used to serve God wonderfully when they were young! They began early, and were full of zeal! They can tell you all about it with much pleasure. In middle life they worked marvels, and achieved great wonders, but now they rest on their oars, they are giving other people an opportunity to distinguish themselves—their own heroic age is over. Dear brother and sisters, as long as ever you are in this world, forget what you have already done, and go forward to other service! Living on the past is one of the faults of old churches. We, for instance, as a church, may begin to congratulate ourselves upon the great things God has done by us, for we shall be sure to put it in that pretty shape, although we shall probably mean the great things we have done. After praising ourselves thus, we shall gain no further blessing, but shall decline by little and little. The same is true of denominations. What acclamations are heard when allusion is made to what our fathers did! Oh, the name of Carey, Knibb, and Fuller! We Baptists think we have nothing to do now but to go upstairs and go to bed, for we have achieved eternal glory through the names of these good men! And as for our Wesleyan friends, how apt they are to harp upon Wesley, Fletcher, Nelson, and other great men! Thank God for them. They were grand men. But the right thing is to forget the

past, and pray for another set of men to carry on the work. We should never be content, but, "On, on, on," should be our cry! When they asked Napoleon why he continually made wars, he said, "I am the child of war. Conquest has made me what I am, and conquest must maintain me." The Christian church is the child of spiritual war. She only lives as she fights and rides forth conquering and to conquer. God deliver us from the self-congratulatory spirit, however it may come, and make us long and pine after something better!

III. And now the third point. Paul, having put the present and past into their right places, goes on to the future, ASPIRING EAGERLY TO MAKE IT GLORIOUS, for he says, "reaching forth unto those things which are before." Does he not here give us the picture of a runner? He reaches forth. The man, as he runs, throws himself forward, almost out of the perpendicular. His eyes are already at the goal. His hands are far in advance of his feet. His whole body is leaning forward—he runs as though he would project himself to the end of the journey before his legs can carry him there. That is how the Christian should be—always throwing himself forward after something more than he has yet reached—not satisfied with the rate at which he advances, his soul always going at twenty times the pace of the flesh. John Bunyan gives us a little parable of the man on horseback. He is bid by his master to ride in a hurry to fetch the physician. But the horse is a sorry jade. "Well," says Bunyan, "if his master sees that the man on the horse's back is whipping and spurring, and pulling the bridle, and struggling with all his might, he judges that the man would go if he could." That is how the Christian should always be, not only as devout, earnest, and useful as he can be, but panting to be a great deal more so—spurring this old flesh, and striving against this laggard spirit, if perhaps he can do more. Brethren, we ought to be reaching forward to be like Jesus. Never may we say, "I am like so-and-so, and that is enough." Am I like Jesus? Perfectly like Jesus? If not—away, away, away from everything I am or have been. I cannot rest until I am like my Lord.

The aim of the Christian is to be perfect—if he seeks to be anything less than perfect, he aims at an objective lower than that which God has placed before him. To master every sin, and to have and possess, and exhibit every virtue—this is the Christian's ambition. He who would be a great artist must not follow low models. The artist must have a perfect model to copy, if he does not reach to it, he will reach far further than if he had an inferior model to work by. When a man once realizes his own ideal, it is all over with him. A great painter once had finished a picture, and he said to his wife with tears in his eyes, "It is all over with me; I shall never paint again, I am a ruined man." She inquired, "Why?" "Because," he said, "that painting contents and satisfies me. It realizes my idea of what painting ought to be, and therefore I am sure my power is gone, for that power lies in having ideals which I cannot reach, something yet beyond me which I am striving after." May none of us ever say, "I have reached my ideal, now I am what I ought to be, there is nothing beyond me." Perfection, brethren, absolute perfection—may God help us

to strive after it! That is the model, "Be you perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." "Shall we ever reach it?" asks one. Thousands and millions have reached it—there they are before the throne of God—their robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. And we shall possess the same; only let us be struggling after it by God's good help. Let every believer be striving, that in the details of common life, in every thought, in every word, in every action, he may glorify God. This ought to be our objective—if we do not reach it, it is that which we must press for—that from morning light to evening shade we shall live unto God. Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is what we are to seek after, praying always in the Holy Spirit to be wholly sanctified, spirit, soul, and body. "It is a wonderfully high standard," says one. Would you like me to lower it, brother? I should be very sorry to have it lowered for myself. If the highest degree of holiness were denied to any one of us, it would be a heavy calamity. Is it not the joy of a Christian to be perfectly like his Lord? Who would wish to stop short of it? To be obliged to live forever under the power of even the least sin would be a horrible thing! No, we never can be content short of perfection. We will reach forward towards that which is before.

IV. And now the apostle is our model, in the fourth place, because he PUTS FORTH ALL HIS EXERTIONS TO REACH THAT WHICH HE DESIRES. He says, "This one thing I do," as if he had given up all else, and addicted himself to one sole objective—to aim to be like Jesus Christ. There were many other things Paul might have attempted, but he says, "This one thing I do." Probably Paul was a poor speaker—why did he not try to make himself a rhetorician? No, he came not with excellence of speech. But you tell me Paul was busy with his tent making. I know he was—what with tent-making, preaching, visiting, and watching night and day, he had more than enough to do. But all these were a part of his pursuit of the one thing—he was laboring to serve his Master perfectly, and to render himself up as a whole burnt offering unto God. I invite every soul that has been saved by the precious blood of Christ to gather up all its strength for this one thing—to cultivate a passion for grace, and an intense longing after holiness. Ah, if we could but serve God as God should be served, and be such manner of people as we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness, we should see a new era in the church. The greatest need of the church at this day is holiness.

Why did Paul pursue holiness with such concentrated purpose?—because he felt God had called him to it. He aimed at the prize of his high calling. God had elected Paul to be a champion against sin. Selected to be Jehovah's champion, he felt that he must play the man. Moreover, it was "God in Christ Jesus" who made the choice, and as the apostle looked up and saw the mild face of the Redeemer, and marked the crown of thorns of the King of Sorrows, he felt he must overcome sin. He could not let a single evil live within him. And though he had not yet apprehended, he felt he must press forward till he had apprehended that to which God in Christ had called him.

Moreover, the apostle saw his crown, the crown of life that fades not away, hanging bright before his eyes. "What," he said, "shall tempt me from that path of which yon crown is the end? Let the golden apples be thrown in my way, I cannot even look at them, nor stay to spurn them with my feet. Let the sirens sing on either side, and seek to charm me with their evil beauty to leave the holy road, but I must not, and I will not. Heaven! Heaven! Heaven! Is not this enough to make a man dash forward in the road there? The end is glorious, what if the running is laborious? When there is such a prize to be had, who will grudge a struggle?" Paul pressed forward towards the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. He felt he was a saved man, and he meant through the same grace, to be a holy man. He longed to grasp the crown and hear the, "Well done, good and faithful servant," which his Master would award him at the end of his course. Brothers and sisters, I wish I could stir myself, and stir you to a passionate longing after a gracious, consistent, godly life. Yes, for an eminently, solidly, thoroughly devoted and consecrated life. You will grieve the Spirit if you walk inconsistently. You will dishonor the Lord that bought you. You will weaken the church. You will bring shame upon yourself. Even though you are "Saved so as by fire," it will be an evil and a bitter thing to have in any measure departed from God. But to be always going onward, to be never self-satisfied, to be always laboring to be better Christians, to be aiming at the rarest sanctity—this shall be your honor, the church's comfort, and the glory of God. May the Lord help you to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PHILIPPIANS 3.

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THE GOOD SHEPHERDESS
NO. 1115

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 1, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed, where You make Your flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions? If you know not, O you fairest among women, go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents."
Song of Solomon 1:7, 8.

THE bride was most unhappy and ashamed because her personal beauty had been sorely marred by the heat of the sun. The fairest among women had become swarthy as a sunburned slave. Spiritually it is so full often with a chosen soul. The Lord's grace has made her fair to look upon, even as the lily, but she has been so busy about earthly things, that the sun of worldliness has injured her beauty. The bride, with holy shamefacedness, exclaims, "Look not upon me, for I am black, because the sun has looked upon me." She dreads alike the curiosity, the admiration, the pity, and the scorn of men. She then turns herself to her Beloved, whose gaze she knows to be so full of love that her swarthiness will not cause her pain when most beneath His eyes. This is one index of a gracious soul—that whereas the ungodly rush to and fro, and know not where to look for consolation, the believing heart naturally flies to its Beloved Savior, knowing that in Him is its only rest.

It would appear from the preceding verse that the bride was also in trouble about a certain charge which had been given to her, which burdened her, and in the discharge of which she had become negligent of herself. She says, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards," and she would wish to have kept them well, but she felt she had not done so, and moreover, she had failed in a more immediate duty—"My own vineyard have I not kept." Under this sense of double unworthiness and failure, feeling her omissions and her commissions to be weighing her down, she turned round to her Beloved, and asked instruction at His hands. This was well. Had she not loved her Lord, she would have shunned Him when her comeliness was faded, but the instincts of her affectionate heart suggested to her that He would not discard her because of her imperfections. She was, moreover, wise to appeal to her Lord against herself. Beloved, never let sin part you from Jesus. Under a sense of sin, do not fly from Him. That is foolishness. Sin may drive you *from* Sinai, but it ought to draw you *to* Calvary. To the fountain we should fly with all the greater eagerness when we feel that we are foul. And to the dear wounds of Jesus, where all our life and healing must come, we should resort with

the greater earnestness when we feel our soul to be sick, even though we fear that sickness to be unto death. The bride, in the present case, takes her troubles to Jesus, her distress about herself, and her confession concerning her work. She brings before Him her double charge, the keeping of her own vineyard and the keeping of the vineyards of others. I know that I shall be speaking to many this morning, which are busy in serving their Lord, and it may be that they feel great anxiety because they cannot keep their own hearts near to Jesus—they do not feel themselves warm and lively in the divine service. They plod on, but they are very much in the condition of those who are described as "faint, yet pursuing." When Jesus is present, labor for Him is joy, but in His absence His servants feel like workers underground, bereft of the light of the sun. They cannot give up working for Jesus, they love Him too well for that, but they pine to have His company while they are working for Him. And like the young prophets who went to the woods to cut down, every man, a beam for their new house, they say to their Master, "Be content, we pray You, and go with Your servants." Our most earnest desire is that we may enjoy sweet communion with Jesus while we are actively engaged in His cause. Indeed, beloved, this is most important to all of us. I do not know of any point which Christian workers need more often to think upon than the subject of keeping their work and themselves near to the Master's hand.

Our text will help us to this under three heads. We have here, first, *a question asked*—"Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed, where You make Your flock to rest at noon?" Secondly, *an argument used*—"Why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions?" And, thirdly, we have *an answer obtained*—"If you know not, O you fairest among women, go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents."

I. Here is A QUESTION ASKED. Every word of the inquiry is worthy of our careful meditation. You will observe, first, concerning it, that it is *asked in love*. She calls Him to whom she speaks by the endearing title, "O You whom my soul loves." Whatever she may feel herself to be, she knows that she loves *Him*. She is black, and ashamed to have her face gazed upon, but still she loves her Bridegroom. She has not kept her own vineyard as she ought to have done, but still she loves Him. Of that she is sure, and therefore boldly declares it. She loves Him as she loves none other in the entire world. He only can be called, "Him whom my soul loves." She knows none at all worthy to be compared with Him, none who can rival Him. He is her bosom's Lord, sole prince and monarch of all her affections. She feels, also, that she loves Him intensely—from her inmost *soul* she loves Him. The life of her existence is bound up with Him. If there is any force, and power, and vitality in her, it is but as fuel to the great flame of her love which burns for Him, alone.

Mark well that it is not, "O You whom my soul believes in." That would be true, but she has passed further. It is not, "O You whom my soul honors." That is true too, but she has passed beyond that stage. Nor is it merely, "O You whom my soul trusts and obeys." She is doing that, but

she has reached something warmer, tenderer, fuller of fire and enthusiasm, and it is, "O You whom my soul *loves."* Now, beloved, I trust many of us can speak so to Jesus. He is to us the Well-beloved, "The chief among a myriad." "His mouth is every sweetness, yes, all of Him is loveliness," and our soul is wrapped up in Him, our heart is altogether taken up with Him. We shall never serve Him aright unless it is so. Before our Lord said to Peter, "Feed My lambs," and "Feed My sheep," He put the question, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" And this He repeated three times, for until that question is settled, we are unfit for His service. So the bride, here, having both herself and her little flock to care for, avows that she loves the spouse as if she felt that she would not dare to have a part of His flock to look after if she did not love Him—as if she saw that her right to be a shepherdess at all depended upon her love *to* the Great Shepherd. She could not expect His help in her work, much less His fellowship in the work, unless there was first in her that all-essential fitness of love to His person. The question, therefore, becomes instructive to us, because it is addressed to Christ under a most endearing title. And I ask every worker here to take care that he always does his work in a spirit of love, and always regards the Lord Jesus not as a taskmaster, not as one who has given us work to do from which we would gladly escape, but as our dear Lord, whom to serve is bliss, and for whom to die is gain. "O You whom my soul loves," is the right name by which a worker for Jesus should address his Lord.

Now, note that the question, as it is asked in love, is also *asked of Him:* "Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed." She asked Him to tell her, as if she feared that none but He would give her the correct answer. Others might be mistaken, but He could not be. She asked of Him because she was quite sure that He would give her the kindest answer. Others might be indifferent, and might scarcely take the trouble to reply, but if Jesus would tell her Himself, with His own lips, He would mingle love with every word, and so console as well as instruct her. Perhaps she felt that nobody else could tell her as He could, for others speak to the ear, but He speaks to the heart. Others speak with lower degrees of influence—we hear their speech but are not moved. But Jesus speaks, and the Spirit goes with every word He utters, and therefore we hear to profit when He converses with us. I do not know how it may be with you, my brethren, but I feel, this morning, that if I could get half a word from Christ, it would satisfy my soul for many a day. I love to hear the gospel, and to read it, and to preach it—but to hear it fresh from Jesus, applied by the energy of the Holy Spirit, O, this is refreshment! This is energy and power! Therefore, Savior, when Your workers desire to know where You feed, tell them Yourself; speak to their hearts by Your own Spirit, and let them feel as though it were a new revelation to their inmost nature. "Tell me, O You whom my soul loves." It is asked in love; it is asked of Him.

Now, observe what the question is. She wishes to know how Jesus does His work, and where He does it. It appears, from the 8th verse, that

she has a flock of kids to tend. She is a shepherdess, and would gladly feed her flock. Therefore her question, "Tell me where You feed?" She desires those little ones of hers to obtain rest as well as food, and she is troubled about them. Therefore she says, "Tell me where You make Your flock to rest," for if she can see how Jesus does His work, and where He does it, and in what way, then she will be satisfied that she is doing it in the right way, if she closely imitates Him, and abides in fellowship with Him. The question seems to be just this: "Lord, tell me what are the truths with which You do feed Your people's souls. Tell me what are the doctrines which make the strong ones weak, and the sad ones glad; tell me what is that precious meat which You are known to give to hungry and fainting spirits, to revive them and keep them alive. For if You tell me, then I will give my flock the same food. Tell me where the pasture is where You feed Your sheep, and straightway I will lead mine to the same happy fields. Then tell me how You make Your people rest. What are those promises which You apply to the consolation of their spirit so that their cares and doubts, and fears, and agitations all subside? You have sweet meadows where You make Your beloved flock lie calmly down and slumber. Tell me where those meadows are, that I may go and fetch the flock committed to my charge—the mourners whom I ought to comfort, the distressed ones whom I am bound to relieve, the desponding whom I have endeavored to encourage—tell me, Lord, where You make Your flock to lie down, for then, under Your help, I will go and make my flock to lie there, too. It is for me, but yet far more for others that I ask the question, 'Tell me where You feed, where You make them to rest at noon.'" I have no doubt that the bride did desire information for herself, and for her own good, and I believe Dr. Watts had caught some of the spirit of the passage when he sang—

"Gladly would I feed among Your sheep,
Among them rest, among them sleep."

But it does not strike me that this is all the meaning of the passage by a very long way. The bride says, "Tell me where You feed Your flock," as if she would wish to feed with the flock. "Where You make Your flock to rest," as if she wanted to rest there too. But it strikes me the very gist of the thing is this that she wished to bring her flock to feed where Christ's flock feeds, and to lead her lambs to lie down where Christ's little lambs were reposing. She desired, in fact, to do her work in His company. She wanted to mix up her flock with the Lord's flock, her work with His work, and to feel that what she was doing she was doing for Him. Yes, and with Him, and through Him. She had evidently met with a great many difficulties in what she had tried to do. She wished to feed her flock of lambs, but could not find them pasture. Perhaps when she began her work as a shepherdess she thought herself quite equal to the task, but now the same sun which had bronzed her face, had dried up the pasture, and so she says, "O You that know all the pastures, tell me where You feed, for I cannot find grass for my flock." And suffering from the noontide heat, she finds her little flock suffering too. And she inquires, "Where do You

make Your flock to rest at noon? Where are cool shadows of great rocks which screen off the sultry rays when the sun is in its zenith and pours down torrents of heat? I cannot shade my poor flock, and give them comfort in their many trials and troubles. I wish I could. O Lord, tell me the secret art of consolation, then will I try to console my own charge by the same means." We would know the groves of promises, and the cool streams of peace, that we may lead others into rest. If we can follow Jesus, we can guide others, and so both we and they will find comfort and peace. That is the meaning of the request before us.

Note well that she said most particularly, "Tell *me."* "O Master, do not merely tell Your sheep where You feed, though they want to know, but tell *me* where You feed, for I would gladly instruct others." She would gladly know many things, but chiefly she says, "Tell me *where You feed,"* for she wished to feed others. We need practical knowledge, for our desire is to be helped to bring others into rest—to be the means of speaking peace to the consciences of others, as the Lord has spoken peace to ours. Therefore the prayer is, "Tell me." "You are my model, O Great Shepherd. You are my wisdom. If I am a shepherd to Your sheep, yet am I also a sheep beneath Your Shepherdry, therefore teach me that I may teach others."

I do not know whether I make myself plain to you, but I wish to put it very simply. I am preaching to myself perhaps a great deal more than to you. I am preaching to my own heart. I feel I have to come, Sunday after Sunday, and weekday after weekday, and tell you a great many precious things about Christ, and sometimes I enjoy them myself. But if nobody else gets blessed by them, I do, and I go home and praise the Lord for it. But my daily fear is lest I should be a handler of texts for you and a preacher of good things for others, and yet remain unprofited in my own heart. My prayer is that the Lord Jesus will show me where He feeds His people, and let me feed with them, that I may conduct you to the pastures where He is, and be with Him, myself, at the same time that I bring you to Him. You Sunday school teachers and evangelists, and others—my dear, earnest comrades for whom I thank God at every remembrance—I feel that the main point you have to watch is that you do not lose your own spirituality while trying to make others spiritual. The great point is to live near to God. It would be a dreadful thing for you to be very busy about other men's souls and neglect your own. Appeal to the Well-beloved, and entreat Him to let you feed your flock where He is feeding His people, that He would let you sit at His feet, like Mary, even while you are working in the house, like Martha. Do not do less, but rather more, and ask to do it in such communion with Him that your work shall be melted into His work, and what you are doing shall be really only His working in you, and you rejoicing to pour out to others what He pours into your own soul. God grant it may be so with you all, my brethren.

II. Secondly, here is AN ARGUMENT USED. The bride says, "Why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions?" If she should lead her flock into distant meadows, far away from the place

where Jesus is feeding His flock, it would not be well. As a shepherdess would naturally be rather dependent, and would need to associate herself for protection with others, suppose she should turn aside with other shepherds, and leave her Bridegroom—would it be right? She speaks of it as a thing most abhorrent to her mind and well might it be. For, first, would it not look very unseemly that the bride should be associating with others than the Bridegroom? They have each a flock—there He is with His great flock—and here is she with her little one. Shall they seek pastures far off from one another? Will there not be talk about this? Will not onlookers say, "This is not seemly; there must be some lack of love here, or else these two would not be so divided"? Stress may be put, if you like, upon that little word, "I." Why should *I,* your blood-bought spouse; I, betrothed to You before the earth was; I, whom You have loved—why should I turn after others and forget You?

Beloved, you had better put the emphasis in your own reading of it just there. Why should *I,* whom the Lord has pardoned, whom the Lord has loved, whom the Lord has favored so much—*I,* who have enjoyed fellowship with Him for many years—*I,* who know that His love is better than wine—*I,* who have aforetime been inebriated with His sweetness—why should *I* turn aside? Let others do so if they will, but it would be uncomely and unseemly for me. I pray You, brothers and sisters, try to feel that—that for you to work apart from Christ would have a bad look about it. That for your work to take you away from fellowship with Jesus would have a very ugly appearance. It would not be among the things that are honest and of good repute. For the bride to feed her flock in other company would look like unfaithfulness to her Husband. What, shall the bride of Christ forsake her Beloved? Shall she be unchaste towards her Lord? Yet it would seem so if she makes companions of others, and forgets her Beloved! Our hearts may grow unchaste to Christ even while they are zealous in Christian work. I dread very much the tendency to do Christ's work in a cold, mechanical spirit. But above even that I tremble lest I should be able to have warmth for Christ's work, and yet should be cold towards the Lord Himself. I fear that such a condition of heart is possible—that we may burn great bonfires in the streets for public display, and scarcely keep a live coal upon our hearth for Jesus to warm His hands.

When we meet in the great assembly, the good company helps to warm our hearts, and when we are working for the Lord with others, they stimulate us and cause us to put forth all our energy and strength. And then we think, "Surely my heart is in a healthy condition towards God." But, beloved, such excitement may be a poor index of our real state. I love that quiet, holy fire which will glow in the closet, and flame forth in the chamber when I am alone—and that is the point I am more fearful about than anything else—both for myself and for you, lest we should be doing Christ's work without Christ, having much to do, but not thinking much of *Him*, involved in much serving and forgetting Him. Why, that would soon grow into making a Christ out of our own service, an Anti-

christ out of our own labors. Beware of that! Love your work, but love your Master more. Love your flock, but love the Great Shepherd more and always keep close to Him, for it will be a token of unfaithfulness if you do not.

And mark again, "Why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions?" We may read this as meaning, "Why should I be so unhappy as to have to work for You, and yet be out of communion with You?" It is a very unhappy thing to lose fellowship with Jesus, and yet to have to go on with religious exercises. If the wheels are taken off your chariot, it is no great matter if nobody wants to ride. But what if you are called upon to drive on? When a man's foot is lame, he may not so much regret it if he can sit still, but if he is bound to run a race, he is greatly to be pitied. It made the spouse doubly unhappy even to suppose that she, with her flock to feed and herself needing feeding too, should have to turn aside by the flocks of others and miss the presence of her Lord. In fact the question seems to be put in this shape—"What reason is there why I should leave my Lord? What apology could I make? What excuse could I offer for doing so? Is there any reason why I should not abide in constant fellowship with Him? Why should I be as one that turns aside? Perhaps it may be said that others turn aside, but why should *I* be as one of them? There may be excuses for such an act in others, but there can be none for me. Your rich love, Your free love, Your undeserved love, Your special love to me has bound me hand and foot—how can I turn aside? "There may be some professors who owe You little, but I, once the chief of sinners, owe you so much, how can I turn aside? There may be some with whom You have dealt harshly who may turn aside, but You have been so tender, so kind to me, how can I forget You? There may be some who know but little of You, whose experience of You is so slender that their turning aside is not to be wondered at. But how can I turn aside when You have shown me Your love and revealed Your heart to me? Oh, by the banqueting house where I have feasted with You, by the Hermonites and the hill Mizar, where You have manifested Your love; by the place where deep called to deep, and then mercy called to mercy; by those mighty storms and sweeping hurricanes in which You were the shelter of my head, by ten thousand thousand mercies past which have been my blessed portion, why should *I* be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions?"

Let me address the members of this church and say to you, if all the churches in Christendom were to go aside from the gospel, why should you? If in every other place the gospel should be neglected, and an uncertain sound should be given forth, if Ritualism should swallow up half the churches, and Rationalism the rest, yet why should *you* turn aside? You have been peculiarly a people of prayer. You have also followed the Lord fully in doctrine and in ordinances. And consequently you have enjoyed the divine presence and have prospered beyond measure. We have cast ourselves upon the Holy Spirit for strength, and have not relied upon human eloquence, music, or beauties of color, or architecture. Our

only weapon has been the simple, plain, full gospel, and why should we turn aside? Have we not been favored for these many years with unexampled success? Has not the Lord added unto our numbers so abundantly that we have not had room enough to receive them? Has He not multiplied the people, and increased the joy? Hold fast to your first love, and let no man take your crown. I thank God there are still churches, a few in England and yet more in Scotland, which hold fast the doctrines of the gospel, and will not let them go. To them I would say, why should you turn aside? Should not your history, both in its troublous and its joyous chapters, teach you to hold fast the form of sound words?

Above all, should we not try to live as a church, and individually, also, in abiding fellowship with Jesus? If we turn aside from Him, we shall rob the truth of its aroma, yes, of its essential fragrance. If we lose fellowship with Jesus, we shall have the standard, but where will be the standard-bearer? We may retain the candlestick, but where shall be the light? We shall be shorn of our strength, our joy, our comfort, our all, if we miss fellowship with Him. God grant, therefore, that we may never be as those who turn aside.

III. Thirdly, we have here AN ANSWER GIVEN by the Bridegroom to His beloved. She asked Him where He fed, where He made His flock rest, and He answered her. Observe carefully that this answer is *given in tenderness to her infirmity,* not ignoring her ignorance, but dealing very gently with it. "If you know not"—a hint that she ought to have known, but such a hint as kind lovers give when they would gladly forbear to chide. Our Lord is very tender to our ignorance. There are many things which we do not know, but ought to have known. We are children when we should be men, and have to be spoken to as unto carnal—unto babes in Christ, when we should have become fathers. Is there one among us who can say, "I am not faulty in my knowledge"? I am afraid the most of us must confess, that if we had done the Lord's will better, we would have known His doctrine better. If we had lived more closely to Him, we would have known more of Him. Still, how very gentle the rebuke is. The Lord forgives our ignorance and condescends to instruct it.

Note next that the answer is *given in great love*. He says, "O you fairest among women." That is a blessed cordial for her distress. She said, "I am black," but He says, "O you fairest among women." I would rather trust Christ's eyes than mine. If my eyes tell me I am black, I will weep, but if He assures me I am fair, I will believe Him and rejoice. Some saints are more apt to remember their sinfulness, and grieve over it, than to believe in their righteousness in Christ, and triumph in it. Remember, beloved, it is quite as true today that you are all fair and without spot, as that you are black because the sun has looked upon you. It must be true, because Jesus says so. Let me give you one of the sayings of the Bridegroom to His bride—"You are all fair, My love; there is no spot on you." "Ah, that is a figure," you say. Well, I will give you one that it not a figure. The Lord Jesus, after He had washed His disciples' feet, said, "He that is washed needs not except to wash his feet, for he is clean every whit." And then

He added, "And you are clean." If you desire an apostolic word to the same effect, let me give you this— "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"—*anything*—any little thing or any great thing! Jesus has washed His people so clean that there is no spot, no wrinkle, nor any such thing upon them in the matter of justification before God—

"In your Surety you are free,
His dear hands were pierced for thee!
With His spotless vesture on,
You are holy as the Holy One!"

How glorious is this! Jesus does not exaggerate when He thus commends His church. He speaks plain, sober truth. "O you fairest among women," says He. My soul, do you not feel love to Christ when you remember that He thinks you beautiful? I cannot see anything in myself to love, but He does, and calls me, "All fair." I think it must be that He looks into our eyes, and sees Himself, or else this—that He knows what we are going to be, and judges us on that scale. As the artist looking on the block of marble sees in the stone the statue which he means to fetch out of it with matchless skill, so the Lord Jesus sees the perfect image of Himself in us, from which He means to chip away the imperfections and the sins until we stand out in all His splendor. But still it is gracious condescension which makes Him say, "You are fairest among women," to one who mourned her own sunburned countenance.

The answer contains much sacred wisdom. The bride is directed where to go that she may find her beloved, and lead her flock to Him. "Go your way forth by the footprints of the flock." If you will find Jesus, you will find Him in the way the holy prophets went, in the way of the patriarchs, and the way of the apostles. And if your desire is to find your flock, and to make them lie down—very well, go and feed them as other shepherds have done—Christ's own shepherds whom He has sent in other days to feed His chosen. I am very glad, in speaking from this text, that the Lord does not give to His bride in answer to her question some singular directions of great difficulty, some novel prescriptions singular and remarkable. Just as the Gospel is simple and homely, so is this exhortation and direction for the renewal of communion. It is easy, it is plain. You need to get to Jesus, and you want to bring those under your charge to Him. Very well, then, do not seek out a new road, but simply go the way which all other saints have gone. If you want to walk with Jesus, walk where other saints have walked. And if you want to lead others into communion with Him, lead them by your example where others have gone. What is that? If you want to be with Jesus, go where Abraham went in the path of separation. See how he lived as a pilgrim and a sojourner with his God. If you would see Jesus, "Come you out from among them, be you separate, touch not the unclean thing." You shall find Jesus when you have left the world. If you would walk with Jesus, follow the path of obedience. Saints have never had fellowship with Jesus when they have disobeyed Him. Keep His statutes and observe His testimonies, be jealous over your conduct and character, for the path of obedience is the path of

communion. Be sure that you follow the ancient ways with regard to the Christian ordinances—do not alter them, but keep to the good old paths. Stand and inquire what apostles did, and do the same. Jesus will not bless you in using fanciful ceremonies of human invention. Keep to those which He commands, which His Spirit sanctions, which His apostles practiced. Above all, if you would walk with Jesus, continue in the way of holiness, and persevere in the way of grace. Make the Lord Jesus your model and example, and by treading where the footprints of the flock are to be seen you will both save yourself and them that hear you. You shall find Jesus and they shall find Jesus too.

We might have supposed that the Lord would have said, "If you want to lead your flock aright, array yourself in sumptuous apparel or go get your music and fine anthems. By these fair things you will fascinate the Savior into your sanctuaries." But it is not so. The incense which will please the Lord Jesus is that of holy prayer and praise, and the only Ritualism which is acceptable with Him is this—pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father—to visit the fatherless and the widow, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. This is all He wants. Follow that, and you shall go right, and lead others right.

Then the Spouse added, "Feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents." Now, who are these shepherds? There are many in these days that set up for shepherds, who feed their sheep in poisonous pastures. Keep away from them. But there are others whom it is safe to follow. Let me take you to the 12 principal shepherds who came after the great Shepherd of all. You want to bless your children, to save their souls, and have fellowship with Christ in the doing of it—then teach them the truths which the apostles taught. And what were they? Take Paul as an example. "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." That is feeding the kids beside the shepherds' tents, when you teach your children Christ, much of Christ, all of Christ, and nothing else but Christ. Mind you, stick to that blessed subject. And when you are teaching them Christ, teach them all about His life, His death, His resurrection. Teach them His Godhead, and His manhood. You will never enjoy Christ's company if you doubt His divinity. Take care that you feed your flock upon the doctrine of the atonement. Christ will have no fellowship with a worker unless he represents Him fairly, and you cannot represent Christ truthfully unless you see the ruddy hue of His atoning blood as well as the lily purity of His life. "Feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents." Then will you teach them the atoning sacrifice and justification by faith, and imputed righteousness, and union with the risen Head, and the coming of the great One, wherein we shall receive the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body from the grave. I speak the truth and lie not when I say that if we want to teach a congregation so as to bless them, and keep in fellowship with Christ at the same time, we must be very particular to teach nothing but the truth—not a part of it, but all of it. Preach that blessed doctrine of election. Oh, the deeps of divine love which are contained in that blessed truth! Do not shirk it, or

keep it in the background. You cannot expect Christ's presence if you do. Teach the doctrine of man's depravity. Lay the sinner low. God will not bless a ministry which exalts men. Preach the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's effectual calling, for if we do not magnify the Spirit of God, we cannot expect that He will make our work to stand.

Preach regeneration. Let it be seen how thorough the change is, that we may glorify God's work. Preach the final perseverance of the saints. Teach that the Lord is not changeable—casting away His people, loving them today, and hating them tomorrow. Preach, in fact, the doctrines of grace as you find them in the Book. Feed them beside the shepherds' tents. Yes, and feed the kids there—the little children. I begin to feel more and more that it is a mistake to divide the children from the congregation. I believe in special services for children, but I would also have them worship with us. If our preaching does not teach children, it lacks some element which it ought to possess. The kind of preaching which is best of all for grown-up people is that in which children also, will take delight.

I like to see the congregation made up not all of the young, nor all of the old, not all of the mature, or all of the inexperienced, but some of all sorts gathered together. If we are teaching children salvation by works, and grown-up people salvation by grace, we are pulling down in the classroom, what we build up in the church, and that will never do. Feed the kids with the same gospel as the grown-up sheep, though not exactly in the same terms. Let your language be appropriate to them, but let it be the same truth. God forbid that we should have our Sunday schools the hotbeds of Arminianism, while our churches are gardens of Calvinism. We shall soon have a division in the camp if that is so. The same truth for all—and you cannot expect Christ to be with you in feeding your little flocks unless you feed them where Christ feeds us. Where does He feed us but where the truth grows?

Oh, when I read some sermons, they remind me of a piece of common by the roadside, after a hungry horde of sheep have devoured every green thing. But when I read a solid gospel sermon of the Puritans, it reminds me of a field kept for hay, which a farmer is at last obliged to give up to the sheep. The grass has grown almost as high as the sheep, and so they lie down in it, eating and resting. Give me the doctrines of grace, and I am in clover. If you have to feed others, take them there. Do not conduct them to the starved pastures of modern thought and culture. Preachers are starving God's people nowadays. Oh, but they set out such beautiful China plates, such wonderful knives and forks, such marvelous vases and damask tablecloths! But as for food, the plates look as if they had been smeared with a feather, there is so little on them. The real gospel teaching is little enough. They give us nothing to learn, nothing to digest, nothing to feed upon. It is all slop and nothing substantial. O for the good old corn of the kingdom. We need that. And I am persuaded that when the churches get back to the old food again, when they begin to feed their flocks beside the shepherds' tents, and when, in practical living

Christians, the saints, get back to the old Puritan method, and follow once again the tracks of the sheep, and the sheep follow the tracks of Christ—then we shall get the church into fellowship with Jesus, and Jesus will do wonders in our midst. But to get that, each individual must aim at winning it for himself—and if the Lord shall grant it to each one of us, then it will be granted to the whole, and the good times which we desire will certainly have come. My beloved, do you desire to work with Christ? Do you want to feel that Jesus is at your right hand? Then go and work in His way. Teach what He would have you teach, not what you would like to teach. Go and work for Him as He would have you work, not as your prejudices might prescribe to you. Be obedient. Follow the footsteps of the flock. Also be diligent to keep hard by the shepherds' tents, and the Lord bless you more and more, you and your children, and His shall be the glory.

I have spoken only to God's people. I wish there had been time to speak to the unconverted too, but to them I can only say this—may God grant you grace to know the beauties of Jesus, for then you will love Him too. May He also show you the deformities of yourselves, for then you will desire to be cleansed and made lovely in Christ!

And remember, if any one of you wants Christ, *He* wants *you*. And if you long for Him, He longs for you. If you seek Him, He is seeking you. If you will now cry to Him, He is already crying after you. "Whoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." The Lord save you for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
SONG OF SOLOMON 1.

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DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 8, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul." Psalm 94:19.

GODLY people are thoughtful people. Indeed, it is often a sign of the beginning of grace in a man when he begins to consider. Lack of thought has to do with the ruin of most of those who perish—it is not so much that they despise, as that they neglect the great salvation. They have no time for thinking. They fly through life like mere butterflies, and they rush upon destruction like wanton moths. Alas, that they should be so brutish! It is shameful and grievous that men, whose noblest attribute is an intellect akin to angels, should live like "dumb, driven cattle." Even men who call themselves religious often seek for priests or ministers to do their thinking for them. They cannot be induced to give personal heed to their eternal welfare.

Good men are, none the less, full of thought because they are men of faith—believing is not the death of thinking, it is the sanctification of it. When our Savior said, according to our version, "Take no thought," He was very far from meaning what those words would seem to imply; He meant take no worrisome care, no anxious thought. It was anxiety, not prudence, which He condemned. Christians are among the most thoughtful and contemplative of people. It is the foolish man who leaps before he looks, and therefore often looks backward with vain regret after he has leaped. Men of Belial hate meditation, but men of God delight in it. The gospel excites thoughts and perfumes them. It does not allow the mind to lie fallow, but sows it with heavenly seed from which spring meditations of truth, contemplations of purity, and purposes of virtue. Believing in God opens up to us the stores of divine wisdom, and then, by holy meditation, we feed on them. Faith gathers the handfuls of sacred corn from which contemplation threshes out the ears and prepares soul-sustaining bread.

Gracious men take much account of their thoughts, and make a conscience of them. Other men are scarcely alarmed in conscience by their actions, unless they happen to commit some glaring crime, but the saint has lost his heart of stone, and his heart of flesh is conscious of God's displeasure, and trembles at it when an impure thought has defiled his soul. Regenerates have sensitive minds, so that a word wrongly spoken grieves them sorely. And if it should never go so far as a word, and only an evil thought like an unclean bird flits through their mind, they are troubled lest they should have invited or secretly entertained so foul a

lodger. They dread the sparks of desire, for they know what flames may be kindled by them. They have a horror of sin in any shape—it is a deadly poison—and they dread the very odor of it. If they thought that they had lost their sensitiveness in any degree, it would grieve them and make them pray—

"Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make;
Awake my heart when sin is near,
And keep it still awake."

They judge their thoughts severely and cannot be induced to imagine that they are mere trifles. In this they are fully justified, for thought is the foundation and formation of character. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." If you had not thought of evil, you had never spoken it. If your thought had never conceived, your hand had never executed. Thoughts lie upon the anvil like rough iron, and time hammers them into actions. If there were no plastic clay of evil thoughts, there were no potters' vessels of evil deeds. The thought is the man, the essence of himself, the core of his humanity; the outward act is but the bone—the marrow lies in the motive, intent, and design—therefore he who desires to be right looks mainly at his thoughts.

And as thought makes character—and therefore good men cannot afford to trifle with it—so thought makes happiness or woe. In the present life it is certainly so. Many a man never possessed a diamond or a chain of gold, and yet he is not unhappy, because he wears the pearl of contentment, and his thoughts of future bliss are as an ornament about his neck. Men who have their breasts made brilliant with stars and gems might well envy those whose jewels flash within their bosoms, and light up the secret chambers of their souls. Thoughts have more to do with true wealth than all the miser's stores. The soul makes the estate. He is a poor man who ranks with emperors and yet is a stranger to inward peace. And he is rich who has not a foot of land to call his own, whose heritage is altogether in another world, but who nevertheless can say—

"My God, You are mine,
What a comfort divine,
What a blessing to know
That my Jesus is mine!
In the heavenly Lamb,
Thrice happy I am,
And my heart, it does leap,
At the sound of His name."

Thought does it all. If thoughts are full of faith in Jesus, confidence in the great Father, hope of heaven, and love to his follow men, the man has a young heaven within the boundaries of his manhood. But if his thoughts are full of sadness, despondency, ambition, pride, selfishness, revenge, discontent, and the like, the man is and must be unhappy, he creates his own hell, and is his own tormentor.

We must, then, look well to our thoughts, and keep our heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. We must watch thought, think upon thought, and pray about thought—and happy shall we be if

we can say, in the language of the text—"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul."

Now, as I may be helped to do it, I shall this morning first speak upon *the Psalmist's declarations,* setting it out in some of the different lights in which he intended it to be seen. And, secondly, I shall dwell for a little upon *the subject in this declaration upon which he lays the greatest stress,* "Your comforts delight my soul."

I. First, then, let us look at THE PSALMIST'S DECLARATION. We shall set it forth under five aspects.

The first will be this—May we not, without twisting the text, understand David to mean that *when passing many subjects in review before him, he selected the joys of true religion, or the comforts of God as the subjects which he preferred beyond all others?* The poet-king sees marching before him in procession a thousand themes for thought, many of them exceedingly attractive and fascinating, but after looking at them all with the fixed eyes of contemplation, he says, "Notwithstanding the multitude of all these subjects for thought, none of them charm me like the testimonies of my God: they afford me pleasure for a while, but my deepest pleasure, that which delights my very soul, is found in the comforts of God." It is worthy of note that David was a man whose contemplations could take a wide range because his experience had been a singularly varied one. He knew the joys of quiet meditation, for in his early youth he had been a shepherd's boy, and had kept his father's flock. There are some who fancy that if happiness is to be found on earth, it may be discovered in rural scenes, in quietude and peace, and I am inclined to think that they are not far off the mark. To the mind which is rightly attuned, there are sacred charms in solitude. Well might our poet praise God for quiet, and sing—

"The calm retreat, the silent shade,
With prayer and praise agree,
And seem by Your kind bounty made
For those that worship Thee."

In the quietude in which he fed his flocks, David had not been a soulless clown, but a poet, a student, a divine. At midnight he surveyed the heavens, and gave us that wonderful 8th Psalm in which he says, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars, which You have ordained; what is man, that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" He had considered objects upon earth as well as those in the skies. Many psalms will show that he was a careful observer of all the works of God's hands. He loved to ramble where he startled the hind of the morning, and glanced at the eagle renewing his youth. He delighted to sit down by the brooks which ran among the hills, to watch the wild goats and the conies, and listen to the birds which sang among the branches of the trees. He noted the fir trees where the storks have their nests, and the cedars of Lebanon so full of sap. He knew the joys of observing the works of God's hands, and they are by no means small. If we all observed nature more, it would be well for us. An eminent physician of the insane has said that he has never

met with an insane naturalist. The observation of the works of God in the animal and vegetable kingdoms is so amusing and entertaining to the mind, that it affords relaxation from the severer studies and ruder cares of life. David knew something of natural history, and something of astronomy, indeed, something of every natural science, and besides, he was acquainted with the charms of music and the delights of poetry, for he was, himself, a poet of transcendent genius.

I think of all purely intellectual joys, there is none greater than to be able to pour fourth sublime truths in fitting words. Surely if the new-born child gives pleasure to its mother, the new-born poem gives even more rapturous joy to its author—"This is my own thought; it has sprung from my own soul." The author feels a fuller joy in every stanza than the reader is ever likely to do, for who admires the child one-half as much as does the parent? And then to wed an immortal hymn to celestial music, as David often did, is not this delight? To sit beneath some spreading oak and there, with skillful fingers, wake the harp to ecstasy, and sing, "My hands shall find You, O my God, and every string shall have its tribute to sing"—is not this pleasure? David knew, beyond all others of his times, the united charms of the divine arts of poetry and music. Yet in looking back, the royal psalmist exclaims, "In the multitude of all these charming subjects, rich beyond all price, You, my God, even You, are the chief of my delights, and the comforts You have revealed to me and applied by Your Spirit, to my heart—these are the summit of my joy. In all the rest I may take a measured solace, but Your comforts fill my heart to the brim. They not only sustain and cheer me, but they delight my soul."

Remember, beloved friends that David not only knew the joys of retirement, but he had felt the delights of active life, and they are not few to a man who is in vigorous health and mental force. There is rapture in being able to serve one's country by noble deeds. When the cowards were flying before Goliath, it was no small joy for the stripling of Bethlehem to come to the front to do battle for his country in heroic fashion. It is no mean thing to be stirred by—

"That stern joy which warriors feel
In firemen worthy of their steel."

When he came back with the grizzly head of the champion in his hand, it was no trifling joy that flushed the young warrior's bosom. He had slain the enemy of his country, and now would the daughters of Israel rejoice in the dance and say—"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." He knew the joys of battle and of victory.

Moreover, the psalmist knew the splendors of a court, and the glory of a throne, for he was the chosen king of Israel. He was an absolute monarch of a people glad to serve him. He knew the pleasures of power and the sweets of eminence. David's history was the epitome of all human experience. It was not so much one life as all our lives condensed in one. "He seemed to be not one, but all mankind's epitome." That Book of Psalms—to which of us does it not belong? Is there not a portion there for each man and woman among us? Whereas we each have had a separate way, David appears, like his greater Lord, to have trodden all our

ways, and to have known the sorrows and the happiness of us all. Yet, reviewing all his thoughts, he says, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, of all I have suffered, and all I have enjoyed; all I have gained, and all I have lost; all I have desired, and all I have attained, the delight of my soul is in my God, and in nothing else; Your comforts, O my God, delight my soul." I feel sure that we are not going away from David's words, and certainly not from David's sense, if we give this meaning to the text.

Now, I say to every Christian here, should not this be your assertion, that although all desirable things should pass before you in procession, yet nothing to you is like your God, nothing is comparable to His comforts? Perhaps some of you are now growing gray, having in your time passed through many phases of life. You were rich once, you have also been poor. You have been in company, you have been in solitude. You have been a wife, you have been a widow. You have been a child, you have been a parent. You have been a master, you have been a servant. You have been honored, you have been slandered. You have gone through most conditions of life, and now: what is your verdict? Your answer is concerning everything else except the love of Christ, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." But concerning the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, you confess that it delights your souls as much as it did in your youth, when you consecrated your first energies to God. The gospel still delights us, now that we begin to miss the strength from the arms, and the spring from the footsteps. Now that gray hairs are on us, and we are descending to the grave, it delights us, yes, and delights us in our last hours as much as it did in our first. Blessed be the name of the Lord for this.

But we cannot linger. A second sense of the text will now come before us. David also means that *when he was exercised with many cares in life, he found his solace in the comforts of his God*. David had many reasons for care. Probably the first part of his life was the happiest, when he had only his sheep. Afterwards, when he was called to court, his evil days began. Then was he persecuted by Saul, and hated without a cause. His cares were many when he roamed the wilderness with that rough warrior band around him, so eager for vengeance, so apt to censure their leader's actions. Then his thoughts must have been many and perplexed. We find passages in David's life full of bewildering trouble, like the scene at Ziklag when the city was burned with fire, and all his property and the possessions of his followers was taken away, and their wives and children too. The rough soldiers, in the bitterness of their spirits, spoke of stoning David, and David was much distressed. His own dear ones were missing, and thus he had to bear his own share in the common calamity, and the blame of all his followers besides. At that time, "David encouraged himself in his God." He does not appear to have talked to Joab and Abishai about it, but his heart went away to his God, so that in the multitude of his cares, his resort was to the Lord. After he assumed the throne, David's cares multiplied. The care of the Church of God, as well

as of the state, was upon him. His own sins also multiplied his cares, for when he had transgressed against his God, his family became to him a constant source of distress, and even to the last he had to say, "My house is not so with God."

He had cares heavier than yours or mine, because we are not kings, and have neither army at home, nor foes abroad to look after. However much we may have to think of, we can scarcely claim to be quite as burdened as David must have been. And I thank God we have not such rebellious children to deal with as David found in Amnon, Absalom, and the rest. What, then, did David do when he was beset with thoughts of trouble and distress? He went always to the Lord, and delighted in the comforts of his God. Ah, brethren, this age is an age of care. We live too fast by half; we do too much, and accomplish, therefore, too little. Our good grandparents could afford time for lengthened family devotions of a character which seem impossible to us. They could listen to sermons which would altogether tire us, and snap the bands of our patience because their minds were of a more solid order, and their lives were vexed with fewer cares. We are all hack and hurry; we ride the whirlwind—we are scarcely satisfied with the speed of lightning. Today Christian people cannot rush at this pace without serious injury to themselves unless they often refresh themselves with the comforts of God. Sunday is the great safeguard for the sanity of merchants and business men—and those who break the Sabbath to bring business cares into the one day in seven, act a suicidal part. If more often, in the other six days, Christians would get alone with God, pour out their hearts before Him, tell Him their cares, and unveil to Him their souls, they would have more ease of mind, be stronger for the struggle of life and less likely to fail through an over-worked brain. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul."

Londoners, in olden times, went into the fields on May Day morning to bathe their faces in the dew, for they thought it made them fair. I would that every morning we bathed our faces in the dew of heaven, so should we be comelier to look upon when mingling with men in the business of the day. If every night before we went to sleep, we dipped our foot in the ocean of divine love, our sleep would be more sweet to us, and care would not corrode and eat into the heart and eat into the bodily constitution, as I fear it does in a great number of cases in this weary age. Get away to your God, O Christian! You see the rooks by day flying over the fields searching for food, but as the sun goes down they congregate around their nests, and offer their evening hymn together among the treetops. Beloved, let us fly away to our God when the cares of the day are over, and praise and magnify His name. And then let us nestle down beneath the shadow of His wings.

A third meaning of the text is this—*when oppressed with evil thoughts, the psalmist found his shelter in God.* I may be speaking upon a subject which will be novel to some here, but it is one in which others of you have had much experience. There are times when the thoughts within us

are terrible and horrible. If all the thoughts of the most chaste and holy here could now be unveiled to all, a life-enduring blush would crimson every cheek. Some evil thoughts arise from our own depraved hearts, and these are bad enough. Others are excited by the unholy world around us, and these are equally as evil. But there are some of still darker form, which are not thoughts of ours at all, but which are injected into the soul by Satan. How horrible they are, and how desperate is the conflict of a gracious soul when it is tortured with them! Satan will make you think that there is no God, no Savior, no Holy Spirit. There is not a doctrine of the gospel which he will not tempt you to doubt. There is not a holy thing which he will not urge you to blaspheme. I know some who have been forced to put their hands to their mouths for fear they should utter the accursed thoughts which have rushed through their minds. Do you suppose that these were drunks and swearers? No, I am not speaking of such. I am speaking of the purest and most holy men and women it was ever my lot to know, who have nevertheless been tormented by the devil with the most hideous and horrible suggestions with regard to the things of God. If you have never felt this temptation, I hope you never may, but the probabilities are you will, for there is scarcely a child in God's family that the dog of hell has not barked at. I have known such seasons; have known them to my horror.

Now in such times, when obscene, profane, and blasphemous thoughts swarm in the brain like so many flies, as though Beelzebub, the god of flies, had taken possession of the whole mind, and made it swarm with every filthy thing—at such times the only consolation is to fall back upon your God. In the multitude of my thoughts within me, when they fret and wear me, like moths, or rather tear and rend me like wolves, I will fly to You, my God, to the splendor of Your love, to that fountain filled with blood which washes even these sins away, and to the mighty Spirit whose strong hands can chase these evil ones far away, and give peace to my spirit. Your comforts shall lift me right away from all this tempestuous weather into the clear sky of communion wherein Your comforts shall delight my soul.

Let me give a fourth rendering, upon which I will be very brief. *When the mind is worried with thoughts which cannot be dissipated, it is well to turn unto the Lord.* Thoughtful men will have periods in which they do not seem as much to have a subject for thought as to be prisoners of war to 10,000 subjects at once. They are carried away as with a flood. Their thoughts leap over one another, they press and struggle like a raging mob, they surge like the billows of the sea, they overflow the brain as though some mountain torrent had burst its banks and rushed down with devastating force into the valleys beneath. There are riots of thoughts—not one is well formed—or if well formed, it jostles its neighbor, and is jostled in return. The motions of the mind are at such times quick, hurried, impetuous, as though a whole lifetime of thought could be lived through in a few minutes. Have you ever been borne away by thoughts which you long to be rid of? Have you not put your hand to

your weary brain, and wished it would leave off thinking? Have you not envied the country boy who swings upon a gate, scares the birds, eats bacon, and is as happy as a king? Have you never wished you could turn into a flower, and shut yourself up for the night as a flower does? O those nights of weary watching and longing for rest that will not come! Now there is no sleeping nectar that I know of like contemplation of the love of God. I know nothing which can give the jaded spirit rest like drawing near to God. When God smites me with pain, I love to tell Him, "O God, I would not smite a child of mine like this. If I did, if there were some necessity for it, I should pity him, my heart would yearn over him, I could not be untender to my dear boy. And I am Your child, and You are a better Father than I am—why, then, do you strike me?" Lay hold of the Lord, my brethren, in His relationship of Father, lay hold upon His heart, draw near to Him and wrestle with Him in this way, and pain will often give way before your pleadings. And trouble of heart will fly when you thus come to close grips with the covenant angel, and rise to really child-like, believing dealings with your Father which is in heaven. If you know the law of mental storms, you may reach peace, and that law may be summed up in one line—Steer to God right away! Fly to Him, and you will find a peaceful shelter where—

"You shall smile at Satan's rage,
And face a frowning world."

The last meaning I shall give the text is this—that *if ever we are beset by a multitude of thoughts of a doubting kind, we shall find our best solace in flying to our God.* Do you ever fall into this state? Do you thus speak—"No doubt there is a Savior, and a Savior for sinners, but is there a Savior for me? He can forgive sins, but will He forgive mine? He is able to renew the heart, but has He renewed mine? May I not prove, after all, to be a hypocrite? Is not my experience imaginary? Is not my faith presumption? May I not be self-deceived? Can I hope to hold out to the end? Shall I not, after all, fall by the hand of the tempter? Above all what shall I do when I come to die—will not the waves of death overflow me? Will not its chill floods swallow me up? What shall I do in the world to come if God forsakes me? Alas, may He not have forsaken me already? "My present circumstances are grievous, may I not expect to be deserted in my future distresses, and if so, what shipwreck shall I make, and what a byword will my character be? Will He not leave me to my own devices because I have, in former times, been so worldly and unholy? Alas, if He does, shall I become like others, who were at their outset flaming professors, and ended in being apostates from the Lord?" Now, my brothers and sisters, whenever such thoughts assault your soul, remember David's declaration—"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul." Come and anchor close by your God and the storms of unbelief will no more affect you.

Francis Quarles, in his quaint, "Emblems," represents a man with a flail who is dealing heavy blows all around, and the only one who escapes is a person who, with much daring, comes close to him. The way to escape the heavy blows of providence is to close in with Him who wields the

rod, for the further off you are, the heavier is the blow. In all dark times run home! Return to your rest! If you cannot come to the Lord as a saint, come as a sinner. If the past should have been altogether a delusion, yet begin again. Do not discuss with Satan the question as to whether you are a saint or not, but fly to Christ Jesus. Cease all your questions about whether or not you are saved, and say—

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Christ's kind arms I'll fall!
He'll be my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my all!"

Thus will you quickly end a fray, and begin a feast, for God's comforts will delight your soul.

II. We will spend a few minutes on the second point, which is this—WHAT IS THIS SUBJECT UPON WHICH DAVID LAYS SUCH STRESS? He says, "Your comforts delight my soul." What are God's comforts? They are very many—they are certainly as many as the multitudes of our thoughts! And they are very weighty—they are certainly as weighty as our thoughts can be, so that the one may be set over against the other.

The comforts of God are those refreshing truths which surround the person and the offices of the blessed Three in One. First there is the Father. Oh, is there no comfort in the thought that He is our Father, and not a stranger? Not a taskmaster, as some like to call Him, but our Father, and "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him." Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Can I be His child, and will He take delight in my misery? He may chasten me for my sins, but will He always chide, will He keep His anger forever? If He is a father, and the best of fathers, my soul, why are you cast down, why are you disquieted in me? Hope in His eternal love, for He will yet comfort you, and be the light of your countenance.

Then comes Jesus, Jesus the Son of God. What comforts there are in Him! A man of the substance of His mother, suffering just as we suffer, and touched, therefore, with a feeling of our infirmities, with a heart that always beats true to us; Jesus, God as well as man, and therefore able to succor. Is not that case well-cared for which is in His hands? Is not a soul safe when it is under His protection? Look up, troubled heart, into the eyes of Jesus, and see if they are not as stars to chase away the midnight of your spirit. Look at the crown of thorns on Jesus, and see if it does not pluck the thorns out of your spirit. Behold Him suffering for you as Son of Man, and Son of God, and find your richest consolation there. Does my sin trouble me? It was laid on Jesus, why should it trouble me? Does God's wrath distress me? It has spent itself on Jesus, how can it fall on me? Where are fears about the future? Is it not written, "Because I live, you shall live also"? Can we be burdened by fears of death? Jesus Himself has died, perfumed the grave in which we shall sleep and then removed its door so that none shall be imprisoned there. Shall we be dismayed concerning the Judgment? "Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather that has risen again." What room is there for

distress of mind if we think upon the person and the work of Jesus Christ?

Nor let us forget the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has already regenerated us, and in some degree, sanctified, illuminated, and comforted us, and He at this time "Helps our infirmities." Shall we not in all times of our distress think of Him? What if I cannot pray? He "Makes intercession in the saints." What if I cannot feel? He can quicken me. What if I feel utterly dead to divine things in my own apprehension? Cannot He make me like the chariots of Amminadib, and that in a single moment? Has He not coals of fire with which to kindle on the cold altar of my spirit another flame such as burned there in the day of my espousals? O blessed Spirit, You can do everything, deal graciously with me. Thus from the Father, Son, and Spirit, we obtain fullness of comfort.

But these consolations also spring from the whole work and system of divine grace. Old Christians, as a rule, become more and more Calvinistic because they need more comfort, and having had more experience, they have an appetite for the more solid and soul-satisfying doctrines of grace which they were strangers to in their youth. The idea that we are to preserve ourselves, and that our salvation hinges upon our own future endeavors may be very pleasant for a summer-weather sailor, but for navigating the wintry seas, we need something more cheering. The idea that we have not an immutable God to deal with may be put up with when the birds are singing in the sun, but it will not be tolerated when the owls are hooting in the night. A tried believer must have an immutable God, or he will feel his case to be hopeless.

At this moment my richest comforts are summed up in the verse—"Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." That whole system which begins in grace, which goes on in grace, which ends in grace, that system which makes the creature nothing and the Creator everything, that system which says to self-righteousness, "Begone, for if you remain here, men will boast," but which says to grace, "Come in and dwell with guilty, worthless, helpless sinners, and save them from first to last, that Christ may wear the crown"—that entire system is my consolation. In times of spiritual gloom I cling more tenaciously than ever to the old faith of my fathers, the faith which I have taught you from the beginning—that salvation is of the Lord, not of man, neither by man, but is the entire and sole work of God. I am a lost man if it is not so. If there is anything for me to do to complete the Savior's work, I shall never accomplish it. And if the grace of God is not effectual to save the very worst of men, then where God's face is seen in splendor, I shall never come. Salvation is all of grace, rich grace, triumphant grace, and therefore it delights my soul.

Again, in times when many thoughts assail us, the attributes of God are, each one of them, the delight of our soul if we are enabled to see

them aright, though, alas, Satan too often makes us see them in a wrong light, and tempts us to extract sorrow instead of joy from them. Is God omniscient? Then my heavenly Father knows what things I have need of before I ask Him. Is God omnipotent? Then He is able to save to the uttermost them that come to Him. Is God immutable? Then from His purpose He will never turn, but will certainly perform the work of grace. There is light in every divine attribute for the believer. God is Love! Oh, what a jewel that sentence is! What a mountain of light! God is love! Child of sorrow, sing of that God and let your sorrows flee. God is love, unbounded, infinite, immutable, omnipotent, eternal love; love even to you—rejoice in it. It is also most comforting to remember that God is just, for He is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love. He is not unrighteous to forget His promises or break the bonds of the covenant, frustrate His oath, and discard the many solemn engagements under which He has laid Himself to His only Son.

Furthermore, dear friends, at such times the promises of God are still before us, and what a field of comforts to delight the soul one has opening up before him. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." "Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help you, says the Lord." "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you." "For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you." "I have engraved you upon the palms of My hands." "Your shoes shall be iron and brass, and as your days, so shall your strength be." "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you." "I give unto My sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." "My Father, which gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." "Father, I will that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory which You have given Me: for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"? "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." "He will keep the feet of His saints." "The righteous, also, shall hold on His way, and he that has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk upright." But, oh, if I had a thousand mouths, I could not repeat and dwell upon a thousandth part of the promises as they should be dwelt upon. This Bible is a great honeycomb, and it drips with honey. Come and taste its virgin sweetness, O you whose mouths are full of bitterness, and the next time the multitude of your thoughts shall make your mouth taste of gall and wormwood, come to these comforts of the Lord, for they shall delight your soul. It is worth while to taste the bitters, that the sweets may be the sweeter. Thank God for winters, we should not value summers half as much without them. Blessed be

God there are nights as well as days, or we might grow weary of the sun. Blessed be God for trouble, for depression of spirit, for adversity, for waves and billows to go over us, one after another, for here in the midst of all these, His comforts delight our soul.

The gist of the whole matter is this—the way to comfort is the way where God is to be found. Christian, the way for sustenance, strength, hope, and consolation is the way which leads you to your God. Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength.

And oh, poor sinner, the same way is open to you. Do not look within for comfort, for you will find none. As well go to the Arctic regions and pierce icebergs to discover warmth, as look to yourselves for consolation. Away, away, away, away from your own thoughts to God's thoughts! Away from your own judging, and weighing, and computations, and speculations, and expectations to the firm promises of a God that cannot lie, who has said, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out," and, "Whoever believes in Christ Jesus is not condemned." Come and throw yourself at the foot of the cross though you are the blackest sinner out of hell. You, who are half-damned already in your own apprehension, come where the bleeding hands are streaming priceless blood, and put your confidence in the propitiation God Himself has provided for such as you are. You can never perish if you will come there, but in the multitude of your thoughts within you the comforts of Jesus shall delight your soul.

God bless you, dear friends, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 94.

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THE FATHER'S WILL
NO. 1117

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And this is the Father's will which has sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."
John 6:39, 40.

SUCH is our impertinent curiosity that we would gladly peer between the folded leaves of the divine purposes. The eager thirst of man to discover secrets, to solve mysteries, to draw aside the folded curtains and to ascertain that which is past finding out, tempts him full often to the wildest conjecture and the most adventurous speculation. How many would rush to any part of the earth were it possible to light upon a spot from which they could reconnoiter the times and the seasons to get a sight of the future? To know that which God conceals seems to be one of the depraved desires of the human heart. This presumptuous inquiry is both foolish and sinful. What have you to do, O man, with God's councils? To obey Him is your work, not to attempt to know what He does not please to reveal. But let us understand that the gospel is an extract from the will of God, and such an extract that it contains the very essence thereof. Certainly there is nothing in the will of God contrary to the gospel. Among the unrevealed things, there cannot be anything in conflict with the revealed things. None of the secrets can possibly contradict those truths which He has seen fit to unfold. O then, you who want to know the will of God, here is something of it for you to closely observe, and diligently to study! If you want to read that will, here it is given to you in two forms—"This is the Father's *will,* (the will of Him which has sent Jesus, His only-begotten Son, to be our Savior), that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." And here is that same will again, opened up before you, if you have but hearts to receive it—"This is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

The will of God is our salvation. It was from the will of God that the very thought of salvation first arose. Had we been left to our own wills,

we should have been willing to wander further and further from God. No man originated the idea of restoration for our race—God Himself willed it, and it is from the purpose of His grace that all our hopes begin—and the will which originated salvation, shaped and formed it. It was God's will that ordained salvation by faith, salvation through an atoning sacrifice, salvation by the way of the new birth, salvation by the way of perseverance up to perfection. God cast in His own mold the way and *modus* of salvation and it has been His will that has shaped it. Like a vessel revolving upon the wheel before Him, His fingers have made the form and fashion of it. According to His own will He made us that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. It is His will that has brought those of us who are saved into the knowledge of the truth, by which will, also, we are sanctified, and upon which will we rely, as the motive force which shall bear us onward throughout the entire of our lives. It will bear us over the regions of death, and bear us into the land of the perfect, where we shall see the face of God without sin.

Now, it is about this will of God that we are going to speak, taking the two phrases as setting forth *the divine side of salvation,* and *the human side of salvation.* You know, beloved friends that the general custom with the various denominations of Christians, is to take up one part of the Bible and preach that part. And then it is the duty of all divines on that side of the question not to preach anything but that. Or if they find a text that looks in rather a different direction, these gentlemen are expected to twist it round to suit their creed—it being supposed that only one set of truths can possibly be worth defending; it never having entered into the heads of some people that there can be two apparently irreconcilable truths which, nevertheless, are equally valuable. Think not that I come here to defend the human side of salvation at the expense of the divine. Nor am I desirous to magnify the divine side of it at the expense of the human, rather would I beseech you to look at the two texts which are together before us, and to be prepared to receive both sets of truths. I think it a very dangerous thing to say that the truth lies between the two extremes. It does not—the truth lies in the two, in the comprehension of both, not in taking a part from this and a part from that, toning down one and modulating the other, as is too much the custom, but in believing and giving full expression to everything that God reveals whether we can reconcile the things or not; opening our hearts as children open their understandings to their father's teaching, feeling that if the gospel were such that we could make it into a complete system, we might be quite sure it was not God's gospel. For any system that comes from God must be too grand for the human brain to grasp at one effort. And any path that He takes must extend too far beyond the line of our vision for us to

make a nice little map of it, and mark it out in squares. This world you know we can readily enough map. Go and get charts, and you shall find that men of understanding have indicated almost every rock in the sea, almost every hamlet on the land, but they cannot map out the heavens in that way, for albeit that you can buy the celestial atlas, yet as you are well enough aware, there is not one in 10,000 of the stars that can possibly be put there. When they are resolved by the telescope, they become altogether innumerable and so far exceed all count, that it is impossible for us to reckon them up in order and say that is the name of this and this is the name of that. We must leave them—they are beyond us. There are deeps into which we cannot peer. Even the strongest telescope cannot show us much more than a mere corner of the starry worlds. Thus, too, is it with the doctrines of the gospel—they are too bright for our weak eyes, too sublime for our finite minds to scan except at a humble distance. Be it ours to take all we can of their solemn import, to believe them heartily, accept them gratefully, and then fall down before the Lord and pour out our very souls in worshipping Him.

I. Well, now we come to our two texts. The first is the DIVINE SIDE OF THE WORK OF SALVATION. It needs to come first—such is its dignity. "This is the Father's will which has sent Me, that of all which He has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

Mark attentively the announcement, how *sovereign its character*—"This is the Father's will." Majestic words—"This is the Father's will." No, "if." No, "but." No asking and requesting of men; no bending the knee to their choice or caprice; no asking them if they will please to have it so, but—"This is the Father's will." That is the will which is altogether absolute and independent, revolving on its own axis, the will that called creation out of nothing, the will which cannot be thwarted, for it is omnipotent, which none may stand against, for it proceeds ever on its eternal course. It is a fixed will, for God is not fickle as we are. He does not will this today, and that tomorrow. "I am God," He says, "and change not." He is "The Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of a turning"—a fixed, irresistible will, standing the same from everlasting to everlasting—not subject to change. Would you have it change for the better? How could that be? Can God be better? Would you have it change for the worse? Would God be God if He could be worse than He is? How can it be that perfection can change? It must ever remain perfection—a change would bring in imperfection into that which is complete. To God's eternal mind there is no past, there is no future—

"He fills His own eternal now,
And sees her ages past."

Looking as He does, from heaven, He takes in at one glance all those periods of time which we are accustomed to call ages and cycles. They are all as the twinkling of an eye to Him, for "A thousand years in His sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." Let me, then, again read these words. They concern the salvation of His people. "This is the Father's will." I say again, how grand they are. "This is the Father's will." O God, I tremble at Your will, until I read those lines. I know not what Your will might be, and since I know it must be accomplished, I cower down at Your feet in terror until I read that mercy is the Father's will, that love is the Father's will, that salvation is the Father's will—and then my heart flies into Your bosom with ecstasy and joy, to think that Your omnipotent, unchangeable will should be such goodwill! So full of benevolence, so full of love!

Following the current of this testimony, we are introduced to *the obedient Servant of that will.* "This is the Father's will, which has sent Me." Read the 38th verse—"For I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." Christ, then, is the obedient sent servant of His Father's will. But why does He say, *"Not to do My own will"?* The meaning, I doubt not, as Dr. Owen well interprets it, is first or primarily in reply to the malicious charge of the Jews, "That He was not intent to accomplish or bring about any private purposes of His own, distinct or different from those of His Father." But more than this, "The will of God, which Christ came to fulfill, is sometimes taken for the commandment which He received from the Father." So He says in the 40th Psalm, "I delight to do Your will, O My God: yes, Your law is within My heart." As though He should proclaim, "All that You require at My hand as mediator I am ready to perform." Was it not to this end that He did verily "take on Him the form of a Servant"? And for the same cause did not the Father expressly call Him His servant, as you read in the 42nd chapter of Isaiah—"Behold My servant, whom I uphold, My elect, in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles"? Thus is He the servant of the Father in the accomplishment of that work for which the Spirit was put upon Him. Moreover, the "Will of God" may be taken for His purpose, His decree, and His good pleasure to fulfill which Christ came into the world. It is thus, little by little, that the full sense of the words breaks on our minds. Now, as I turn that over in my mind, *"Not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me,"* I am prone to reflect, "It is for me to lay down my will at God's feet." Well, it is but fit and right for all of us to do so. For every one of us to say, "I came not to do my own will," seems natural and proper. But Christ, beloved—His will is perfect; His will is as complete as the will of God, Himself. It is, in fact, coincident, must be coincident,

with the will of God. But He speaks as God-man—mediator, and He puts it so that He may be to us the pattern of complete resignation and perfect obedience. "I, even I, who have no difference with God, who am God, who wills as God wills, yet I came not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." Why do you think it was necessary that He should say that? It was necessary, as I have already said, as an example to us, but further necessary that every one of us may know that Christ is no amateur Savior come into the world to save without a commission and without authority. He has come here willingly enough, but still, the reason of His coming is His Father's will. When Christ forgives a sinner, it is His Father's will. When Christ receives a rebel to His bosom, it is His Father's will. He does not save us clandestinely or in any manner inconsiderate of or contrary to the divine purposes, nor yet in some such way as though by the tenderness of a friend He would rescue us from the sternness of a judge. No, no, in no wise—for all that Jesus does is the Father's will, as He would say of us, "I say not that I will pray to the Father for you, for the Father Himself loves you." The will which Christ is doing is the Father's will. All that He is engaged to bring about is according to the will of the Father. Let us bless His name for that.

Well now, it would appear that God, in His divine will, was pleased to give to Jesus, His obedient servant, a number of men out of mankind who were to be His. Is not that the plain meaning of the passage, "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing"? The Father gave to the Son, then, a number, I believe it is a number that no man can number—a number far beyond the bounds of our thought. But He did give a certain number whom He had chosen from before the foundation of the world, and these became the property of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were put under a different government, being placed under the mediatorial sway of the Son of God. They became disciples—not by their own natural inclination, but by His gracious calling. They became Christ's flock; He was their Shepherd. They were to become Christ's body; He was to be the head. In due time they were to be Christ's bride; He was to be the husband. They were to be Christ's brethren, and they were to be conformed to Him that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; now this is a great transaction full of sublimity—let us not forget it or slight it. There was a day before all days when there was no day but the Ancient of Days, and then the Ancient of Days, in His eternal wisdom, transferred a number of men whom He had chosen into the hands of Jesus Christ. It is of no use quibbling at it. It is true! It was so, and it is so, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. God's eternal and electing purpose severed from the mass of mankind a people who were to belong to Jesus. Let us say "Amen" to the record.

The next thing we learn here is that all these persons *Jesus Christ undertook to keep.* It was the Father's will that of all who were given to Christ, He should lose—how many?—"lose nothing." This is a very remarkable expression. It does not say He should lose none, that is true—but lose no thing, "nothing." The Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, has taken all those who were given of the Father to Him, into His custody. He is the Surety, He is responsible for them, and He keeps them. In what way does He keep them? Seeing they were lost, He redeemed them. Seeing they were far from Him, He fetches them back, by His grace, by the power of His Spirit. Seeing that they are still prone to wander, He restores their souls. Seeing that they are imperfect, He sanctifies them, and He continues the work of sanctification. And He will make them, one day, to be without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

But the text says He will "lose nothing," by which He means that while He will certainly not lose one that His Father gave Him, He will not lose any part of one of them. Look at that child of God who died a few months ago. We laid him in the grave with many tears, and we believe his spirit is taken up to the right hand of God, but where is his body? Ah, we should not like to exhume it—it would be a terrible spectacle if we should take it out of that coffin, or open the lid and look at all that mass of putridity. Surely this is part of one of Christ's people that has been lost! But it is not His Father's will that Christ should lose anything of what was given Him—and therefore He adds, "I will raise it up at the last day." When the trumpet sounds, the dead shall come forth from their graves, and there shall not be left in the grave a bone, nor a piece of a bone, of one of the Lord's redeemed—they shall come again from the land of the enemy, and leave nothing behind them. When Israel came out of Egypt, the great Master did not bring some of the people out and leave some behind. Oh, no! Neither did He bring all the people, and leave their property behind. Did not Moses say to Pharaoh, "There shall not a hoof be left behind"? Not a solitary lamb of all the flocks, there shall not one be left behind. And so out of the entire company that God the Father has given into the custody of Jesus, there shall not only not be one soul lost, but no part of any one of them—neither of their body, of their soul, nor of their spirit. Death shall yield up its captives; they shall be completely free—

"Then all the chosen race
Shall meet around the throne,
To bless the conduct of His grace
And make His glories known."

That is the divine side of salvation, and that is the truth which this first part of our text teaches.

Do I hear somebody say, "I think that doctrine is dangerous"? My dear sir who is it dangerous to but fools? If God has taught it, there can be no

danger in it. At the same time there never was a truth which foolish persons could not distort and turn into mischief. Ropes are good things, but many people have hung themselves with them. And there is many a grand doctrine which men wrest to their own destruction. And we cannot be shaping God's truth down to consult the folly and sin of man. The question is, is it in the Bible? If it is there, let none of us ever say it is dangerous. "Well, but," you say, "is it not all about secret things?" Is it so? Then you need not be at all alarmed at our talking about it, for none of us can divulge anything which is secret—therefore you need not be under any concern that we shall do it. If it is secret, then so far as it is secret we cannot intermeddle with it. But we do say this—whatever of it has been revealed is for us, and for our children, and we are not ashamed to speak of what God was not ashamed to declare.

Moreover, we have proved it to be good, comfortable, solid, soul-sustaining, sanctifying doctrine, for if there is anything in this world that can put force, life, energy, into a man—it is the belief that God has chosen him unto eternal life, has put into him an unconquerable nature which must fight against sin until it overcomes it, and that Christ is engaged to bring him safely to the right hand of the most High. Why, the gratitude of a man that believes this becomes the master power of his life!—

"Loved of my God, for Him again
With love intense I burn!
Chosen of Him before time began
I choose Him in return."

Slaves are whipped to the battle, but the free man goes cheerfully to fight for the cause dear to his heart. The man that only lives a good life because he is afraid of being damned is a mere hireling in the House of God, but the man who knows that he is God's child, and never will be anything else, that God loves him, and must love him, says now, out of no desire of reward and no fears of punishment, being saved, forever saved, "I love my Lord with all my heart and soul and strength, and I will render to Him the obedience of a child which is infinitely superior to the obedience of a slave." I question the possibility of virtue to a man who cannot say, "I am saved." He that does good works in order to his being saved or in order to keep himself from the peril of being lost, acts from a selfish motive, and believes in himself rather than his God. But he, on the other hand, who feels that he is bought with a price and *is* delivered, *is* saved, *is* a child of God, can say, "Now I have not myself to consider, but my God. Now will I live for Him; now will I spend and be spent, that I may glorify His name." The Lord grant to us to be brought into that condition in which we can understand and enjoy this doctrine, and may we

then by our lives, prove our gratitude for the great benefits we have received from Him.

II. Now I am going to take the HUMAN SIDE, and I think I hear somebody say—"Though I liked the first part, I know I shall not like the second." Dear hearer, what rights have you to quibble at anything that is true? Somebody on the other hand may say, "I do not believe in this first part, perhaps I may in the second." My dear friend, I wish you would give up that notion of picking and choosing parts of God's Word that are agreeable to your taste, but rather take the whole, from the beginning of it to the end of it, so you shall find pleasure and profit all the way through. Truly, brethren, it is shocking to think of the theoretical difficulties that people make for themselves by a kind of smart criticism that seems clever, but lacks common sense. In this very chapter, at the 27th verse, you read—"Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you." The fact is you get here two paradoxes in one sentence. You are told *not* to labor for that meat which no man can procure *without* labor, and you are told *to* labor for that bread which no man can procure *by* labor, because it is a free gift. Nevertheless, the thing needs no explanation. It is clear as daylight to every discerning heart. Here, then, is the human side of salvation—"This is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Observe there is no lowering of the tone. The same august words strike us on the threshold of each announcement. "This is the will of Him that sent Me." The freest proclamations of the gospel that can ever be given are as much divine as are the plainest declarations of distinguishing grace. Listen, then, with equal attention to this second part, for this has the same imprimatur, the same divine stamp upon it—"This is the will of Him that sent Me."

Notice, again, that there is the same obedient servant engaged on this occasion as before. *Whether* you look at the divine side or the human side of salvation, the most conspicuous object is still Christ Jesus. If God looks down on men, it is through His Anointed, or if men look up to God, it is through God's Christ whom He has sent. The points of difference we will therefore dwell upon. In this second verse the persons described as partakers of the benefit of salvation are thus described—"Everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him."

What are we to understand by these words—"Everyone which sees the Son"? We cannot see the Son now with our natural organs of sight, for Jesus has gone up to heaven. With these optics we cannot scan His features or perceive His presence. But when we read of Him in the evange-

lists, and when we hear of Him from the mouths of His servants, we do, in effect, see Him evidently set forth before us. The eyes of our understanding discern Him. The sense of faith recognizes Him. Now, if by that sight, that knowledge, that information, we are led to believe on Him, then we have everlasting life. Whoever he may be—"Everyone," it says—"Everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him," comes in for the same privilege. This includes the man with great faith, but it equally includes the babe with little faith. This includes the man of reputable character, but it equally includes the man whose character has been, up till now, disreputable—"Everyone that believes on Him." Does it mean that if I believe on Him I have eternal life? Yes, whoever you are. You may listen to it in the dark; I do not want to look at you to discriminate between one individual and another. The assertion is wide enough for all of you. Are you a black man, or a white man? Are you a yellow man, or a brown man? It matters not. Are you rich, or are you poor, one in the higher ranks, or one obscure and despised? It matters not. Whoever you may be, every child of man that is born of woman, that sees the Son, and believes on Him, shall have eternal life. Are there no exceptions? None whatever! Can it not be supposed that some characters may be excluded? None are excluded, but those who exclude themselves. The learned and polite, the ignorant and rude—"Everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life." That is to say, to go over the same matter yet again, every man, woman, child, every one of the human race that trusts his soul with the Son of God, has everlasting life. "Well, but," says one, "suppose I should not have been given by God the Father to the Son?" You have no right to suppose that. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you have everlasting life. I could explain, I think, a little to you, at least I have a way of explaining it to myself, how these two meet. I do not care to explain it. I do not think it is necessary at all, for it is so. There never was a soul that believed in Jesus, yet, but God the Father had given that soul to Christ. There never was a soul that trusted the Savior but it turned out that, after all, that soul had been ordained to do so from before the foundation of the world. We will not attempt to answer objections. There is the truth, the plain, naked truth. This is the will of Him that sent the Savior into the world, that everyone that sees the Son, and believes on Him, should at once have eternal life. O what a splendid gospel that is!

Now, when I go out to preach, I have not to say, "I am going to preach to God's elect"—not at all—"Everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life." Nor have I to say to myself, "Now I shall pick out certain characters that I think must be a delineation of God's chosen." I have no right to make any picking or choosing, there is

the gospel—"Go you into the entire world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." And this, again, is the gospel—"That everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life." There let it stand, then; we will not clip its wings, but we will rejoice in its simple truth.

Now, it appears that these persons who believe in Jesus, whoever they may be, are already in a present state of safety, for as soon as they believe on Him, they have everlasting life. They are made alive unto God; they receive a spiritual life which they never had before. The Holy Spirit comes into them, and quickens them. Whereas they were up to then dead in trespasses and sins, the Holy Spirit makes them alive unto God by Jesus Christ. And this is true of everyone that sees the Son, and believes on Him. This life which is thus given is a life that cannot die, for it is everlasting. Everlasting life is freely and sovereignly bestowed, so that every believer has in him a vital principle which cannot be destroyed any more than God Himself can. For, as God's life is everlasting life, so the life of every believer is called "everlasting life." O, see the blessedness of this, "That everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life." We do not seem to want to preach upon that. I like to roll it over under my tongue. I should like everybody here that is perplexing himself about the doctrines of the gospel, and saying, "Perhaps I am shut out from the mercy of God," to go home repeating these words. Therefore I will repeat them again—"That everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life." And since notwithstanding this gift of everlasting life, the bodies of believers die, Jesus Christ has added here that it is the will of the Father that He should "raise him up at the last day." It seems, then, beloved, that no Believer shall be lost and nothing of a believer, for if his body must be put into the ground, corruption, earth and worms shall but refine his flesh till at the sound of the last trumpet he shall put it on afresh. "I will raise him up at the last day." Then it seems that if I am a believer in Jesus, I may conclude that God the Father gave me to Christ to save me, and that Christ will save me and keep me until He, Himself, shall descend from heaven with a shout, and call His own redeemed out of the graves. Thus the two truths are reconciled—may they be reconciled in our experience as well as in our faith!

Now then, to close, let me say to any troubled person here present—beloved friend, never fear that there is anything in the secret purposes of God which can contradict the open promises of God. Never dream, if you are a believer, that there can be any dark decree that shuts you out from the benefits of grace. Decrees or no decrees, "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may

have everlasting life." Lay hold, therefore, on Christ with all your heart, poor sinner. Ask not to know whether your name is in the Book of Life. Come just as you are, by God's own invitation, and lay hold on Jesus Christ. The woman in the crowd could not tell whether it was written in the book of the decrees, that she would be healed, but she came behind the Savior, and touched the hem of His garment, and was made whole. The dying thief did not stop to inquire, "Was I chosen of God before time began?" But he said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Now you, in like manner, act upon your present crisis, and fit your prayer to the present opportunity. The doctrine of decrees never operates upon a man's ordinary life. What hungry man would stop, or hesitate and say, "I cannot tell whether it is the purpose of God that I should eat"? But when the provision is spread out before him he eats. Would the weary man vex his soul with misgivings, and say, "I need to know whether it is the purpose of God I should sleep?" No, but he acts like a sensible creature and goes to his bed at the time of rest, grateful for the interval of deep repose that can renew his strength and freshen his vital powers. Now you go and do likewise. Do not rebel at the purposes, or deny them, but act upon the precepts, and rejoice in them. They are the guide for you. Rely upon the promises. That is the way for you to realize them. And inasmuch as the clear promise rings out from the eternal throne, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out," go and see if He will cast you out. Come, you vile sinner, you foul sinner, you devilish sinner—come you who are stained with every sin, come and see if Christ will reject you. And remember that the text that should encourage you stands hard by that which may embarrass you—close to it—where Jesus says, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." I do pray that those words may encourage many souls to come.

And once more, fear not that if you believe, your believing will end in failure. If you believe in Jesus Christ, the text says, "It is the Father's will" that you should "have eternal life" and be "raised up at the last day." The question sometimes comes to one's mind—"After I have believed in Jesus, and placed all my hope in Him, may I not, after all, perish? Is there not something expected of me in which I may fail? If I rest upon Him as a rock, yet still, are there not some other props and buttresses needed, and if I shall not supply them, shall I be safe at last?" Well, I frankly confess if there is anything needed as the ground of a sinner's hope beyond the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, I, who preach to you, must certainly perish, for I can sing the hymn we sang this morning with all my heart—

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.
Leave, oh leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me."

We desire to abound in good works. We desire to destroy every vice, and forsake all lies and all evil, but we cannot depend on these things, we cannot mix them up with the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Our one hope lies here, that Jesus died, and God has said it, "He that believes on Him has eternal life, and shall be raised up at the last day." Now, suppose, after all, you should believe on Him and find, at last that you are not saved! Beloved, the supposition cannot be entertained for a moment, for it is written, "It is the Father's will." Is that will to be thwarted? It is written that He has sent Christ—has Christ come in vain? God must be false to all His promises, belie His oath, degrade His Son, before He can allow a soul that sees the Son and believes on Him to perish. You are all safe enough if you are resting there. Do not let a doubt disturb you. Go your way full of peace and consolation, and the Lord be with you! But, oh, if you have never believed in Jesus, may your spirits never know any rest till you do! May you never be content till you flee to Him, and rest on Him! The Lord grant it, for His dear name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 6:22.

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THE WAY TO HONOR
NO. 1118

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Whoever keeps the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he who waits on his master shall be honored."
Proverbs 27:18.

IF a man in Palestine carefully watched his fig tree, and kept it in proper condition, he was sure to be abundantly rewarded in due season, for it would yield him a large quantity of fruit of which he would enjoy the luscious taste. So, according to Solomon, good servants obtained honor as the fruit of diligent service. In those early days, when there were far better relations between servants and masters than unhappily there are nowadays, if a servant carefully waited upon his master, he was sure to be honored for his faithfulness. The Bible is full of such cases. Eleazar, the servant and steward of Abraham, met with much honor at his master's hands. Deborah was a faithful nurse, and what sorrow there was for her at Allonbachuth, or the oak of weeping. Elisha poured water upon the hands of his master Elijah, and became a prophet, endowed with a double portion of his master's spirit. In the New Testament we read of the centurion who so honored his servant that in his sickness he sent to the Lord Jesus, earnestly entreating Him to come and heal him. There were exceptions, of course. There were faithful servants who met with ungenerous treatment, but what rule is there without an exception? The rule was that he who was faithful to his master received honor.

I could wish it to be more general for there to be intimate friendly relationships between men and their servants. I would gladly see a restoration of family loyalty between heads of households and their dependents. In these times, servants and persons in the employ of others are looked upon as *hands* to be worked, rather than as *souls* to be cared for. It may be that servants have degenerated, but it may also be the truth that masters have degenerated too. I believe that every Abraham will be likely to find an Eleazar, and every Rebekah a Deborah. Good masters make good servants. Good servants make good masters. Happy is the family where, without forgetting the proper distinctions of position, all are knit together in firm friendship. Alas, the bonds of society have been too much loosened. Oppression on the one hand and discontent on the other, have split the commonwealth. Yet there still survive among us instances of personal attachment where servants have served the same masters from their youth up, have continued with them in sickness and in misfortune, have remained faithful to the family when the master has been scarcely able to remunerate them for their services, and have con-

tinued faithful even unto death. I am sure when we have read such stories, or seen such servants ourselves, we have felt that they deserved to be held in honor. And there is still a general respect which is manifested by mankind to the servant that waits upon his master. However, I am not going to speak about the duties of masters and servants this evening. At other times we have not hesitated to speak our mind upon that matter, and we shall not fail to do so as occasion requires.

But now we shall speak of a higher Master, who was never unfaithful to a servant yet and never will be. And we shall speak of a superior service, which brings to those who are engaged in it the highest possible degree of honor. Blessed are they who are servants of the King of kings. Happy is he who takes even the lowest place, and fulfils the meanest office for the Lord Jesus, if any service can be mean that is rendered to our all-glorious Immanuel.

We will begin by considering the *relation of the Lord Jesus Christ to us, and ours to Him.* Then we shall consider the *conduct which is consistent with that relation,* and then the *reward which is promised to such conduct.*

I. And first, the RELATION WHICH SUBSISTS BETWEEN OURSELVES AND OUR LORD. He is our Master—*our Master.*

I speak now, of course, only to you who are converted, to you who are true believers and are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is to you, your *Master*, in the sense of contrast to all other governing powers. You are men, and naturally moved by all that which moves other men, but still the master motive power with every one of you who is a Christian is the supremacy of Christ. There are some among your fellow servants to whom you render respect, just as in a large firm there are foremen set over different parts of the work, to which a measure of deference is fitly rendered. Still, as the overseer is not the chief authority, so your earthly superiors are not in the highest sense masters over you. The highest of your fellow workmen in your Lord's service is far, far, far below the Master. Ministers and fathers in Christ are not the ultimate authorities to whom you bow, and whatever esteem you may pay even to such glorious names as those of Peter, James, and John, you still regard them but your fellow servants. "One is your Master, even Christ, and all you are brethren." In this sense we are not servants of men, yes, we know no man after the flesh. We are in subjection to the Father of Spirits, not to a "Pope" in Rome, nor bishops at home. We are the Lord's free men, and cheerfully obey those whom He sets over us in His church, but we yield to none who claim lordship over us, and would divert us from obeying only the Lord Jesus.

The Christian has, of course, to attend to the concerns of this life, and while he is attending to them, he must throw a measure of his heart into them, or he cannot do them properly. Still, the master of our heart is not our business, but our Savior. A Christian is thoughtful, and he studies, and reads, and investigates. Still, for all that, philosophy does not rule

him, or the news of the day, nor the science of the times. Christ is our Master—master of our thoughts and meditations, the great leader and teacher of our understanding. We are His disciples, and disciples of none else besides. We are affected by the love of family, the love of friendship, and the love of country. But there is a love that is higher than all these—a master love, and this is love to Jesus, our Well-beloved, and the Bridegroom of our souls. That text is frequently misread—"No man can serve two masters." The stress is not to be laid upon the word *"two."* In reality, a man might serve three or half-a-dozen or 20 masters. The stress is to be laid upon the word *"masters"*—"No man can serve two *masters."* Only one thing can be the master passion, only one power can completely master us, so as to be supremely dominant, and exercise imperial lordship over us. No man can have two imperial master faculties, master motives or master ambitions. *One* is our Master, and that one is Christ. Brethren, as I have said before, we are compelled while we are in this body to yield to this impulse and to that, we are urged forward by this motive and by that, we pursue this end and that, and subordinately none of these things may be sinful. But the master impulse must be the love of Christ, the master aim must be Christ's glory, and the master power that possesses us, as the Spirit took possession of the prophets of old and carried them away, must be loyalty to Jesus Christ our Lord. He is our Master, and we stand before Him as servants who desire to obey His bidding.

What is, then, the reason why the Lord Jesus Christ has become to us a Master? If we were contending with the ungodly, who challenge us for calling Christ, "Master," we could give them a ready enough answerer by telling them that He is the Master man of all men. We would ask them to turn over the pages of history and find a man it was worthwhile to serve in comparison with the man, Christ Jesus. We would appeal to His character, and ask, was there ever a character which could compel homage as His character does? Why, He is a right royal man in all respects—there is nothing about Him of meanness or weakness. To know Him is to become enthusiastic in His cause. We would then point to His kingdom, and the nature and character of it, and ask whether there was a kingdom for which men ought to fight, for which men ought to strive and be willing to die for, compared with His kingdom? We would point to the benefits which He confers upon mankind, the blessings which the faith of Jesus Christ has scattered among the nations, and ask if there ever was a cause so worthy of zeal as the cause of Christ, which is the cause of humanity, the cause of truth, the cause of right, the cause of God. His are the principles which alone can redeem men from their degradation and misery. We count it easy enough to answer the ungodly in this matter. Whoever *their* leader may be, he is not fit to loosen the shoe lace of our Master's sandal. Whoever he may be, and however they may lift him up, he is only fit to lie in the dust beneath the feet of our Immanuel. Christ is

so excellent, and in His nature so pre-eminent, that we defy anyone to call us foolish for choosing Him to be our Master.

But behind all this, deep down in our souls, we have other reasons for calling Him our Master, namely, that we belong to Him by the purchase of His blood, by the rescue of His grace, and again, by the surrender, the willing surrender, which we have made to Him. Christ is our Master because He bought us. When we were sold under sin, when by the justice of God we were condemned to die, when we were utter slaves, He purchased us and redeemed us from all iniquity with a cost which sometimes has seemed to us, for His sake, to be too great. What were 10,000 times 10,000 sinful worms compared with the Son of God? Yet that glorious Son of God laid down His life for us. He loved His church and gave Himself for it—a matchless price, indeed, to pay! And now we are not our own, but are bought with a price. We feel that we would be unjust to Jesus, base to our best Benefactor, if we were to ignore the solemn obligations under which His redemption has placed us. We had been on the road to hell if it had not been for His blood—shall we not walk in the way of His commands? After what He has done for us, nothing is too great for us to do for Him. Our body, our soul, our spirit, we cheerfully render up to His dominion. Neither do we count anything of our nature to be our own. As He has redeemed us entirely, so in the entirety of our manhood we belong altogether to Him. And if there is a part of our nature which has not been subdued to Him, we desire Him to conquer it by force of arms, for its rebellion against Him is sorrow to ourselves. Jesus is our rightful Lord, His wounds attest it, and if any other lord has dominion over any portion of our nature, that lordship is usurped, and ought to be cast down.

I said, moreover, that Christ has won us by His power as well as by His blood. There are two redemptions, redemption by price and redemption by power. Redemption by price was typified in the paschal lamb and the passover, redemption by power in the passage of the Red Sea, when the children of Israel went through it dry shod, and the Egyptians were drowned. Remember how Jacob spoke to his son Joseph, and said, "I have given to you one portion above your brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword, and with my bow"? Now, the Lord Jesus Christ claims us in the same way as Jacob claimed that particular portion, for we are His spoil, taken in battle. Almighty grace bowed us down when we were stiff-necked. Almighty grace delivered us from our habits of sin when we were fast bound by them. Almighty grace broke the iron bars of our despair and led us into liberty. Let all the glory be ascribed unto the Almighty Redeemer. With a high hand and an outstretched arm He brought us forth from the Egypt of our lusts and taught our willing feet the way to the heavenly Canaan. And now we grace His chariot wheels as servants, not in manacles of iron, but in silken fetters of love—

"As willing captives of our Lord

We sing the triumphs of His Word,"

and confess Him to be our Master, and none besides.

Remember that I also said we are His servants and He our Master, because we have willingly surrendered ourselves to Him. Recall to your memories that blessed time when you gave yourselves up to Jesus under the sweet constraint of His love. Was it not a good day in which you said—

"Now, Lord, I would be Yours alone;
Come, take possession of Your own,
For You have set me free!
Released from Satan's hard command,
See all my members waiting stand,
To be employed by Thee!"

And now at this day, remembering the love of your espousals when you went after your Lord into the wilderness, would you have it otherwise? You were married to Him—do you now wish to sue for a divorce against your glorious Bridegroom? No, but you can sing with Doddridge—

"High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear:
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear."

Now, beloved, as I have shown that Christ has a right to be our Master from the very dignity of His character, and that we yield Him service because of His love to us, it only remains for me to add that our position of servants to Christ is an irreversible one. The servant of old, when he might go out from bondage, sometimes said, "I love my master, and I love his children, and I love his house. I desire to be his bondsman forever." And after the same manner would I speak this day. And then, you remember, they took an awl, and they bored the man's ear and fastened it to the doorpost, that he might be a servant as long as he lived. Even after that fashion would I say, "My ears have You opened, and I was not rebellious." Who among us would not wish to bear in our body the marks of the Lord Jesus, to receive the brand which would betoken the irretrievable confiscation of all sinful liberty? Do we not wish to be forever bound to Christ and crucified with Him? This was the teaching of our baptism. When we were baptized we were buried in the water. The teaching was that we were from that time forward to be dead and buried to the world and alive alone to Jesus. It was the crossing of the Rubicon—the drawing of the sword and the flinging away of the scabbard. If the world should call us, we now reply, "We are dead to you, O world!" One of the early saints, I think it was Augustine, had indulged in great sins in his younger days. After his conversion he met with a woman who had been the sharer of his wicked follies. She approached him winningly, and said to him, "Augustine," but he ran away from her with all speed. She called after him, and said, "Augustine, it is I," mentioning her name. He then turned round and said, "But it is not *I;* the old Augustine is dead, and I am a new creature in Christ Jesus." That to Madam Bubble and to Mad-

am Wanton, to the world, the flesh, and the devil, should be the answer of every true servant of Christ—"I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. You are the same, O fair false world—you are the same, but not I. I have passed from death unto life, from darkness into light. Your siren charms can fascinate me no more. A nobler music is in my ears, and I am drawn forward by a more sovereign spell towards other shores than yours. My boat shall cut her way through all seas and waves—till it reaches the fair haven and I see my Savior face to face." It is irretrievable, then, this step which we have taken; the absolute surrender of our whole nature to the sway of the Prince of peace. We are the Lord's. We are His forever and forever. We cannot draw back, and blessed be His name, His grace will not allow us to do so. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day."—

"Leave You? No, my dearest Savior,
You, whose blood my pardon bought?
Slight Your mercy, scorn your favor?
Perish such an impious thought!
Leave You—never!
Where for peace could I resort?"

II. The second point of our reflection is to be this. Seeing that we are servants of Jesus, there is A CONDUCT WHICH IS CONSISTENT THEREWITH.

What conduct is consistent in a servant? Is it not, first, that he should acknowledge himself to be his master's? Such a servant as is mentioned in the text does not call himself his own, or his time his own. No person who is a servant can say during his work hours—"This time is my time; I can do what I like with it." No, he is a false servant if having sold his time for a reward, he takes it to himself. Servants of Jesus have no time at their own disposal. We have no wealth of our own, we are only stewards. We have no talents, they are our Lord's. When we have traded with our stock, and have multiplied it diligently, we shall say to our Lord, "*Your* pound has gained 10 pounds." We dare not call the talent ours. If we are true servants, we are always about our Master's business. If we eat or drink, or rest or sleep, we desire to do all to the glory of God. We are never off duty. A policeman may be, but we never are. A soldier may have a furlough, but a Christian never; he or she must wear both night and day the whole armor of God. We are always to bear the shield, and the sword is always to be in our hands. Even in our recreation we are to remember that our Master may come at any hour, and therefore we are still to be looking for His coming.

As servants, it is our duty to learn our Master's will. I am grieved to observe that some of my fellow servants do not want to know their Lord's will. There would not be so many divisions in the church if we all came to Holy Scripture and searched the law and the testimony to know the Lord's will. The Lord's will is fully set forth there, and no other book is of the slightest authority among saints. The Lord's will is not in the prayer book, it is in the Bible. The Lord's will is not in the canons. The Lord's

will is not in the creed of the Baptist church, or the Wesleyan church, or the Congregational church, or the Episcopalian church. His will is in the Scriptures. And if we searched them more and more, and were determined, irrespective of anything that may have been done by the church, or the world, or by government, or by anybody else, that we would follow our Lord's will, we would come to closer union. We are divided because we do not study the Lord's will as we should. Brethren, we ought to be prepared to give up any doctrine however venerable, any institution however comely, if we do not see it to be the divine will. Obedience is the path of the servant; obedience is his safety and happiness. What have I, as a servant to do with anybody but my Master? I am set to do a certain thing, and if passersby make a remark that I am not doing it according to the usual rules of the trade, what is that to me? Rules and customs are of small consequence. My Master's will, must be everything to me if I am a true servant. Somebody will sneeringly remark, "You are acting very strange." Well, the Master must be accountable for the strangeness of conduct which He prescribes. If we are true servants we obey even in the jots and tittles, at all hazards. But we must search the Word, for unread Bibles are evidences against rebels, and are unbecoming in believers.

When his master's will is known, every true servant is bound immediately to do it. A servant is not to say, "Sir, I will attend to that tomorrow." If the command is ascertained, it will be as surely disobedience to postpone obedience as to reject the duty altogether. If delay is a part of the command, the delay is justifiable, but if not, the servant must not tarry. "But surely you forget that the consequences of obedience may be costly and involve great sacrifices?" Servants have nothing to do with consequences—those belong to their masters. "But, perhaps, if I were to follow out the Master's command, I might place myself in a position where I should not be as useful as I now am." You have nothing whatever to do with that except as it may prove a test of your faith. It is a lame obedience which only follows the Master where carnal judgment approves. A servant of God is not to use his judgment as to the rightness of his Master's command—he is to do as he is bid, for his Lord is Infallible. What if the heavens fell through our doing right? God does not want us to sin in order to prop them up. His throne is not rotten so as to need buttresses of iniquity. Consequences of true principles ought never to be considered. There is nothing more vicious in the world than policy. It may be admired in the House of Commons, but it should be detested in the church of God. Far from our minds is every question of policy. If an act is right, let it be done. If Christ bids it, let it be done. And let there be no hesitation in the matter.

It is ours, also, if we are servants, to obey the Master *willingly* and for love of His person. The text says, "He that waits *upon his master* shall be honored." Suppose I, as a minister, know something to be God's will, yet, nevertheless, attend to it with the view of serving you and doing you good as God's church? I shall possibly receive honor from you whom I serve,

but that is not the honor which a Christian minister ought to seek. The church is not his master—his Master is in heaven, and if he desires real honor, he must earn it by waiting upon his Master for his Master's sake. Suppose any of you are children, and are doing right in order to please your parents—I will not censure the motive—you will get honor from your parents. But the right honor is gained by seeking to please God. You must labor as believers to wait upon your Master—to come to the house of God, for instance, not because it is the custom, but because you would honor the Lord in prayer and praise. You must give to the poor, not because others have given so much, but because Jesus loves His people to be mindful of poor saints. You must do good, not that others may say, "See what a zealous man he is!" but for your Master's sake. I am afraid we sometimes serve ourselves even in our holiest things. And in carrying out our judgment of the Lord's will, we are often the victims of prejudice or whim, and are not so much determined to do the Lord's will, as to have our own, or to carry out what we call our "principles" in order to show that we are not to be cowed by human opposition. Ah, brethren, there must be no motive with us but our Master's honor. "He that waits on his master shall be honored." Wait on your Master. Take care that you have an eye always to Him. Do your duty because He bids you. Then you shall win the honor of which the text speaks.

Then observe that this waiting upon the Master is to be performed *personally* by the servant. It is not, "The servant who employs another to wait upon his master shall be honored," I do not so read the text; but "He who waits upon his master" *himself,* doing *personal* service to a *personal* master—*he* shall have honor. Jesus Christ did not redeem us by proxy. He, Himself—His own self—bore our sins in His *own* body on the tree. Let us not attempt to serve God by merely contributing to the foreign missions, or City Mission, or helping to support the minister, or something of that sort. We should do that, but we should not put it in the place of the other. Let us constantly give our personal service, speaking for Christ with *our* lips, pleading for His kingdom with *our* heart, running on His errands with *our* feet, and serving Him with *our* hands.

"He that waits on his master shall be honored," even though the waiting is almost passive. Sometimes our Master may not require us to do anything more than stand still. But you know John, the footman, behind his master's chair, if his master bids him stand there, is as true a servant as the other attendant who is sent upon an errand of the utmost importance. The Lord for wise reasons may make us wait for a while. Having done all, we may yet have to stand still and see the salvation of God, and find it to be the hardest work of all. In suffering especially is that the case. For it is painful to be laid aside from the Master's service. Yet the position may be very honorable. There is a time for soldiers to lie in the trenches as well as to fight in the battle. David made a law that those who tarried with the baggage were to share the spoil with those who went down to the fight. This is the rule of the church militant to this day.

Some cannot march to the battle, yet are they to share in the spoil. They are waiting on their Master, and they shall be honored.

On the whole, summing all up in a word, it is ours to abide near to Christ. Servants wait best when they can see their master's eyes, and hear his wishes. We are to wait upon our Master humbly, reverently, feeling it an honor to do anything for Him. We are to be self-surrendered, given up always to the Lord, free men, and yet most truly serfs of this Great Emperor. We are never so truly free, as when we own our sacred serfdom. We are always the body servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Often Paul calls himself the servant of the Lord, and even the slave of Christ. And he glories in the branding iron's marks upon his flesh. "I bear," he says, "in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus, therefore let no man trouble me." We count it liberty to bear the bonds of Christ. We reckon this to be the most supreme freedom, for we sing with the psalmist, "I am Your servant; I am Your servant. You have loosed my bonds." "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar." Such is the conduct which our servitude to our Lord requires.

III. The third point is THE REWARD WHICH SURELY COMES TO FAITHFUL SERVANTS. "He that waits on his master shall be honored."

You will observe that he finds his honor in waiting on his master. Now, the Christian may have other honors besides the one of waiting on his Master. He may have poor, wretched, miserable, faded honors. I am always sorry when I see a Christian making himself some great one in the world's esteem. I knew one, and I esteemed him much. He was an earnest Christian, but his great ambition was to be the chief magistrate in a certain city, which I shall not name. He lived to reach that post, and his heart exulted greatly. But I noticed that the very night he attained the honor, the hand of the Lord went forth against one whom he greatly loved, and in a short time he himself sickened, and went home to his Father and his God. No joy came with the honor, for he had looked at it too long, and with too keen an eye. Not I alone, but those who knew him, judged so too, and we almost thanked God that He did not allow the child of God, whose crown was in heaven, to be satisfied with being a magistrate here. I have seen men grow very eager after gold, they have had a good business, but have clutched at more and got it, and then sought after still more. And when I have seen chastening come, and sorrow in the household, I have not marveled at it, for I have understood that Christ meant His servant to take honor from *Him,* and if he *would* look after other honor, he would find it but bittersweet. There is a law, I believe, that no subject of Her Majesty may take princely rank from any foreign potentate, and it is a law in the kingdom of Christ. What honor can this world confer upon a servant of Christ? I count that to be a dishwasher in Christ's kitchen would be a greater honor than to be the Czar of all the Russias, or to exercise imperial sway over all the kingdoms of the earth at once. Honor! *You* confer honor upon the servant of Christ—you worldlings! As well might ants upon their anthills hope to confer dig-

nity upon an angel! Already infinitely superior, it is but degradation to a saint to be honored by the sons of men. The servant of Christ finds his honor in the service itself. The cultivator of the fig tree looks for figs from the fig tree. The servant of the Master looks for honor from the Master, and he covets no other honor.

Every faithful servant of Christ is honored in his Master's honor. If you serve Christ aright, you will have to bear His reproach. You must take your share of the cross, for you have already your share of the crown. Thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph in every place. Paul and the other apostles, when they were suffering for Christ, were always triumphing in Christ at the same time. If there is any honor in the cause of truth and righteousness, and the salvation of men, Christ has it all, but He reflects some of it upon those of His servants who defend His righteous cause and propagate His truth. "He that waits on his Master is honored" by being permitted to wait upon such a Master. The honor of the Master falls upon the servant, who is honorably distinguished by wearing the livery of the great Prince.

He is honored too, with his Master's approval. Did you ever feel that Christ approved of you? You did some little act of love which nobody knew of but your Lord. He smiled on you, you knew He did, and you felt superabundantly rewarded. You served Him, and you were reviled for it, but you took it very joyfully, for you felt that He knew all about it, and as long as your Master was satisfied it did not matter what man could do to you. For the true Christian, his Lord's approval is honor enough.

Sometimes the Lord honors faithful servants by giving them more to do. If they have been faithful in that which is least, He tries them in that which is great. If they have looked after a few little children, and fed the lambs, He says, "Come here and feed My sheep." If they have trimmed a vine, or a fig tree in a corner, He calls them out and sets them among the chief vines of the vineyard, and says to them, "Look after these clusters." Many a man would have been called to wider fields of labor if he had not been discontented or slothful in his narrow sphere. The Lord watches how we do little things, and if great care is taken in them, He will give us greater things to do. Elisha poured water upon the hands Elijah, and then the Lord said, "Elijah's mantle shall fall upon his faithful servant, and he shall do even greater miracles."

God also honors the faithful in the eyes of their fellow servants. When I take down from my library shelf the biography of a holy man, I honor him in my soul. I do not care whether he was a bishop or a Primitive Methodist preacher, a blacksmith or a peer, I do him honor in my heart. If he served his Master, he will be sure to be elevated into a position of honor in the memory of succeeding ages. There are some men whose doctrines you and I could not endorse, who yet were faithful to the light they had, and therefore we number them among the honored dead, and we are glad to remember how bold they were against the foe, how meek they were with the little ones, how faithful they were in believing their

God, and how courageous in rebuking sin. If you would have honor from your fellow servants, you will never get it by seeking honor from them. You must go to your Master and honor Him by waiting upon Him, and then there will come to you honor in the eyes of your fellow men.

But, beloved, the chief honor of a faithful servant comes from the blessed Trinity. "If any man will serve Me, him will my Father honor." Does it not appear too good to be true that a poor man should be honored of God the Father, the Creator, the great I Am! I will not speak about it, but leave you to think it over.

And then Jesus Christ will honor us, for He says that when the Master comes and finds the servant waiting for Him, He will gird Himself and serve him. Can you understand that? There was a certain festival among the Romans, which was observed once a year, in which the masters changed places with the servants entirely, and the servants sat at the table and commanded their masters as they liked, while the masters served them. It has been thought by some that our Savior has drawn the figure from that singular celebration. I hardly think that it can be so, for He would scarcely have cared to use such an illustration.

To think of the great Master serving us is strange indeed, yet He has done it. He did so when He took a towel and washed His disciples' feet, and He will do it again. He will gird Himself and serve us.

The Holy Spirit will honor us too, for the Holy Spirit often puts great honor upon a faithful man in a way that I cannot explain to you except by a figure. Moses had been a faithful servant, and the skin of his face shone when he came down from the mountain. Stephen was a faithful servant, and when he stood up to confront his adversaries, he was full of the Holy Spirit, and a glory gleamed from his face. When the Spirit of God is richly in a man, and that man is faithful to his Master, some gleaming of a supernal splendor will come from him, not visible to human eyes but potent over human hearts. Believers will feel its power, for as one of our poets says, when a good man is in company 'tis even as though an angel shook his wings. You feel the influence of the man, and almost without a word from him, he has honor in the eyes of them that sit at meat with him, for the Holy Spirit is upon him.

Now, dear brothers and sisters, I close by saying we ought faithfully to serve, for we have before us the greatest conceivable reward, a reward which grace enables us to gain. That precious blood which cleanses us, cleanses our service also, it makes us white as snow, and it makes our service white too. We and our work are both accepted in the Beloved. A Christian's works are good works. Let no one say they are not, for they are the work of the Spirit of God, and who shall say they are not good? It is an encouragement to go forward when we know that "He that keeps the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof." And that "The servant who waits on his master shall be honored."

There is a black side to this, upon which I must speak one word. He, who does *not* serve Jesus Christ, will *not* be honored. In the day when

the Lord comes many that sleep in the dust shall awake, some to glory, but some to shame and everlasting contempt. Oh, the contempt that will be poured upon ungodly men at the last judgment! When God holds up the mirror and they see themselves, they will despise their own image. And when God holds up their characters to men and angels, revealing to all created beings their secret deeds, their evil motives, their base designs, their filthy imaginations, there will go up against such men, dying without faith in Christ, a universal hiss of general cursing, to think that they would not believe God, but made God a liar, would not accept the sacrifice of Christ, but trod the blood of the covenant under foot as an unholy thing. Redeemed men will cry, "Shame!" Unfallen angels will cry, "Shame!" Holy spirits from a thousand worlds will cry, "Shame!" And it will be everlasting contempt. Nothing stings a man like contempt. The poorest among us does not like to be despised, however poor he may be. You do not like to be pointed at and be made the object of derision, yet, sinner, this will be your portion. If you die without believing in Jesus, you will wake up to shame, and to everlasting contempt. "Shame shall be the portion of fools"—such shame! Oh, be ashamed today, that you may not be ashamed then! Penitent, shame will lead you to fly to Christ, and put your trust in Him, and then your transgressions shall be blotted out forever. May the Spirit lead each one of you to repentance for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 25.

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THE SPUR
NO. 1119

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go."
Ecclesiastes 9:10.

I FIND that these words, and those which precede them, have been considered by some to be a sarcastic address to those persons of an epicurean spirit who consider this world to be everything, and will not believe that there is a world to come. They are bidden to eat the fat and drink the sweet, and enjoy life while they can, and if they have anything that they wish to do, to get it done as quickly as they can, because there is neither work nor device in the grave. If this is the meaning, we must regard it as spoken to them from their own standpoint, and so it is tantamount to their favorite maxim, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." It is possible that the royal preacher intended our text to be sarcasm, but I do not think so. I think the common interpretation is the true one, and that would make it run parallel with the saying of our Lord, "Work while it is called day, for the night comes wherein no man can work." It is an address to men, commending to them promptness, determination and practical earnestness. Inasmuch as they have but one life here on earth, they should give diligence to accomplish all the right purposes which they have formed for this world. Seeing that once dead they cannot return, nor in the grave can they carry out any of their resolves, they should do quickly what they mean to do. May God give us grace to make a right use of this exhortation!

First, we shall give this passage *an evangelical voice to the unconverted*. Secondly, we shall find in it *a stimulating voice to the people of God*.

I. First, we shall give it AN EVANGELICAL VOICE TO THE UNCONVERTED. And it will be necessary for us to say that there is nothing for the unconverted man to do, by way of work or device with his hands in order to his being saved, and therefore, we do not address him, and say to him, "Do what your hand finds to do, in order that you may be saved by it." That would be false doctrine, and would tend to put the anxious seeker upon the wrong track. The gospel regards the unconverted man as dead in trespasses and sins, and it tells him that, first of all, he must be quickened by a new life—he must be born-again, in fact, or else he is not capable of those actions which would be acceptable with God. Neither if he were capable of them would the performance of them be the way of salvation, for we are expressly told that our salvation is not of

works. Salvation from sin, and justification before God, come to us in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit within us leading us to faith in Jesus. And so, salvation is entirely and alone of the grace of God. Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ are the evidences of saving grace, and are at once the gifts of God, and the works of the renewed mind. Looking at this present moment upon faith, repentance, prayer, and the seeking of the Lord, as being *our* works when God's grace has worked them in us, we would say to every unconverted person, "It is high time that you should begin to think about the solemn interests of your soul, for you will soon pass from the place of saving knowledge and heavenly wisdom, into the shades of forgetfulness."

Repentance is not a feeling which you may have or may not have, and yet be equally saved. You must repent of your sins, or there can be no forgiveness for you. Faith in Jesus Christ is not an optional thing, so that a man may perhaps fare well at last, whether he believes or not. "He that believes not shall be damned" is the emphatic declaration of Christ Himself, not an invention of His disciples but our Lord's own declaration. You must have faith, or you cannot be saved. And you must be men of prayer, for without prayer no man shall be saved. The sinner's first evidence of salvation is—"Behold he prays!" If there is no prayer, there is no grace. These things are indispensably essential.

Note well, also, that it is essential that they be done with all our might. The text says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." Nobody ever truly repented who repented in a half-hearted way. We cannot repent in our sleep, and so go to heaven dreaming. Eve was taken out of Adam when he was asleep, but our sins will not be removed in a like manner. Neither does any man believe in Jesus without thought upon the matter. Faith does not grow spontaneously and without our own consent, like nettles in the sluggard's garden. Faith is not the fruit of a swoon. It requires the exercise of the faculties. It is a simple thing, but it is an earnest thing, a hearty thing. "If you believe with all your heart," said Philip to the eunuch, "you may be baptized." It is with the heart that man believes, and that sort of believing which does not exercise the heart will never save the soul. A prayer, too—a prayer accepted in heaven, is not a dull, cold thing. It is not a saying of prayers, a using of certain holy words, just as wizards of old were accustomed to mutter their enchantments. Oh, no. It is the yearning of the spirit after God, the passionate longing of the creature to get to the Creator, and to be reconciled to Him. "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." But without a holy violence we shall not gain entrance at the gates of mercy. Prayer is no child's play, but requires all our might. In order to eternal life there must be faith, there must be repentance, there must be prayer, and these must all be real, deep, fervent, or else they are not such as God gives, and they are not true evidences of salvation.

Moreover, the text urges us to immediate action because death is coming. Now, I feel quite sure that the bulk of the unconverted part of my congregation is made up of persons who have fully resolved to repent one day. If I were now sent as a commissioner from Satan and were wickedly to ask you to make a contract with the powers of darkness that you never would repent, that you never would believe in Jesus, and that you never would pray, you would start back from so dreadful a compact. You would feel as if a most profane bargain were proposed to you. You would suspect the presence of Mephistopheles or some other form of the arch-deceiver. And yet your actions practically come to the same thing. For how many years have you lived without attending to your souls? "Oh, but we mean to!" Yes, and you meant to 20 years ago. "Oh, but we *really do* mean it, now!" Yes, and you were quite as earnest when you were but children in Sunday school. Since then you have had different times of awakening, and you have resolved and re-resolved, but you remain the same. Will it always be so? If so, why do you start back from promising to let it be so? If you think it right to continue as unbelievers, what is right today will be right tomorrow, and what has been convenient today will be as convenient tomorrow. And though you say, "Go your way for this time: when I have a more convenient season I will send for you," it will come to pass with you as with Felix, the convenient season will never come and you will remain unsaved. And yet you are dying men and women! Yet as I look you in the face, I read, "Mortality!" written across your brows. There is not a body here but what, unless the Lord shall come, will lie in the cold grave and turn to dust. And there is not a soul here but what shall pass into the disembodied state, and by-and-by, after the resurrection, shall stand before the judgment seat of God.

Yet all this while you are trifling about your best interests—not about your purses, nor about your property, but about your souls, yourselves, your truest selves! Sirs, is this wise? You are not short of wit in other things. How are you then, so short of it in this? If you must play at hazard, let it be with something cheaper than your souls. If there must be risks, go risk your houses and risk your health, but risk not your souls and their everlasting interests. The voice of wisdom says *today*—you must repent, you must believe, you must seek God in prayer, therefore, since death is near you, do it, do it with all your might, and do it now. For before long you will be where these things never can be done.

In a very short time every unconverted person here will be in the land where there are no Sabbaths. You can waste them now—they hang heavy on some men's hands—but you will not be galled with Sabbaths there, or worried with calls to go up to the House of God and think about your souls. We who are preachers of the gospel are very troublesome to you, and often make your consciences uneasy. Soon you will no longer be troubled by us. There will be none to cry to you to have mercy on yourselves. There will be none whose loving persistence shall be weariness to you. None will annoy you with their expostulations, or burden you with

invitations. You will be in the land where there are no Sabbaths and no preachers. And there will be no Bibles there. You will not say there, as you did this afternoon, "It is dry reading—that Bible." You will not be tired of hearing promises there. No promise and no gospel will ever salute your ears in that dark realm of despair. And there will be no mercy seat there. You do not pray now, though God will hear you, but in a future state prayer will be altogether out of season. God hears not the ungodly when once they are cast away from His presence. They may call, but He has said, "I will not answer. They refused Me, and therefore I will mock at their calamity, I will laugh when their fear comes." I pray you remember that there will be no Jesus there, no Fountain filled with blood in which to wash away crimson stains. There will be no Redeemer to cover a naked soul with His righteousness. No Savior to say, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you." There will be no Spirit of God there to plead with your conscience, and to be resisted. There will be no grace of God there to show you your sins and to show you the atoning sacrifice.

I pray you, have a little patience with us who preach to you, for our time is short and you will soon be rid of us. Have a little patience with your Bible. It will soon enough be out of your way! Have a little patience with your poor Christian mother who tries to bring you to the Savior. She will soon be far from you! We who now trouble you by desiring to do you good, will soon be out of your way. Ah, poor souls! Poor souls! For you will then be out of God's way, and out of Christ's way, and out of mercy's way, banished from the Savior's presence. And that because the kingdom of God came near to you, and you put it away from you, for you would have none of the Lord's reproofs. But you turned everyone to his own way, and rejected the counsels of God against yourselves. Beloved hearers may none of you stand in that plight. While I breathe the prayer that it may not be so, may I ask you to pray for yourselves that it will not be so? Will you let me whisper in your ear, as though I stood close by each one of you now? I will softly and lovingly say, "Repent, and believe in Jesus, *now*, with all your might. God help you, 'for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave where you go.'"

II. But now I have another task, and that is to set forth my text as A STIMULATING VOICE TO GOD'S OWN PEOPLE. Beloved brethren, our text reminds you that *you have a work to do*. You have not the work to do of saving yourselves. That is done; the dear Redeemer has finished it. "It is finished," says the Savior, and that is joy for you. But now you have another work to do because you are saved. Man was not created to be idle, he was not elected to be idle, he was not redeemed to be idle, he was not quickened to be idle and he is not sanctified by God's grace to be idle. Every Christian while resting in Christ's work for justification is himself a worker, ordained to bring forth fruit unto God's glory. Have we been bought with the blood of Jesus, and can we be idlers in our Redeemer's vineyard? The love of Jesus to us must provoke love in our heart to Jesus, and that love must show itself by deeds of service for His

name. I am sure we feel that. Do you not feel, brothers and sisters, as members of the Christian church that you have each a work to do? You love the church, and you would not like to be idle members of it. As soldiers in one great army, you eagerly desire to promote the prosperity of the host. As members of the body of Christ, you wish to perform your office to your head and your fellow members. I know you do. The vows of Christ are on you, and the vows of the church of God are on you too.

Moreover, I know that my dear brethren have a love for the truth of the gospel. Does it not grieve you when you hear false doctrines, and when you see the idols set up again—the idols which your fathers abhorred, set up in the national temples of God? Your heart is provoked to jealousy—I know it is—and you feel each one of you, that you have the truth committed to your charge, and that you are bound to bear testimony to it. This you wish to do most completely. In addition, you feel that you should seek the souls of others. Here is a great city of three millions and more of people, perishing for lack of knowledge. And if you are God's people you would, if it were possible, snatch them from the flames, and deliver them from the wrath to come. Do you not feel that each one of you, according to his position, has a work appointed him? I know I have mine. There are times without number in which I have wished that I could become the pastor of some little country church, with two or three hundred hearers, over whose souls I could watch with incessant care, about whose circumstances I could fully inform myself, and with whom I could plead individually. But here are so many, so very, very many! You are counted by thousands. What can I do with you? My soul is burdened with the weight of the work to which the Lord has called me. Yet I know it is my work and it must be done.

You are parents, some of you. Do you not feel that you are called to bring up your children in the fear of God? Are you doing it? Few Christians in these days feel as they ought to, that as parents they are bound to instruct their children in the things of God. You are masters—do you care for your servants? Have you no desire to see your households ordered aright? Oh, I trust you are not such heathens and publicans that you care not for your own households. You live in neighborhoods where you are brought into contact with your fellow men of all sorts. Do you not know that you are put there as lights in a dark place, as handfuls of salt in the midst of putrefaction? Have you never felt that you are debtors? Do you not feel it your duty to battle against error, your duty to coming generations to stand steadfast to the truth today, which if it falls today, may not rise again for many a century? Have you felt that your obligations extend as far as your influence extends, and that if you are not serving God with your influence, you are doing harm with it? If you are a Christian, you are like an oil lamp, which, if it does not yield light, gives forth a foul smell as its wick smokes. You are doing mischief if you are not doing good. You set an example of idleness and indifference to the things of God to sinners, which will make them say, "There is nothing in

religion! Why should we make any stir about it, when even these who profess to enjoy it, do not live as if they were in earnest, and care not whether our souls are lost or saved?" Each woman here, as well as each man, if converted, should feel, "I have a work to do for God." If you are converted as a child, sing your hosannas to the King. And if you are born to God in your declining years, still bring forth fruit in old age. Even if you are confined to the bed of weakness, there is a something to be done by you before you enter heaven, and the voice of the text says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." That is a most weighty point, and none may question it. *All believers have a work to do.*

The second thing is this: Our text indicates *the wisest course to follow.* It is—*Do it,* do it at once, do not talk about it, do not regret that you have not done it and sit down and fret because you have done so little in the past. It is little use crying over the spilt milk of your past life. If you have not done what you should, up, man, and do what you can! "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it." Many prefer to find fault with the way in which other people do their work. Yes, and if you look round the Tabernacle, you will see a great many imperfections in the preacher, in the deacons, in the elders, and in the members, and possibly none of the workers among us do their work exactly as your superior wisdom would dictate. There are persons here who have done a great deal of good, but you have a notion that you could tell them how to do it in a better fashion, though you do nothing yourself. Oh, sir, have done with it! Go, sir, and do your own work, and I will do mine in my own way. I do not suppose you will do my work better than I do it, if you try, and I do not suppose I can do yours better than you can do it, if I take your place. "Whatever your hand finds to do, *do it."*

Our text exhorts us to *do our work now.* Do not talk about doing it tomorrow, do it at once. The impetus of the text carries the thought as far as that, seeing that death may come tonight, do it now, even *now.* What wonders would have been done if tomorrows were todays! What great achievements have passed through that young man's imagination! He has often pictured how useful he will be. His daydream has been so very vivid that he has mistaken the will for the deed, and complacently reviewed his fine resolutions as if they had already been carried out. He has felt himself to be somebody on the strength of what he was going to do. What draughts men make upon the future, and how hopefully they reckon upon meeting them when the time comes. Like insolvent traders they maintain their present position by discounting bills which they will never honor, and live as if they were rich, when all their wealth is represented by the wretched forgeries of their own false promises. Oh, sirs, do not promise to do anything tomorrow, leave off promising, and come to real actions. Never mind what you will do next year, what will you do *now?* "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it," and do it at once and on the spot. If I knew that my hearers had resolved to be very diligent next week or next month, I would conclude that my sermon was wasted upon

them. The fact is, if the sermon quickens, a man feels uneasy, and begins to put his fingers into his pocket and his thoughts into his heart, and he says, "What can I do before I sleep tonight? I do not feel comfortable in idleness. Is there not some poor person I could visit? Is not there some poor sinner who is going the wrong road whom I might, perhaps, lead aright?" An inward impulse makes the man feel as though he walked on hot coals till he has done something for the Lord. Do not quench these impulses, if the thing is good, do it—do it now.

But Solomon says, *"Do it with all your might."* There are several ways of doing the same action. One man will do a thing and he *has* done it, another has performed the same action, but has practically done nothing. What a difference there is in preaching! Words may be uttered in a lukewarm manner, and produce no result, while by another preacher nothing better shall be said, but it shall be said earnestly, and the effect will be marvelous. One hates to see a workman finnicking with a hammer, touching the nails as though he loved them too well to hurt them, but one likes to see a workman driving his nails home, working as though he meant it. The masters of assemblies should remember this. If a thing is worth doing, let it be done well; if it is not worth doing, let it alone. Every man who preaches should aim at preaching his best sermon every time he mounts the pulpit. Every Sunday school teacher ought to teach his best. Every evangelist in the street ought to preach up to his highest level, if it is only to a dozen. Jesus Christ ought never to have our second best—never. Our best is all too poor for Him; let us never put Him off with our inferior fruits. Do it—"Do it with all your *might."*

And, once more, do it *all.* For the text says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it." That is to say, do it all. Do not pick it over and say, "All these things I could do for Christ, but I shall only do a part of them. Here is a duty which I could perform with my gloves on, like a gentleman. I could do this without trouble, labor, or expense, and earn a good deal of credit by it. This is the kind of thing I will do." Do you think God will accept such obedience as that? Man, do it, if it stains you from head to foot with mire, if it brings contempt upon you and the universal hiss of all your fellows. Whatever—*whatever* God appoints you to do, do it right straight through. Servants, like beggars, must not be choosers, but what their masters appoint, they must do. And with such a Master, who never can appoint us a dishonorable task, it is a shame that we should think any service too hard. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it," and do it at once.

The meat of the text lies in the next thought, namely, that *there is an argument to every earnest Christian for intense zeal in the fact of the certain approach of death*—"For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go." Unless the Lord shall come, we shall all die, and that quickly. Life at the longest is very short. When I consider how many claims there are upon a Christian and how much a loving heart desires to do, and then think how short is the space of time

into which we must need crowd all, I am depressed in spirit, but sternly resolute to condense much work into a small space. The heathen said, "Work is long, and life is short." But I will venture to alter the sentence and say, "The service of God is long, and life is short"—far too short for us to perform all our desire. What, then, is the argument from the shortness of life, but just this—work for God with all your might. If you have so little time, waste none of it. If there is so small a space entrusted to you, allow no wastes and by-ends, but fill up the narrow space with precious things—gold, silver, and precious stones—holy works done in earnest for Jesus Christ. The work girl sat in her little room and her fingers flew as she passed the needle rapidly, because she had but that tiny bit of candle, and feared her task might prove longer than her light. May we not also fear that our work for Jesus may prove greater than the time in which we may perform it? At any rate, we cannot afford to throw away a moment.

Remember solemnly that life may end in a single moment. How suddenly death comes across our path! It came almost into my house this morning, for I was scarcely up from my bed before I was told that a little child belonging to my coachman had died in an instant, though she had seemed to be in perfect health the moment before. The thought came to me with power, "It might have been the master instead of the servant's child." I know no reason why it should have been the little one rather than I. Sudden death has, perhaps, come as near to you lately. It is not a very unusual thing to see death in the street in such a city as this, or to hear of it in the common talk of the day. My friend, would you like to die at this moment? "No," you say, "I have many things I would wish to finish." Finish them, brothers and sisters, finish them at once. Set your house in order, for you must die, and not live. "I would like to have prayed with my children more earnestly than I have ever done." Go home and do it, for you may never have another opportunity. "I would like to have my Sunday school class around me once more before I die, to tell them about the Savior more earnestly than I did this afternoon." Dear brother, dear sister, take advantage of your next opportunity in the class. Teach as though you might never teach again. Say to yourself, "What is there I have left undone? I will do it immediately. What is there that is half done that needs finishing? I must finish it at once. What is there that I have done so badly, that if I went to heaven I might almost wish to come back to set it right? Let me finish it now. What is there that I should like to amend? Let me make amends now." I have read of Dr. Chalmers that one evening he stayed with a company of friends at a gentleman's house, and they spent the evening, as we are too much in the habit of doing, very pleasantly, but not very profitably, talking upon general subjects, not at all to be forbidden, but at the same time not much to be commended. There was among the number a Highland chief, who had attracted Dr. Chalmers' notice, and he had talked with him, but nothing was said about the things of God. In the middle of the night a

bitter cry was heard in the hospitable habitation, and there was a rush to the bedroom, where it was found that the Highland chief was in the agonies of death. Dr. Chalmers expressed (and he was not a man whom we could blame for laxity in that direction) his bitter regret that he had allowed that last evening of the man's life to pass over without having spoken to him concerning the things of God. The regret was most proper, but it had been better if it had never been necessary. Such regret may have occurred to ourselves—do not let it occur again. If *you* do not die, the person whom you are concerned about may die, therefore, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it," for death may come on a sudden.

Remember solemnly that while we have been speaking in this Tabernacle, we have been spending a part of our allotted time. Every time the clock ticks, our time grows less and less, and less. I have a great love for old-fashioned hour-glasses, because they make you see the time go, as the sands run. I remember in Milan Cathedral seeing the sun travel along the ecliptic line on the floor of the cathedral, and I realized time's ceaseless motion. Every minute our life-candles are shorter. Every pulse makes the number of pulses less. Quick, then, man! Quick! Quick! Quick! Death is behind you. Can you not hear his footsteps? He pursues you as the hound its prey. Quick! Quick with your work and your service, for soon may his skeleton hand be laid upon your shoulder to palsy your hand of skill, and silence your tongue of eloquence forever.

And let us remember that when we die there is no return to the field of labor. I have known persons (and this is talking about a very commonplace thing, but it may be a very useful thing). I have known husbands who meant to make their wills in a proper way, and to provide for their wives as they should do, but they have died and the will has been unmade, and the future life of the wife has been full of a sorrow which might have been avoided by the proper use of the pen. Do not leave anything undone which ought to be done. Leave nothing undone which may be for the good of others, for you cannot come back to do it. Anything you have to do for the glory of God, get it done at once, for you will not be able to return. I fancy, for a moment, how I would preach to you if I should die tonight, and should be allowed to come back to preach to you once more. I know how you would listen. It would be a very strange sermon, but you would catch every word, I am sure. I know how I would preach. I should say, "Blessed be God for letting me come back to have one more trial with my unconverted hearers, for perhaps they may yet be led to Jesus." I do not think I would have anything to say to you who are converted that morning, if I had that opportunity. I would leave the 99 and go after the sheep that is gone astray. I would preach to the lost one, and salt my words with tears, and burn my lips with flaming love. Yet that is exactly how we ought to preach always.

Now put it to yourselves. If you had to die and were permitted to come back to speak once more to your children, to your neighbors, to your Sunday school class or to anyone else committed to your care, how

would you address them? Do it just that way now—with the same ardor, zeal and tenderness. Do you say you cannot? That is very likely. Ask God to help you. His grace waits to aid you. It is what you need, and what you must have in order to succeed. Seek it, seek it at His hands who, gives generously and upbraids not. In such fashion must every one of us go about the work allotted to us, because there is no work or device in the grave, to which we are journeying!

Our text has a peculiar bearing upon some persons. May I be happy enough to catch their ears! There are persons here present, perhaps, who have a very heavy charge upon them, and to them the text speaks. I am one of that company. With the heavy charge of this church, the college, and the orphanage, and I know not what besides, I hear a voice saying to me, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." It would ill become me to loiter; above all men I must labor. Some of you have wealth. Permit the text to speak to you also—"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might," for you can not take your money with you, neither can you serve God with it when you are gone, "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go." Some of you possess much influence, for you are large employers. And I know some—I need not go into details—whom God has placed in peculiar positions, where they lead and guide the minds of others. I charge you by the living God—do not let the blood of any man's soul be on your hands. Go with holy diligence before Him who will weigh you in the scales before long, lest it be said of you, "You are weighed in the balances and found wanting." By the blood that bought you, I beseech you, if the Lord has trusted you with 10 talents; put them out to interest, lest a tenfold judgment come upon you. I know not how to speak as I should, but I feel I am speaking most of all to myself here. I charge you, O my heart, be faithful to your trust. It was better for me that I had never been born, than that I preach to these people carelessly or keep back any part of my Master's truth. Better to have been a devil than a preacher playing fast and loose with God's Word, and by such means working the ruin of the souls of men. To other preachers I say what I have said to myself, and to each one of you whom God has put in solemn charge—see to it that what He gives you to do, you do with all your might.

Next, I speak to those of you who are advanced in years. If you have up to now done much for Christ, be thankful for it. But if you have not, if you have loitered, oh, my dear brethren, may I, who am as it were, but a youth compared with you, may I take an old man by the hand and say—"Dear brother, there can be for you here, in the order of nature, but a short time to serve God. Do immediately, with all your might, what you can. Let your last days, if they have not the vigor of your youth, at any rate, have a yet more eager desire for God's glory. It would seem a strange thing for a man to get nearer to heaven and to be less heavenly minded, to be riper for glory as to his age, and to be less mature in grace.

O that you may live while you live, and bear a good testimony during life's eventide."

Do I speak to those who have been lately converted, and are past middle age? At what a rate, my dear brothers and sisters ought you to live! Remember, Martin Luther was converted in middle life, but he did a great work before he died, and many a distinguished servant of God has begun late, but has worked well, and made a good day's work of it before his sun went down. There is no reason why *you* should not copy the example. God can do much by you, though your time is short.

Then I also address myself to those of delicate constitutions who may be here. Some of you must often be reminded of death by the trembling you feel in your own bodies. I do not exhort you to do anything that would injure your constitutions by imprudence, for God does not require us to be suicides. But whatever service it is in your power to do, do it, so that there may not be mingled with the sorrow of your future sickness any reflection upon yourself because when you had the power to serve God, you did not use it.

I would also speak to those who have been the subjects of high impulses and noble thoughts. There are choice spirits in the world, into whose ears the Holy Spirit whispers grand designs such as He does not reveal to all men. Here and there He finds a soul that He makes congenial to Himself, and then He inspires it with great wishes, deep longings, and grand designs for glorifying God. Do not quench them, brothers and sisters. Do not starve them by holding them back, but as death is coming, do what is in you, and do it with all your might. No man knows what God means to do through his agency, for oftentimes the very feeblest have conceived the greatest purposes, John Pounds and his ragged-school—who was John Pounds? A poor cobbler! Robert Raikes, with his Sunday school—who was Robert Raikes? Nobody in particular, but nevertheless, Sunday schools have come to something. *You* may have a sublime conception in your soul. Do not strangle it—nurse the heaven-born thought for God, and the first opportunity you can find, carry out the idea to its practical issues, and throw your might into it. I think there must be some young Christian here who loves his Master, and who means to do something for Him before he dies. Brother, what you do, do quickly. Do I not address some young man of a noble spirit who feels, "I could be wealthy; I could gain a position in my profession. I could become famous, and get honor for myself, but from this hour I will lay all down at the foot of the cross, and lay myself out for the good of souls, and the glory of God"? Give me your hand, my brother, for you and I are of one mind in this. But I charge you go and do it! Do not dream, but work. Do not listen to the sirens which would enchant you by their music, and draw you from the rough sea of duty. Launch forth in God's name, yield yourself up to the winds of heaven, and they will bear you straight on in the course of devoted service. May the Lord help you to do with all your might what you find to do!

And, lastly, there is a peculiar voice in the text to those who will die in the next few days—*those here present, I say, who will die within the next few days.* "Well," you say, "and who are they?" "Ah," say I, "that I cannot tell you." It may be the speaker, and it may be you into whose eyes the speaker's eyes are gazing now. Here are within this house tonight not less, I suppose, than 6,000 persons; and according to the averages of human life, a certain number of us will, in all probability, be in another world within a very short space of time—say, within a year. Yes, and to some one of us, the angel may be sent tonight! Now, to that man or to that woman, the voice of the text is very strong—"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." You have only three days to live. You have only a week to live. You have only a fortnight to live. You have only three weeks to live. Finish, then, your labor for your Lord. "Ah," you say, "if I were that man, I should be very busy the next three weeks, and very earnest in prayer." As you do not know but what you may be that man, go act in such a manner. Set your house in order, draw near to God; seek to glorify His name. Live in the bosom of Christ, and whether you die or not, it will make no difference to you. For you to live will be Christ and to die will be gain and so you will be satisfied whichever way it may be. O brethren, we have not, most of us, begun to live yet. I feel very often like the chicken in the shell, which has chipped its shell a little, and begun to see that there is a great world outside. We have not as yet begun to serve God as He ought to be served. The divinely born manhood within us, the divine life which God infuses, is it not sadly clogged and hampered? May God set us free, and raise us up to the highest standard of a consecrated life, and His shall be the praise for evermore. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ECCLESIASTES 9.

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THE APPLE TREE IN THE WOODS
NO. 1120

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 6, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"As the apple tree among the trees of the woods,
so is my beloved among the sons."
Song of Solomon 2:3.

BY the apple tree would probably be intended by the oriental writer either the citron, or the pomegranate, or the orange. I suppose he did not refer to the apple tree of our gardens, for it would scarcely be known to him. The word would not, however, be properly rendered if we confined it to any of the three fruit trees we have mentioned, or if we excluded our own apple from it, for the term apple comprehends all large round fruit not enclosed in a shell. And so we may, without making any mistake, think of the apple tree of our own English orchards, and the metaphor will stand good, except that the shadow of our apple tree at home is hardly as excellent a retreat from the sun as the shadow of the other trees included under the term. Our own apple tree will suffice us, however, and we shall not need to enter into any minute distinctions, or to carry you away to Palestine. We can sit at home in England, and can say with great propriety, if we love the Lord Jesus Christ, "As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons." The point of the metaphor is this, there are many trees of the forest, and they all have their uses, but when one is hungry, faint and thirsty, the forest trees yield no succor, and we must look elsewhere. They yield shelter, but not refreshing nutriment. If, however, in the midst of the woods one discovers an apple tree, he there finds the refreshment which he needs. His thirst is alleviated and his hunger removed. Even so the church here means to say that there are many things in the world which yield us a kind of satisfaction—many men, many truths, many institutions, many earthly comforts, but there are none which yield us the full solace which the soul requires. There are none which can give to the heart the spiritual food for which it hungers. Jesus Christ, alone, supplies the needs of the sons of men. As the apple tree is the exception to the forest trees in bearing its fruit, as it stands on that account in contrast to the trees of the woods, so does Jesus our Beloved contrast with all others, and transcendently excels them—

"An apple tree in simple beauty stands,
And waves its juicy treasure gracefully,
Among the barren trees which crowd the woods,
Of lofty form, but destitute of fruit!
So Jesus, 'midst the failing sons of men
Bears for my use the fruits of covenant love,

And fills my heart with rare delight and rest!"

Wandering, as I have been, during the last few days, up and down in the New Forest, the only real forest of our country, and finding rest in its vast solitudes, often has this text occurred to me, and therefore I can do no other than speak of it to you—"As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons."

We shall at the outset speak of *the tree which the fainting soul most desires.* We shall then remark that *it is no small wonder that the needy one finds an apple tree in so singular a position.* And, thirdly, we shall note *her very natural conduct when she found so desirable a tree in such a position*—she sat down under its shadow with great delight, and feasted upon the delicious fruit.

I. First, then, our text speaks of THE TREE WHICH THE FAINTING SOUL MOST DESIRES. Imagine yourself upon some sultry day in autumn, as a wanderer in the leafy lanes of a great forest. The grand cathedral aisles reach before you to lengths immeasurable, or huge domes of foliage rise above you like a second sky. Imagine yourself roaming amidst the ferns and brakes, trampling on the briars and hollies, or sitting down on mossy banks and knolls soft with layers of withering leaves. Suppose also, that you are hungry and thirsty, and that no rippling streams offer their cooling floods, while you are so far away from human ears that, hungry though you might be even to death, there would be no eyes to see you, and consequently no hands outstretched for your help. In such a plight it needs no imagination to conceive you as glancing to the trees, your only companions, and silently appealing to them for aid. Some of them look as if their bowing branches would sympathize if they could, others grotesquely grin at you and the most of them sternly refuse you succor by their solemn silence. You will ask in vain of oak, or ash, or elm. Suppose you appeal to yonder stately tree which is *the greatest* of them all, the king of the forest, unequalled in greatness or girth, admire its stupendous limbs, its gnarled roots, its bossy bark, the vast area beneath its boughs. You look up at it and think what a puny creature you are, and how brief has been your life compared with its duration. You try to contemplate the storms which have swept over it, and the suns which have shone upon it. Great, however, as it is, it cannot help you. If it was a thousand times higher, and its topmost boughs swept the stars, yet it could minister no aid to you. This is a fit picture of the attempt to find consolation in systems of religion which are recommended to you because they are greatly followed. Here is a religion which has been patronized by kings and nobles for centuries, a religion which has the support of the great and fashionable at the present hour, will not this content you? Is it not enough to belong to the same religion as the majority, especially when that majority includes the aristocrats of the land? Is not the religion of the people, the voice of God? What more do you need? Why should you be singular? Alas, the great tree is not the fruit-bearing tree. The true Christian, believing in Jesus Christ with all his heart, counts it no desirable thing to be found in the broad road where the many go, for

he remembers that his Master spoke of it as leading to destruction. Majorities are nothing to him, for he remembers that, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there are that find it." He does not reckon that the greatness of the company will make right wrong, or overawe the judge of all, or make eternal punishment one whit the less intolerable. We desire not the way of the multitude. The way of the Crucified we delight to follow. It is not the mightiest tree of the forest that we look to with hope, but to the Lord Jesus, our Beloved, who is the apple tree among the trees of the woods. His fruit is sweet to our taste. He is the way, the truth, and the life to us. His person is most dear to us, and His teachings are the food of our spirits. Happy are you who dare to be singular with Christ. Blessed are you who have found the narrow way which leads unto eternal life. Blessed are you because you are not carried away with the strong current and fashion of the age, but have heard the voice that says, "Be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your minds." Wisdom tells the hungry man to prefer the solitary apple tree to whole groves of the largest oaks or beeches. And wisdom given from above has brought you, O believer in Jesus, to prefer your Redeemer to all the great ones of the earth.

Suppose that in your wanderings to and fro, you come upon another tree which is said to be *the oldest* in the forest. We all of us have veneration for age. Antiquity has many charms. I scarcely know if antiquity and novelty should run a race for popular favor, which might win. Nowadays we are pestered by a class of men who would gladly fascinate our nation to error by the charms of antiquity. They will tell us that a certain ceremony, though no trace of it is to be found in Scripture, must be venerable because practiced in the 4th Century. And they imagine that worship in buildings which were founded by Saxons and garnished by Normans must be peculiarly acceptable with God. To be ancient, is it not a great advantage? As cleanliness is next to godliness, surely antiquity must he next to orthodoxy. Yet if there is no Scripture to warrant it an ancient ceremony, it is only an ancient farce. There are some things which are so old as to be rotten, eaten of worms, and fit only to be thrown away. Many things called ancient are but clever counterfeits, or when they are true, they are but the bones and caresses of that which once was good when life filled it with energy and power. There is an "old way which wicked men have trod," as well as a good old way in which the righteous walk. We cannot be certain that a thing is right because it is old, for Satan is old, and sin is old, and death is old, and hell is old. Yet none of these things are right and desirable on that account.

No, Jesus Christ our Lord, since the day in which we have known Him by faith, has quieted our conscience, has calmed our fears, has given us joy and peace through believing, and we are not to be seduced from Him by all the antiquated lies which may weave their spells around us. Old even to decay may be the trees in which other travelers delight, but as for us, we choose the tree of heavenly fruit—the apple tree is our choice, Jesus is our Beloved. Ritualists may glory in their 4th Century doctrines,

their fathers, their councils, and their ancient customs. The Bible is primitive enough for us; the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is venerable enough for us. We are content with Him, and need no more. To us the main thing is to find food for our souls, the bread that never perishes, and the fruit which will quench our desperate thirst. We have found them in the Savior, and from the Savior we will not depart.

It may be that in the midst of the forest, while you are hungry and thirsty, you come upon a strangely *beautiful tree.* Its proportions are exact, and as you gaze upon it from a distance, you exclaim, "How wonderful are the works of God!" And you begin to think of those trees of the Lord which are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which He has planted. You stand under it and look up among the majestic boughs and the spreading branches, and you again admire the beauty of nature as it comes from the hand of the Most High. But beauty can never satisfy hunger, and when a man is dying of thirst it is vain to talk to him of symmetry and taste. He needs food. This reminds us that nowadays there are some who try to satisfy the souls of men with beauty. Look at their processions. Who would not be charmed with their varied costumes, their spangled banners, their gilded crosses and their melodious hymns? Listen to their choir; is not the singing perfection? If you need a concert on the Sabbath day, and do not like to attend a theater, you can find it in the cathedral, and in many a parish church and please the Lord almost as well. If you need to have your senses gratified, and cannot conscientiously attend an opera on Sunday, you can have ears and eyes gratified at church. Yes and the nose as well in some places. And these amusements they mistake for religious exercises. Compared with the plainness of worship which we follow, our casting out of everything like symbol, our abhorrence of everything that would take away the mind from God Himself, and fix it upon secondary objects, compared with all this, their worship is enchanting, indeed, to the carnal mind. And we do not wonder that those who are led by taste should follow after it. But oh, if a man once hungers after the bread of heaven, his taste for finery will be reduced to a very secondary position as a governing power of his mind. If once the soul craves after God, after peace, pardon, truth, reconciliation, holiness, it will seek the Lord Jesus, the apple tree, and forget the other trees, however shapely they may be. "These bear no fruit for me," says the hungry soul. The awakened conscience listens to the chant as it is echoed among the massive pillars, and watches the smoke as it rises like a cloud among the arches of the roof, and he cries, "What are chants and smoke to me? I need a Savior." He sees the procession, and after he has gazed upon it he says, "What are these mummeries to me? I need washing in the blood of Christ." As the incense smokes to heaven, he says to himself, "O for the incense of the Savior's merit. What are these gums of Araby to me if they should burn all day long?" He turns away, sick and faint in heart, from all the gew-gaws and outward trappings of modern Popery and he cries, "O God, You are a Spirit, and they that worship You must worship You in spirit and in truth. I need You, O

my God. I need spiritual life within myself, that I may commune with You, and where can I find it but in my Savior? He gives it to me. He is the only fruit-bearing tree among the trees of the woods."

We will pursue our investigations in the forest, and while we are doing so we shall come upon some very *wonderful* trees. I have seen just lately, instances in which branches are curiously interlaced with one another. The beech sends forth a long drooping bough, and lest it should not be able to support itself, another bough strikes up from below to buttress it, or descends from above and clasps it, and the boughs actually grow into one another. Strange things may be observed in the undisturbed forests which are not to be seen in our hedgerow trees, or discerned in our gardens. Trees have odd habits of their own, and grow marvelously if left to their own sweet wills. I have stood under them and said, "How can this be? This is singular, indeed! How could they grow like this? What wondrous interlacing, intertwining, gnarling, and knotting!" Yes, but if a man were hungry and thirsty, he would not be satisfied with curiosities. So is it with some preaching that I know of. If you regard it from the standpoint of literary excellence, you confess that it is wonderful. There are great orators and deep thinkers to be found to whom I would not presume to hold a candle, whose performances are really wonderful. I have felt, after I have heard their essays, like the Primitive Methodist who went to dinner with the squire, and then pronounced the blessing afterwards—"Lord, we thank you that we do not have such a good dinner as this every day, for it is too rich to agree with us." I have felt just like that after hearing the fine oration, though, mark you, I did not remember a bit of it after it was over, and my heart was none the better. How many sermons are published nowadays, as well as preached, which are full of what is called thought? By the hypocritical word, "thought," is generally meant contradicting the plain meaning of scripture, and starting new notions. A man who preaches plainly what God reveals is said to be an echo of the Puritans, a dealer in platitudes, a repeater at second-hand or exploded dogmas. But to find out some new lie every week to tell your people, to shake their faith in inspiration every time you open your mouth, and make them believe that there is nothing certain, but that everything is a mere matter of opinion—that is "thought and culture" in these days. And there are in certain dissenting pulpits the most miserable specimens of this school, and in the pews a number of their silly admirers. Brethren, some of us are too old-fashioned ever to be led astray in that way, and what is more, we have such an awful appetite, we are possessed of such a dreadful hunger, and such insatiable thirst, that we dare not go away from the Apple Tree, because we need to be always eating. We dare not go away from Jesus Christ, because we always needing pardon, always needing peace, and always needing fresh life. And provided we can retain our hold on Jesus, we are not particular about the way in which some of these wonderful trees twist their boughs. We do not feel concerned about the marvels of modern thought, or the resurrection of ancient errors—

"Should all the forms that men devise,
Assault my soul with treacherous art,
I'd still call them vanities and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart!
For if we search the globe around,
Yes, search from Britain to Japan,
There shall be no religion found,
So just to God, so safe to man!"

But as we are wandering in the forest and are still hungry, I hear someone saying, "Ah, here is the place for food. You need not boast of your apple tree, the ground is covered with meat beneath this noble tree." I look up—it is autumn time, and I see a huge tree loaded with beech nuts which fall from it like rain. "Here is the place for food." Was that a human voice I heard? No, it was the grunts of a herd of swine. Look how content they are—how happy. How they are munching the meat as it falls from the trees! Yonder is a grove of oaks, all shedding their acorns, and how delighted the swine are! How they fatten upon the spoil! "Will you not come here?" they seem to say, as they munch in comfort. "Will you not come here? Do not tell us about trees which bear no fruit, there is surely fruit enough here." Even thus I hear a voice from the Exchange—"Here are the trees which bear us golden apples. Come here and be filled." I hear it from those who cater to public amusements—"Here are the fruits which can delight the soul. Here is the place to spend a happy day." And so I hear it from the gay followers of vice—"This dalliance, this dance, this flowing bowl, this sweet-sounding viol, these are real joys." Yes, to you, to you who choose them! Beech nuts and acorns are good enough for swine. To you who can find comfort, solid comfort, in the gain of merchandise or in the pleasures of sin, or in the delights of pomp, these things are good enough. But a *man,* a God-made man, a man into whom God has put a new heart—not a swine's heart, but a man's heart—needs apples, not acorns—needs spiritual food, food for an immortal nature, and there is no such food to be found short of the Lord Jesus Christ, for He, and He only, is the apple tree among the trees of the woods.

I might enlarge, but I will not. I will simply say what every child of God here knows, that the Lord Jesus Christ has given to us, ever since we found Him, everything we have needed. When we came to Him, we were worn out with faintness, we were hungry to get rid of our sins, but we are now rid of them, every one of them. We went up to His cross, and as we saw Him hanging on it, the ropes which bound our burden to our shoulders began to crack. Our load rolled off into His sepulcher, and we have never seen it since. We have half fancied we have felt it again, but we never have, for if our sins are searched for, they cannot be found. No, they shall not be, says the Lord. You remember when you first came to that precious tree where the Savior died? And found that your sin was blotted out, and that you were accepted in the Beloved, and were made to be forevermore an heir of heaven. Oh, the lusciousness of the fruit which you gathered then! Oh, the delightful quiet of that shadow under which

you sat that day! Blessed be His name! You had searched among the other trees, but you found no fruit there. You tried to rest in the shadow of other branches, but you never rested, till on that blood-stained tree of the cross you saw your sins put away and your salvation secured. And then you rested and were satisfied.

But the Lord Jesus Christ has not only satisfied us as to the past, look what He has done for us as to the present! My dear hearers, there are some of you who have never known yet, what it is to be perfectly happy. I do not call it being perfectly happy to be full of excitement, laughter, and apparent joy, and then to go home in the evening and sit down and feel disgusted with it all. That is the froth of fancy, and not the true wine of joy. But to be perfectly happy is to be able to think about all things on earth, and all things in heaven, and yet to say, "I lack nothing. There is nothing I desire, nothing I pine after. I am saved. I am a child of God—the eternal God is my own Father. I am on my way to His glorious house. If death should strike me now, it would not matter, or if I am spared for another 50 years it will make no difference to me, for all is well, and could not be better. If there are crosses in my lot, they are God-sent crosses, if I have troubles, they work my lasting good. If I lose, I am a gainer by my losses, if I have all things, I see God in all things, and if I have nothing, yet I see all things in my God. Nothing more can I desire. Christ is all, and Christ is mine, and therefore, I have all things." Now, that is the position of the Christian this day. He sits down under the shadow of Christ and Christ's fruit is sweet to him. Let me ask you, can you imagine any other place where such peace of mind or such happiness can be enjoyed? Why, I know sick people who are far happier in their sickness than worldlings are in their health. And I know poor men who are infinitely more at peace, and more content, than rich men who have not the Savior. Jesus Christ, alone, satisfies us for the past and delights us for the present.

And then as to the future, the man who has found Christ looks forward to it not merely with complacency, not simply without a dread, but with a joyous expectancy and hope. Those things which make others tremble make us glad. There is such a thing as dying—thank God, there is. Who wants to live here always? That narrow stream which separates this country from the better land must be forded by each of us. Who would have it otherwise? Instead of being afraid to cross it, we have sometimes said—

"O Lord of hosts, divide the waves,
And land us now in heaven!"

The judgment? The Christian quails not at the thought. Who shall lay anything to his charge? The coming of the Lord? The believer fears it not, no, it is his grandest hope. Eternity and its never-ending cycles? He dreads it not, for it is to him the climax of his joy that it is to be everlasting. O, happy people who have Christ, happy souls who rest in Jesus. They may say what none others can—"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons." Dear hearer, is He your Beloved? Can you claim Him as your own? If you can, then I am sure you

will bear witness, as the text does, to the satisfying power of the Savior, and declare with Ralph Erskine—

"What fool soever disagrees,
My sweet experience proves
That Jesus is the tree of trees
Among a thousand groves."

II. The spouse spoke of the tree which she most desired—THE WONDER WAS THAT SHE FOUND IT. It was an apple tree, but it was not in a garden, a fruit tree but not in a vineyard—it was "among the trees of the woods." Who would know of so great a rarity as an apple tree in a forest if he were not first told of it? So Jesus Christ, at this present day, is not known to all mankind. It is a most unhappy thought that probably the majority of the human race have not heard of the Savior at all, and a very large proportion have never heard of Him except through misrepresentations. Only a small minority of our fellow men know anything about the Savior—

"What millions never knew the Lord!
What millions hate Him when He's known!"

Even in our own country you will not find it a difficult thing to meet with persons who are totally ignorant of Christ. Try it, and you shall find in country towns and in hamlets, fully grown men who could not give you an answer to this question—"How is it that the death of Jesus saves the soul?" No, they do not even know the fact that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. "Well," you say, "we know the rural districts are ignorant." Yes, but they are far superior in light to parts of London. You can readily find children in our streets, and worse, artisans in our workshops, to whom the bare name of Jesus may be known, but anything like the doctrine of His substitutionary atonement is a thing of which they have not heard. Living in the light, they abide in darkness. Amid a thousand lamps they see not. One of the problems which may most surprise us is the existence of such dense ignorance in persons who live in intimate connection with instructed people. If you want the grossest ignorance, probably you would not find it in Pekin or Timbuktu, but in London or New York. Where the greatest light is, there the shadows are deepest. Men nearest to the church are often furthest from God. You cannot easily find an apple tree in a great forest. If you were put down in the middle of a forest, and told there was an apple tree there, you might wander for many a day before you discovered it, and often go over your own footsteps, lost in endless mazes, but you would not find the object of your search. And so, though there is a Savior, men have not found the Savior—and there may even be souls here present who long for that which Jesus is able to give, and yet have not discovered Him. You know all about Him in the letter of His Word, but you cannot find Him spiritually. And I hear you cry, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." I know I am speaking to some such. You have been going up and down for months with your prayers, and your tears, and your good works. You have been trying to do all you can to save yourselves, but you find your own actions to be barren trees, and you know that there is an apple tree

somewhere, but you cannot find it. Ah, poor soul, you are like the Ethiopian eunuch, when he was asked if he understood what he read, he gave the answer, "How can I, unless some man should guide me?" Do you not wonder that the spouse found her apple tree among the trees of the woods? The fact is none ever finds it except they are led there, and none can lead a soul to that apple tree but the eternal Spirit of God. He can make use of His ministers, and He does, and therefore, brethren in the ministry, let us always be preaching about this apple tree. Let us preach up Jesus Christ, let us make tracks to the tree of life. Whatever we do not preach, let us preach Jesus Christ. I have found wherever I have been during the last month, that though there might not be a road to this place or that, there was sure to be a London road. Now, if your sermon does not happen to have the doctrine of election or the doctrine of final perseverance in it, let it always have Christ in it. Have a road to London, a road to Christ, in every sermon. Still, the plainest preaching will require the Spirit of God to go with it, or else the soul will hear about this glorious tree, and about the sweetness of the fruit, but will never find the shadow, and will never eat the dainty apples. Have you come to Christ, dear brothers and sisters? Then give God the glory for it. Jesus led you, His Spirit guided you. Praise and bless His holy name.

Now, is it not a strange place for an apple tree to be found in—in a forest? We seldom hear of such a thing. An apple tree should grow in a garden. How could it be found in a forest? And is it not a strange thing that a Savior should be found for us among men—not among angels? You shall search for a Savior among "The helmed cherubim and sworded seraphim" as long as you will, but there is none there. The Savior is found in a manger at Bethlehem, in a carpenter's shop at Nazareth, among the poor and needy is He seen while He sojourns among the sons of men. As I was turning this text over in my mind, I thought, "Ah, and what strange trees this tree grew among, for there it stands with a gallows tree on either side, and two thieves hanging upon them. "He was numbered with the transgressors."—

"Not among you, O you cedars;
Not among you, O mighty oaks;
But among the bushes of the desert,
Among the trees accursed was Jesus found!"

"He made His grave with the wicked."—

"As in some dry and unproductive wood,
One lovely, fruit-producing apple tree;
Bright contrast to the ruined thousands round;
So in this populous but vicious world
O You Desire of nations, did You stand!"

Now, there is something very sweet about this, because a forest is the very place where we most love to find Christ growing. If I had come, the other day, upon an apple tree in the forest, and it had happened to be the time of ripe fruit, I would have felt no compunction of conscience in taking whatever I was able to reach, for a tree growing in the forest is free to all comers. Should there be a hungry one beneath its bough, he need not say, "May I?" when his month waters at the golden fruit. He need not

say, "It would be stealing; I am unfit to take it; I am unworthy of it." Man, if there is an apple tree in the forest, no man can keep it for himself or deny your right to it, for each wanderer has a right to what fruit he can gather. The animals have rights of pasturage, and the birds have rights of nesting, and you have rights of feeding. Pluck away, man, and eat to your full. The shadows and the fruits of forest trees are free to all who need them. This ought to delight any seeking soul here this morning. Jesus Christ is not hedged about in the Scriptures, as some theologians would gladly guard Him from coming souls. The Lord has planted no protection of thorns and hollies by saying, "You must bring with you preparations for grace. You must feel this, and feel the other, and only then may you dare to come to Christ." It is a gross error to tell a man to do something, and be something before he believes in Jesus. No! There He stands with no hedge about Him, and whoever will, may partake freely. If you hear the gospel call, your reply to it should be—

"Just as I am, Your love unknown,
Has broken every barrier down!
Now to rely on You alone,
O Lamb of God, I come!"

Christ has no barriers around Him to keep you from Him. If there are any, they are of your own making—

"None are excluded but those
Who themselves exclude!
Welcome the learned and polite,
The ignorant and rude!"

Whoever shall come shall be welcome to this priceless apple tree. There is some comfort, therefore, in thinking that He grows among the trees of the forests.

III. It was little wonder that when the spouse, all hungry and faint, did come upon this apple tree in the forest, SHE ACTED AS SHE DID. Straightway she sat down under its shadow with great delight, and its fruit was sweet to her taste. She looked up at it—that was the first thing she did, and she perceived that it met her double need. The sun was hot, there was the shadow. She was faint, there was the fruit. Now, look how Jesus meets all the needs of all who come to Him. God's anger, like the hot noon-day sun, falls on me, how can I escape it? There is no escape from the anger of God except by an interposer. What is a shadow? Is it not caused by the interposition of the bough, or the rock, or whatever it may be which comes between us and the sun? If we sit under a tree in the shadow, it is because the tree receives the heat, and so we escape from it. Jesus Christ's great office is the Interposer, the Mediator, the Substitute, the Atonement, and the Sacrifice, and when we hide beneath Him, we are screened. God's wrath cannot come on us because it has come upon Him on our behalf—

"When Christ my screen is interposed
Between the sun and me,
My joyful heart and lips unclosed,
Adore the glorious tree."

That is a beautiful picture in Solomon's Song where the king is said to ride in his chariot of love. He takes his spouse with him, and they ride together in his palanquin, and it has over it a canopy. Did you ever notice what it is made of? It is said, "The covering thereof was of purple," for truly the only interposition between us and the sun of God's wrath is the purple canopy of the atoning blood. Is it not delightful to sit down beneath the scarlet canopy of the Savior's blood, and feel, "God cannot smite me, He has smitten His Son; He cannot demand payment a second time. If Jesus suffered in my place, how can God make me suffer, again, for sin? Where would be the justice of the Most High, to punish an immaculate Substitute, and then punish men for whom that Substitute endured His wrath?" This is the cool, calm, holy shadow under which we abide.

But then, the spouse also found that she was thirsty, and that the fruit of the tree exactly met her case. Our inner life needs sustenance and food; now, in the Lord Jesus is life and the bread of life. He is that bread which came down from heaven, of which if a man eats, he shall live forever. O, to get a heart full of Christ, to get a whole Christ into one's inmost soul, to have Him abide in you—this is bliss. Then your soul feels, "It is enough, I have all things, for I have Jesus." Let us therefore seek at this time, and especially this afternoon in our meditations, and when we come to the communion table this evening—to abide under the shadow of Jesus, and there to be found abundantly eating of His fruit.

One thing more is to be noted—the spouse, when she had begun to enjoy the provision and the shade, and had sat down under it as if she intended to say, "I never mean to leave this place. In this delicious shadow I mean to repose forever," then she also began to tell of it to others. In the text she describes Christ as the apple tree, and gives her reason for so calling Him—"I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." Experience must be the ground upon which we found our descriptions. If a preacher wants to preach with power, let him tell what he has felt, tasted, and handled. It is of little use to say Christ is precious, unless you can add, "I have found Him so." Therefore the church brings in her own experience—"Sweet shade! I there sat down as one at home; and there regaled my soul with most delicious fare." She could not hold her tongue about her Beloved. She must speak. She could not retain the secret of this apple tree, and say to herself, "Others may go to it, and so perhaps when I go another time, there may be nothing left for me." But she spread the news. She set it down in black and white in the inspired volume for an everlasting testimony that there is an apple tree among the trees of the woods, of which she had eaten, so that others might eat of it too, and enjoy the same sweetness for themselves.

This morning every renewed heart desires that every other heart should know the Savior. I can speak well of my Lord and Master. I do not know that I can say anything better of Him than most of His people can, for the experience of the saints is much alike. But I can say this, if there

is happiness beneath the sky, Jesus can give it to you. If there is peace and rest to a jaded soul, Jesus can give it you. If there is a delight, a brimming delight, an overflowing delight, if there is that which can make the eyes sparkle and the pulse to beat right merrily, and the blood to leap in the veins, it is when Jesus Christ is consciously ours, and we are resting in Him. I am sure, if there were an apple tree in any forest, and it were once discovered, everybody would be taken to see it, it would be such an attraction. There would be many paths to it, and everybody who had been in the forest, and seen it, would tell his neighbors.

Now, I beseech you, who have found the Savior, to be telling others what you know about Him, and try to lead others to look at Him. You cannot make them feed upon Him, but God can, and if you can lead them to the tree, who knows but God will give them spiritual hunger, and will lead them to feed as you have fed? O you silent Christians, you silent Christians, who neither by your tongue, nor your pen, nor by any other way, ever tell about Christ, I do not know what to make of you. I wonder the seats you sit on do not push you off, and speak instead of you, and that the stones of the street do not cry out against you as you pass over them. Why, what can you be made of, to be saved from going down to hell, and not want others to be saved too! Shame on you! Shame on me also, whenever, I am silent about such a blessed salvation, such a divine redemption. I would gladly set your tongues talking about this blessed apple tree among the trees of the woods. There is nothing about which you can speak so freely without fear of exaggeration.

The entire world has been talking about the Shah of Persia. I wish they would talk half as much about the Christ of God. All the good you will ever get out of the Shah, you may see with your eyes shut, but the benefit that will come from the King of heaven to your own souls and ten thousands of other souls, is unlimited. Cry the Savior up, beloved. Set Him on a high throne. Give Him the best of your thoughts, the best of your words, and the best of your actions. Give Him of your time, and your substance. He deserves honor above all the sons of men, for He is the best of all. As the apple tree to the hungry man, excels all other trees, so does Jesus excel all other loves. Let us give Him today our hearts' warmest love, and praise Him forever and forever. God grant it, for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON— PSALM 23; ISAIAH 12.

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CHRIST ASLEEP IN THE VESSEL
NO. 1121

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 13, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Master, care You not that we perish?"
Mark 4:38.

THE day had been a very illustrious one. Our Lord had remarkably displayed His teaching and healing powers. Great crowds had been attracted, and He had both delivered to them most precious parables and worked among them most marvelous cures. Grand as the day was, it could not come to a close without a storm. After the same manner you will find it in the history of the church of God that intermingled with great successes will be great afflictions. Pentecost is followed by persecution, Peter's sermon by Peter's imprisonment. Though today a church may flourish abundantly, in a very short time it may be visited with stern adversities. It may be tried none the less, but all the more, because God is in its midst, and is blessing it. When our Lord took ship, the weather appears to have been very fair, and many little boats which scarcely would have tempted the sea had its surface been ruffled, put out upon the lake under the convoy of the great Teacher's vessel. His was the admiral's flag ship, and they were the happy fleet. They made a gay flotilla sailing softly like sea birds when the ocean is in a gentle mood. All hearts were happy, all spirits were serene, and the sleep of the Master was but a type of the general peace. Nature reposed. The lake was as a molten looking-glass, everything was quiet. And yet all of a sudden, as is the custom with these deep-lying inland seas, the storm-fiend rushed from his haunt among the mountains, sweeping everything before it. The little vessel was hard put to it, she was well-near filled with water, and ready to sink through the force of the driving hurricane. Thus may our loveliest calms be succeeded by overwhelming storms! A Christian is seldom long at ease. Our life, like April weather, is made up of sunshine and showers—

"We should suspect some danger near
When we perceive too much delight."

Nothing beneath the moon can be depended upon, all things are invariably variable. "Boast not yourself of tomorrow," says the wise man. And he might have added, "Boast not yourself of today, for you know not how the evening may close, however brightly the morning may have opened." Let us learn this lesson at the outset. Let us not reckon upon the continuance of present ease, nor fix our happiness upon the fickle weather of this world, but let us be ready for changes, so that come when they may,

we shall not be afraid of evil tidings, our heart being fixed, trusting in the Lord.

It would seem that when the storm began, the disciples did not at first awaken the Master. They had some consideration for His extreme weariness, for He had spent the whole day in very severe toil, and His human strength was exhausted. They thought, perhaps, that the hurry-burly of the storm would wake Him. How could He sleep amid the howling winds and roaring waves? They little knew how deeply calm His heart was, so that amid the tempest He could sleep right well, for the tempest came not near His soul. When at last they found that they were in great jeopardy, for their boat would surely sink, they began to judge their Lord, and to think of Him unbelievingly and unkindly. They thought they would perish, and they wondered how He could allow them to do so. Therefore they went to Him crying, as Luke says, "Master, Master, we perish." Or as Mark gives it, "Master, care You not that we perish?" Many of them cried out. One said one thing and one another, but their general spirit was one of complaint to their Lord. They knew He loved them, and yet half-thought Him cruel. They trusted Him, and yet had grievous doubts. They called Him Master, and yet they were in a sort of semi-rebellion against Him. They acknowledged His sway, but were ready to mutiny against Him because He did not exercise His power for their rescue.

We shall take the text as the keynote of our subject. And first we shall think upon *the apparent indifference of the Lord to His people.* But we shall note, secondly, that *it is only apparent.* Thirdly, *that He has a real care for them at times when He seems indifferent.* And, fourthly, *they shall see this to be the case by-and-by.*

I. First, then, we, as well as the disciples on the Galilean lake, sometimes complain of THE INDIFFERENCE OF THE LORD TO US. It is but an apparent indifference.

Sometimes the complaint takes this shape. God allows natural laws to proceed in their prescribed course, even when His children will be crushed by them. There is a vessel out at sea. It is enveloped in dense fog. Prayers are offered up by godly men on board for the right guidance of the vessel, but if it continues to be steered as it now is, it will come upon a rock, and on a rock it does come, notwithstanding the prayers. Does not God care that a vessel should perish with people on board it who pray for direction and deliverance? At another time the rough winds are out, and the vessel flies before them. She will soon sink. She cannot long live in the storm. Many supplications and entreaties are sent up to God, yet the tempest does not abate one jot of its fury. The laws of nature at such times appear to be as grim and heartless as if they were managed by the prince of the power of the air. As God has ordained, so does nature move. For us the floods do not stand upright as a heap, neither do the waters refuse to drown. Whether it is martyr or murderer, the fire devours with equal fury, and the sword falls with an equally deadly blow.

"One event happens to the righteous and to the wicked." From this fact arises many a complaint, and we cry, "Care You not that we perish?"

Our dear one, whom Jesus loves, is sick. Day and night we plead for his recovery, but the fever takes its course, or the broken limb requires its full time to heal. God does not alter the physical laws of the body for the convenience of His chosen. To them poison is poison, and disease is disease. Full often the Lord permits those whom we love, to suffer long, and He does not seem to pay attention to our prayers and entreaties, no, rather the case grows worse and worse. We are very apt, when we are under a trying dispensation, to judge the laws of nature to be very pitiless ordinances without hearts of mercy, and we say, "Master, care You not that we perish?" It is well to remember, however, what we may all too easily forget, that the present complaint is based upon an error. For the laws of nature do nothing whatever, and are no more to be blamed than the commandments on the church wall. There is no such power as a law of nature acting by itself. All power lies in God, and a law of nature is neither more nor less than a description of the way in which the Lord usually works. The vessel, badly steered, strikes upon the rock because usually God causes ships to obey their helms, and rocks to retain their hardness, and the man who dies of sickness does not die because of some ungovernable force in nature, but because God continues to give energy to destructive agencies. The laws of nature are but a powerless letter. God works all things. What has He, Himself, said—"I create the light and I create darkness." Not a seed swells beneath the soil, not a bud bursts into beauty, not an ear of corn ripens for the harvest, without God. He is in the dew and the sunshine, the light and the warmth, which nourishes and perfects the plant. Happy is he who in all things beholds a present Deity. I see laws of nature, and I know that God acts according to them, but I see best the God who is behind the law. Law, what force has that? It is God working by the law, He does it all. This truth sets matters in another light, for if the Lord brings the trial upon us we open not our mouth, but yield to His will. His ways of action must be right, and if they cause us grief, we nevertheless feel that He is not afflicting us willingly, or grieving us without design. When we perceive His hand, we kiss the rod. Instead of saying, "Master, care You not that we perish?" we cry out in resignation, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seems good to Him."

Sometimes our lament assumes another shape. We view the troubles which come upon us as the result of the stern decrees of fate, and shudder because it seems to our unbelief that God has made small account of us, and arranged affairs with slight reference to the weakness, sorrow and infirmity of His people. Brethren, the most of us now present believe in predestination, and are persuaded that the Lord works everything according to the counsel of His will. We believe that all things, great and small, are fixed in the eternal purpose, and will surely be as they are ordained. This doctrine becomes the lurking place of a temptation. We gaze

upon the ponderous wheels of predestination in their awful revolutions, and fear that they will grind us to powder. In the forebodings of our trouble, we fear that we may be entangled in the terrible machinery, and that as it will not pause for our crying, it will tear us to pieces. Like the prophet, only with far greater dread, we cry—"O wheel!" But we ought to reflect that there is no such thing as blind fate—predestination is a far different thing. Fate is a blind man who rushes madly on because he must. Predestination is full of eyes, and proceeds in one line, because it is the best path which could be taken. Fate is a tyrant declaring that such a thing shall be because he wills it. Predestination is a father ordering all things for the good of his household. God has His purpose, and His way, and His purposes are both for His own glory, and for the good of His people. Who among us would wish the Lord to turn aside from His holy and gracious designs? He has ordained the best, would we have Him vary? He has determined all things wisely, would we have Him determine otherwise? That which happens to us occurs because in the judgment of infinite wisdom and goodness, it is on the whole best that it should be so. Would we wish the Lord to arrange otherwise? Will you tempt the Holy One of Israel? Will you ask Him to do other than that which is wise and just, and good and holy, and for His own glory? Instead of crying out against destiny, let us cheerfully accept it because the Lord is in it. Do not say—"Care You not that we perish?" but believe that instead of perishing, your complete salvation will be promoted by all the events of providence.

It may be that we are in a different state of heart, and are worrying ourselves today because it seems to us that affliction is sent upon men altogether irrespective of their character, and the godly are made to suffer even more than the wicked. If you read the apostles' question with an emphasis, "Care You not that *we* perish?" it will show you my meaning. They did as much as say, "We are Your apostles, we love You, we spend our lives for You, care You not that *we* perish? We understand that the vessel which carries a load of publicans and sinners should go to the bottom, but care You not that *we* perish?" Sometimes, under trouble, we have wondered why we are so afflicted, for we have felt that the Lord has kept us from known sin, and led us in the way of holiness. And therefore we have seen no special cause for His scourging. Our cry has been, "Show me why You contend with me." And if any have been cruel enough, like Job's comforters, to say that we were suffering because of special sin, we have held fast our integrity, and declared that we were not wicked in the sense in which they accused us.

Now let us look one minute at this, and we shall discover that God does send affliction according to character, after all, but not after the rule which flesh and blood would prescribe. It is not written, "As many as I hate, I chasten," far from it. He permits the wicked to spring as the grass, and allows them to flourish like a green bay tree. As oxen they are well fed, that they may be prepared for the slaughter. They are pam-

pered, but their end is near. But, it is written, "*As many as I love,* I rebuke and chasten." The favorites of heaven are inheritors of the rod. It is not said, "The branches which bring forth no fruit shall be pruned." No, they shall be utterly taken away in due season, and cast into the fire. But it is written, "Every branch *that bears fruit,* He purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit." And, therefore, when affliction comes upon our beloved relative who has lived a most exemplary life, or when a painful death happens to an unusually gracious man, we must not judge the Lord unkindly, as though He were unjust, but see His loving hand in it all, and bless Him that He deals with our beloved ones as He is known to deal with sons, for what son is there whom the Father chastens not? He scourges every son whom He receives. The gold is put into the furnace because it is gold. It would have been of no use to put mere stones and rubbish there. The corn is threshed because it is corn. Had it been weeds it would have been untouched by the flail. The great Owner of heaven's jewels thinks it worth His while to use a more elaborate and sharp cutting machine upon the most valuable stones. A diamond of the first water is sure to undergo more cutting than an inferior one, because the King desires that it may have many facets which may throughout eternity, with greater splendor, reflect the light of the glory of His name.

Perhaps, dear brethren, we have thought that Jesus did not care for us because He has not worked a miracle for our deliverance, and has not interposed in any remarkable way to help us. You are at this time in such sore distress that you would gladly cry, "O that He would part the heavens, and descend for my deliverance!" But He has not opened the heavens. You have read in biographies of holy men the details of very extraordinary providences, but no extraordinary providence has come to your rescue. You are getting gradually poorer and poorer, or you are becoming more and more afflicted in body, and you had hoped that God would have taken some extraordinary method with you, but He has done nothing of the sort. My dear brothers and sisters, do you know that sometimes God works a greater wonder when He sustains His people in trouble than He would if He brought them out of it? For Him to let the bush burn on and yet not to be consumed is a grander thing than for Him to quench the flame and so save the bush. God is being glorified in your troubles, and if you realize this you will be ready to say, "Lord, heap on the loads if it is for Your glory. Give me but strength equal to my day, and then pile on the burdens. I shall not be crushed beneath them, but I shall be made to illustrate Your power. My weakness shall glorify Your might."

Possibly, the hard suspicion that Jesus does not care for you takes another form. "I do not ask the Lord to work a miracle, but I do ask Him to cheer my heart. I need Him to apply the promises to my soul. I need His Spirit to visit me, as I know He does some good people, so that my pain may be forgotten in the delight of the Lord's presence. I need to feel such a full assurance of the Savior's presence that the present trial shall,

as it were, be swallowed up in a far more exceeding weight of joy. But, alas, the Lord hides His face from me, and this makes my trial all the heavier." Beloved, can you not believe in a silent God? Do you always need tokens from God? Must you be petted like a spoiled child? Is your God of such a character that you must mistrust Him if His face is veiled? Can you trust Him no further than you can see Him? Besides, you are losing what you have while pining for what you have not. You say, "I need promises," and I ask you—

"What more can He say to you than He has said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?"

You say you need a token for good—what greater tokens do you require than He has already given you in your past experience, or that He has presented to you in the flowing wounds of a dying Savior? The tokens for good which Jesus gave on the cross ought to be enough, and to spare.

Still, says one, "If He does not come to me and break the darkness with some light from His presence, I wish He would lessen the pain I bear. If He will not take it away altogether, yet surely He will not let me utterly perish through its severity." Ah, "perish," that is the point, and I pray you observe the distinction, "That He may try us we can understand, but that He should let us perish, we cannot comprehend." No, my dear brothers and sisters, you are not asked to understand it, for you have not perished yet. Bad as your case is, it might be worse. You are brought very low, but you might be lower, you might be in the dungeons of hell. What a mercy it is that you never can sink lower than the grave, you shall never make your bed in hell. Thank God for that. When you come to the lowest, God interposes. The tide turns when you reach the full point of ebb, and the darkest part of the night is that which preludes the rising of the sun. Be of good courage, you have not perished yet, and let this be a wonder to you—

"Lord, and yet I am alive,
Not in torment, not in hell!"

Why should a living man complain? Should he not still have hope, and expect that in his extremity God will appear for him?

Thus we have mentioned various forms in which the temptation to charge the Lord foolishly presents itself to the soul.

II. But now, secondly, THE INDIFFERENCE OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE AT ANY TIME MUST BE APPARENT, IT CANNOT BE REAL. Meditate a little. Consider the character of the Triune God of whom we are speaking. The Father—can He be unkind? "His mercy endures forever." His name, His essence, is love. It is said of Him that He "delights in mercy," and we know that He is an unchangeable God, and therefore we are not consumed. Can you, O heir of heaven, believe that He is indifferent to you, His child? You being evil, are careful for your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven pity His own? Can you stand by and see your child tortured with pain, and not wish to relieve him? Have you not sometimes felt, O mothers, that you would take your children's

pangs upon yourselves right joyfully if you could set your dear ones free? And have you, poor fallen creatures, such hearts of compassion, and has your heavenly Father none? O, judge Him not so. Say not to Him, "Care You not that we perish?"

Think of the Second Person of the blessed Trinity in Unity, Jesus, the Son of God, your brother as well as God's dear Son—can He forget His people? Has He not taken upon Himself your nature? Was He not tempted in all points like as you are? Has He not engraved your name upon the palms of His hands, and written the dear memorials of His Love on His side nearest to His heart? Can you look into the face of the Crucified, and believe that He is indifferent to you? O, there was a time in the love of your espousals when His left hand was under your head, and His right hand did embrace you, when you would not have thought so harshly of Him. When He has kissed you with the kisses of His mouth, and you have known His Love to be better than wine, you could not have said such a barbarous thing concerning your Well-Beloved. No, it cannot be that Jesus should ever be indifferent to His people's woes.

And the Spirit, the dear and ever-blessed Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, can He be without pity? He condescends to dwell in us, and to take upon Himself the peculiar office of the Comforter, and this is matchless condescension. Do you think that He is the Comforter, and yet does not sympathize? A Comforter without sympathy would be a strange being indeed. He would be a mocker of human woes. But He is full of tender pity. Think of the love of the Spirit and never for a moment suspect that He is careless as to whether you shall perish or not. The Triune God is love. "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him." He cannot be indifferent to the condition of His own.

Consider next, beloved, the ancient deeds of divine love, of which the Scriptures speak expressly, and you will see that the Lord cannot be careless as to your welfare. Know you not that the eternal Jehovah loved you before the earth was? Have you forgotten that the mountains, with their hoary heads, are but newborn babes compared with His love to you? He chose you. He might have passed you by, but He chose you to be His own. "The Lord has appeared of old unto me," says the prophet, "saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you." And has He loved you these myriads of ages to now be indifferent to your groans? Can it be? If He had meant to cast you away, He would have done so long ago. If He needed reasons for rejecting you, He had reasons from all eternity, for He knew what you would be. No sin in you has been a surprise to Him. He foresaw the hardness of your heart, and the waywardness of your disposition, and if He could now reject, He would never have chosen you, He would never have taken you to Himself at all. O, then, let eternal love forbid you to dream that He can ever be careless as to whether you perish or not.

Next, I pray you think of what He has done for you. I will only put it in brief. Do you think that Christ came from heaven to earth to save you,

and is now indifferent about you? Do you think that He lived here 30 years of toil and weariness for your redemption, and will now cast you away? And do you believe that He went up to the cross for you, having endured Gethsemane's terrible garden and its bloody sweat for you, and yet has no concern about you? Do you think He bore all the wrath of God on your behalf, and now thinks your salvation such a trifling thing that He cares not whether you perish or not? Do you believe that He slept in the grave for you, and rose again for you, and is gone within the veil for you, and pleads before God for you, and is, after all, a hypocrite, and has no real love to you? Man, if what Christ has done does not convince you, what can? Many waters could not quench His love; neither could the floods drown it. Will you not confide in Him for the present and the future, after what He has done for you?

Consider, yet again, what He has worked upon you personally, and what you have known and felt within yourself. Years ago you were His enemy, and He saved you and made you His friend. Do you remember when, in the agony of your soul, you did cry to Him as from the lowest pit, and He came to your rescue? Will He leave you now? Remember how our poet makes a plea out of his past history, and urges it with God? Do you the same—

"Once a sinner near despair
Sought your mercy seat by prayer;
Mercy heard and set him free—
Lord, that mercy came to me!
Many days have passed since then,
Many changes I have seen;
Yet have been upheld till now—
Who could hold me up but Thee?
You have helped in every need,
This emboldens me to plead,
After so much goodness past
Will you let me sink at last?"

There is the point. If God had not done so much for us already, we might question His intentions concerning us, but after the goodness and the mercy He has manifested, surely He will go through with it and perfect the work which He has begun. He has spent too much upon His work to relinquish it now.

Remember, too, beloved—and this is sweet refreshment to the spirit—remember the relationship which exists between you and your God. Fatherhood and sonship are full of comfort. Can the Lord be an untender Father? Will the Lord cast away His own children? "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget you." Remember, also, that between you and Christ, O believer, there is the relationship of husband and of spouse. "I am married unto you, says the Lord." And the prophet tells us that the Lord, the God of Israel, says, "He hates putting away." "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement?" says He, as if He

defied any to prove that He had ever put away His beloved. "I will betroth you unto Me forever," is the language of our immutable God. The Lord has not cast away His people whom He did foreknow. Why, then, mistrust Him? Oh, by the fond relationship which exists between our hearts and God, let us not suspect Him of indifference.

Remember, also, the divine promises. Will He be a liar and let us perish? Remember His oath! It is base profanity to think that He can ever forego His oath! Remember the solemn seal of the blood of reconciliation, how can the Lord treat the blood of Jesus with indifference, or renounce the covenant which was made sure and ratified by the death of His own Son? Let a believer perish! Be indifferent to whether His redeemed is saved or not! Impossible! It cannot be. Far from it! Horrible thought! Let the storm rage as it may, and let Christ sleep as He may, He must feel for His people, His indifference is but imaginary.

III. Thirdly and briefly, THERE IS IN OUR LORD A REAL CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE IN THE MIDST OF HIS APPARENT INDIFFERENCE. It was certainly so on the Galilean Sea. Observe in the narrative that though Christ was asleep, He was in the ship; He had not left His disciples. And however God may seem to deal with His people, He is still with them. "Fear you not," He says, "for I am with you." If there is nothing more, the presence of the Lord ought to be enough to cheer us. Our heavenly Father knows our need. To be banished from the presence of God would be hell. But however tossed with tempest our vessel may be, we cannot despair as long as the Lord is our companion.

Remember, again, that although Christ was asleep, He was tossed about as much as the disciples were, and in the same peril. They might well say, "Care You not that *we* perish?" putting Him with themselves, for they would have gone down together, both He and they. If we are persecuted, Jesus is persecuted. If we suffer, the head suffers in the members. Our cause is His cause. This should encourage us. When Caesar said to the frightened captain, "Fear not, you carry Caesar and all his fortunes," he did afford us an earthly type of the great heavenly truth that the vessel of salvation carries Christ and His honor in it, as well as His people.

Remember too, that our Lord was benefiting His people when He was asleep, for He was setting them a good example, an example of sacred restfulness in times of trouble. He slept not merely because of His fatigue as a man, but because He felt safe in His Father's hands. When the Master put His foot on board that vessel, He knew there would be a storm. The tossing did not take Him by surprise, and yet He went to sleep because He knew that all was right. No one could have slept with such foreknowledge but one whose heart was full of confidence in God. The Lord would have His people restful and not fretful, "So He gives His beloved sleep." We have never read of our Lord's sleeping except on this occasion, this majestic occasion, when He was asleep in a storm-tossed boat, with His head on a pillow, because His heart was on the bosom of

God. He did as well as say to all His servants, "Rest in troublous times, and leave all in the hands of Him who cares for you." His sleeping was an acted sermon upon, "Let not your hearts be troubled."

Moreover, He was testing them and revealing themselves to themselves. Perhaps many of them were in the same state as Peter, and thought they could bear anything, but they would never mistrust the Lord. He let the storm blow till they got into a doubting frame of mind, that they might see the evil heart of unbelief which still lurked within them. By this trial He was strengthening them. They were to be fishers of men all their lives, and fishermen must encounter storms. This was one of the storms of their apprenticeship, when their captain was with them, so that when they came to be captains themselves, no strange thing might happen to them if a tempest overtook them. If they had enjoyed all fair weather when Christ was with them, hurricanes would have startled them afterwards when He was gone, but now they will say, one to the other in the time of persecution and trial, "Did He not aforetime show us this, on that very day when He took us to Gennesaret? He was in the vessel with us, and yet we were in a storm."

Best of all, Christ was caring for them, because He was making their danger an opportunity for the display of Himself. He wanted to show them His omnipotence, but how could He do so if there were no difficulties for His divine power to encounter? He had shown them how He could baffle devils, and overcome disease. But now He desires them to see how winds and waves are subservient to His will, and so He lets loose the raging tempests. For a man to beard a chained lion is little, but let the monster loose and then only a hero will encounter him. The hurricane is loosed, the waves are raging; they devour the boat. Now shall you see how great the Master is as He stands at the prow, and cries, "Peace, be still," and all is hushed beneath Him. Without the storm they could not have seen the glory of the peacemaker, and so the trial was absolutely necessary that they might learn His Deity to the full.

IV. We come now to our last thought, which is this: IN DUE TIME ALL THOSE WHO TRUST SHALL SEE THAT GOD DOES CARE ABOUT THEM. When Jesus was awakened, He was not angry. He might have walked away from His disciples if He had pleased. It was quite in His power to traverse the billows, and to have left them in disgust. And after the hard things we have said and thought of God, He might leave us to perish if He would, but He will do no such thing. Jesus did not reject the unworthy prayers of His feeble followers. He might have taken offense, and have said, "Is that what you think of Me? Is this the way in which you speak of Me?" But not thus did He upbraid them. He did check them gently, out of very love to them, but there was no anger. He accepted their prayers, and He awoke, and what an awaking it was! How mighty were His works! There was no trace of storm another moment after He had been awakened; the most blustering of the conflicting winds slept like a babe in its mother's bosom; the waves were as marble. Troubled

one, you will enjoy calm, yet. Poor tried and tempted child of God, you will see days in which you will wonder where your troubles are. You will say to yourself, "They are quite gone; I have nothing left to be troubled with. Christ has chased my griefs away." Perhaps you will enjoy a long, unbroken calm—not an ordinary one, but such a calm, so deep, so profound, that you will say to yourself, "It is worthwhile to have gone through a storm to enter upon a peace like this." After traversing the wilderness, you will enter Canaan. The angels will visit you when the devils have ended their temptation. You will leave the battlefield for the land of Beulah where you shall hear the choirs of heaven sing, and the angels will bring you spices from the gardens of the blessed. Only have courage! Stand to your post, trust in your Lord, think well of Him, and rest in Him, for as the Lord lives, no vessel that has Christ on board shall suffer shipwreck. He who has faith is insured against destruction. Wait on the Lord, even if the vision tarries, and fair sunlight and smooth sailing shall be your reward.

I shall leave the subject when I have hinted at its application in two ways.

The first is this. I think this is very applicable to the state of the church at this present time. There is great trouble in some minds about the church, for everything is going badly, all things are in commotion. The signs of the times are dark. To me the worst trouble is that Jesus seems to be asleep. There is nothing doing, no great revival of religion, and but little power with the ministry. I am, however, comforted by the reflection that Jesus sleeps, but He never oversleeps. When we fall asleep, we do not know how to awake, but Jesus Christ does—He sleeps, but He does not oversleep. Glory be to His name, He sleeps, but He is not dead. And as long as He is alive, our joy is alive. While there is a living Christ there will always be a living church. There may be both a sleeping Christ, and a sleeping church, but neither Christ nor His church can perish. If our Lord is asleep, He is asleep near the helm—He has only to put His hand out and steer the vessel at once. He is asleep, but He only sleeps until we cry more loudly to Him. When we get into such trouble that we cannot help ourselves, and feel our entire dependence on Him, then He will reveal His power. Perhaps during the next 20 years, the state of religion in England will grow worse, and worse, and worse. Very possibly for another 10 years, infidelity will abound, and superstition will abound, and then His church will be in a desperate state, and she will cry, "O God, the candle is all but quenched. The light is nearly withdrawn!" And then there will go up such an exceedingly great and bitter cry that Christ will hear it, and come and revive His work right gloriously. It may be He will let the battle go against us for many a day and our slender strength will be broken into utter weakness, and we shall almost despair of the fight. Then will He send His trumpeter to us. Then will His Spirit come, and the loud and clear voice shall be heard, "Be of good courage. When you are weak then are you strong!"

Then, on a sudden, in our utter impotence, we shall rush upon the foe once more, and like Gideon's barley cake, which smote the tents of Midian, and made them lie along, so shall the Lord's people do great exploits, because the Lord has awaked as a mighty man out of His sleep. A sudden and glorious victory shall make heaven and earth ring with His praise. Be neither discouraged nor discomforted. The storm is not at its worst yet. The vessel is not filled with the waves yet. The water is not up to her bulwarks yet, she still floats. When she can scarcely keep from sinking, and is almost going down by the head, then the captain will stand in the front of the vessel and calm the seas. When the roaring waves nearly overwhelm her, He will say to them, "Peace, be still!" The calm, the long millennial calm, it may be, is close ahead—we know not how near it may be, but let us hope on.

The other application is to the sinner. It may be that there is someone here who is in a desperate plight. He feels his sins, like hungry waves, ready to devour him, and he does not know how to escape. But he has been praying, and I am glad of it. Dear friend, never give up praying! The poor soul has been crying, "Lord help me!" It is the right prayer. Brother, keep on at it. But it seems to him that Jesus is asleep, and he says, "Does He not care for a poor sinner? Will He let me go down to hell, and think nothing of it?" What do you say, friend? Would you let a praying sinner go to hell if you could save him? "Oh, no!" you say, "If he cried to me I would help him." Do you think you are kinder than Christ? I tell you that—

"His heart is made of tenderness,
His heart melts with His love!"

Believe in His love. Cast yourself upon His grace, and when you believe in Him, you are saved. Do not think hard thoughts of Him. Touch the hem of His garment, and you shall be made whole! Trust your guilty soul with Him, and it is well with you now and forever. May God give you His blessing, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MARK 4.

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FRESH GRACE CONFIDENTLY EXPECTED
NO. 1122

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 20, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I shall be anointed with fresh oil."
Psalm 92:10.

DAVID is very positive. He does not say, "I hope I shall be anointed with fresh oil, and I have a pleasing expectation that it may be so," but he speaks of his future as absolutely certain. "I *shall be* anointed with fresh oil." Nor will it appear at all wonderful that he should be so positive if you read the psalm, for his subject there is the ever-living and all-sufficient God. And when we get near to God, we get into the region of positive certainty. While we depend upon man we are in the realm of "maybe's," and "hopes," and "perhaps," and "peradventures." But when we come to rest in God, we are far removed from everything that is of chance and conjecture. Our God is the God of truth and righteousness. "He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." Man is but a treacherous quicksand where confidence is shipwrecked, but the Lord is a haven of security. We do well neither to boast in ourselves, nor to place our reliance on the promises of our fellow creatures. But we may wisely boast in the great "I AM," and rest our souls securely upon His Word, and His love. He can neither change nor fail. "He is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent." David, therefore, felt quite at his ease about the future. He felt certain that God, who had given him a measure of grace, would give him more grace. He entertained no suspicion that God's great resources would run out, or that God would withhold them from His own. He says, "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Beloved, let us draw near to God, and so let us drink at the wellhead which can never be dried up. Let us give up looking to the broken cisterns which do but mock us, and let us turn to the inexhaustible deep which lies under, which is always ready to overflow for our need.

Let us think, at this time of the confidence of David, and we shall remark upon it thus. First, *it was a confidence full of meaning,* "I shall be anointed with fresh oil," is a most expressive utterance. Secondly, it was a confidence *exceedingly well-grounded*. Thirdly, it was a confidence which *calmed his fear,* and fourthly, it *excited his hopes.* And in the last place, if we possess it, it is a confidence which will *lead us to pity those who are destitute of it.*

I. THE CONFIDENCE HERE EXPRESSED IS FULL OF MEANING. What did he intend by saying, "I shall be anointed with fresh oil"? He

meant, first, that *his strength would be renewed*. It was a common belief among the Orientals that anointing with oil added to a man's vigor. They regarded it as the symbol of renewed strength. So David felt and knew that God would, whenever it was required, renew his strength. Times of weakness will happen to us all. A great strain may be put upon us, and we may become exhausted, or under severe depression of spirit, we may imagine ourselves to be ready to die. But at all such times God will supply strength to us—our extremity will be His opportunity—our time of famine will be His hour of plenty. Is not His strength made perfect in weakness? Is it not written that, "He gives power to the faint and to them that have no might, He increases strength"? David sung in the 103rd Psalm, "He satisfies my mouth with good things; so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's," and he expected it always to be so. "He restores my soul," he says in the 23rd Psalm. Often his psalms, which commence in painful depression, conclude with exultation, because heavenly love had poured fresh life into his swooning soul. From many a soul-sickness had the son of Jesse been recovered, from many a sinking had he been lifted up into holy joy. He here expresses his conviction that the Lord would always deal thus graciously with him. Expect this, then, my brethren, that God will give you new strength as you shall require it. "As your days, so shall your strength be." "He gives more grace." Go to Him in the time of your weakness, in the confidence of this text—"I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

David meant, in the second place, that he should be *afresh assured of the divine favor*. To anoint a man with oil was a token of his welcome to your house. His feet were washed that he might be refreshed, and then the notable guest, worthy of special honor, was anointed with perfumed nard. So David says that as he had received tokens of divine favor before, he should receive them yet again. O beloved, you know what it is to revel in the smiles of God, and find a heaven in His manifested love. You have basked in the sunlight of your Father's love many a time, and felt an ecstasy such as worldlings cannot imagine. Has not the Lord been pleased to make the name of Jesus to your souls "like ointment poured forth"? Oftentimes has He brought you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you has been love. He has made for you a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well-refined. You look back upon these seasons with inexpressible delight, and perhaps at this moment you are saying, "Oh, that it was with me as in months past." Pluck up courage, my brothers and sisters—you shall be "anointed with fresh oil." There are more tokens of love awaiting you; further signs of your Master's love shall be afforded you. You need not cry with Esau, "Have you but one blessing? Bless me, even me, O my Father," for the Lord abounds in blessings, and He delights to bestow them upon His beloved. Yes, there are even richer mercies yet to come. The past, though full of blessedness, shall be eclipsed by the happy future. David had the favor of God as a shepherd boy, he found it anew as a warrior, and he had yet

other tokens when he became king in Israel. Every favor received is a pledge of more to follow. Dawn is the earnest of noon. Within the sacred circle of fellowship to which you have already penetrated, there is a holy of holies of yet closer communion, and there you shall soon enter. "Friend, come up higher," is your Lord's sweet invitation. Have faith and be of good cheer, for you shall see greater things than these. You shall be baptized again into the Holy Spirit. You shall receive anew the spirit of adoption, and your joy shall be full. Therefore lift up your head.

But again, David meant that he should be *confirmed in his estate.* It is noteworthy that David was anointed three times. First of all by Samuel, in prospect of his ultimately becoming king, a second time by the men of Judah, when he reigned over a part of the nation, and a third time at Hebron, when the whole Israelite nation came together, and David was solemnly elected to be their king. Perhaps he remembered this, and looking upon those various anointings as confirmations of his kingly state, he felt that God would yet further confirm him upon his throne all his days. Many were the rebellions against David's authority, but they were all futile. When his throne was shaken by his rebellious son, Absalom, and his government almost annihilated, yet God restored him to the throne again, and in fact, anointed him once more. Now this day, beloved, you and I, who are believers in Jesus, are kings and priests unto God. But if Satan could do it, he would soon bring our kingdom and priesthood to an end. He is plotting and devising by all manner of means to work our destruction. But it is written, "You maintain My lot." The great keeper of our head is one who can never be overcome. The Lord, who has set us on the throne with His Son, will neither allow His Son nor us to be driven from it. The Lord reigns and while the Lord reigns, His people shall also reign. "Because I live, you shall live, also," is the Word of Jesus, and upon that Word He has caused our souls to hope. He will confirm you again, my brothers and sisters, in your sonship. He will make you again to say, "Abba, Father," with an unfaltering tongue. He will confirm you in your position as a member of His body. He will make you feel that the anointing of the Head is still descending upon you, and you shall thus rejoice again and again in full assurance that what God has made you, you shall be even to the end. Thus, again, you see the Lord anoints His people with fresh oil, by confirming them in their estate.

Furthermore, David meant that he should be *qualified for his office* by the bestowal of fresh grace. This was, no doubt, the meaning of the anointing of a king. It was the type and token of his receiving royal wisdom and authority. So, too, in the anointing of a priest, it was the symbol of the Spirit of God being given to him that he might discharge his sacred office. David felt that he would frequently need to be taught of God, guided, enlightened, and instructed, so that he might, as king and leader in Israel, act rightly. Therefore he says, "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Beloved, this is a very sweet confidence for us. If you are a minister of the gospel, you will have a thousand reasons for feeling yourself to be in-

competent, and you might well throw down the staff of your pastorate, and leave work if you were not sure that your sufficiency is of God. In such work as the instruction of the young, the visitation of the sick, and the reclaiming of the fallen or whatever it is that God has called you to, you will frequently tremble as you discover more and more your own unfitness to be used of God. But this will be counterbalanced by learning more and more the divine faithfulness. Do not relinquish your work because of your feebleness, for you shall be anointed with fresh oil. Do you need wisdom? Ask it of the Lord, for He gives generously. Do you need a warm and zealous spirit? Are you conscious of growing cold? Some drops of His dear love falling into your heart will set it on a blaze, and make you as earnest as you would desire. Do you need more power in prayer? Go to Him who understood the art of wrestling on the mountainside at midnight, and He will teach you how to pray. Is there anything you lack in order to the full discharge of the ministry to which God has called you? Wait upon the Lord for it with unwavering faith, and He will grant it to you, and you "shall be anointed with fresh oil."

Once more, I think David meant that he should also *have new cause for delight.* Anointing with oil was intended to give pleasure. The element of joy in religion is looked upon with indifference by some, but they are unwise. There are some, nowadays, who would like to strike out everything from mortal life which gives pleasure. We have societies which are *anti* to every mortal thing that is pleasant and agreeable. And if there remains one solitary enjoyment to mortal men in this vale of tears, which has not some society opposed to it, I have no doubt some genius will commence a crusade against it tomorrow. The theory is that all wholesome things are nasty, and that all gratifications are deadly. I wonder they do not make the parish pump run with wormwood tea, and paint the meadows a dun color. Then, when we have abstained from all that is either beautiful or agreeable, and reduced ourselves to the condition of the savage who eats acorns and lives in a cave, we shall have climbed somewhat near perfection. Now, I do not believe in this theory for ordinary life, much less for spiritual life. Men used of old, to anoint the heads of their guests to give them pleasure, and they were never condemned for it. And the Lord intends that His people should have the richest pleasures in their souls. He is the happy God, and would have those around Him happy. He never intended this world to be a great workhouse, a vast drill-shed, or a convict settlement so arranged that labor should banish joy and a crushing sense of subjection should chase away love. He has made this world to be a happy lodging for His dear children, till He shall call them home; and He has provided for their delight many enjoyments, lawful and commendable, beneficial and spiritual. I believe the Lord intended His people to be the happiest people under the sun. When I see certain of them repining, complaining, fretting, worrying, and calling that state of mind, *"experience,"* I pray, "Lord, save me from that experience, and give me to have Your joy fulfilled in me." Our Lord Jesus was sorrow-

ful, not as our example, but as our substitute. He was put to grief that we might be joyous. He bore our load that we might have no load to carry. He was full of cares for us, that we might have no care, but might rejoice in Him all our days. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, Rejoice." The atmosphere we breathe should be fragrant with thankful joy. Like flowers, we ought to load each breeze with the sweet perfume of holy gratitude. We, who have believed, do enter into rest, and in that rest we discover new joys each day. The banks of the river, the streams which make glad the city of God, are not dark with weeping willows, or dreary with a jungle of thorns and thistles, but they are lovely with the rose of Sharon, and the lilies of the valley. And among their shady groves the righteous lie down at peace, and sing their song of loves touching their Well-beloved. Yes, we did rejoice, we have rejoiced, and we mean to rejoice again. "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Put all those five thoughts together, and you have a great text before you, too big for me to preach from, but it may furnish you with many a theme for thought. It is a branch with many clusters—eat thereof and be glad.

II. THE CONFIDENCE OF OUR TEXT IS WELL-GROUNDED, because it is grounded upon God. We could not reckon upon having supplies all our lives if we depended upon the granaries of Egypt or upon the storehouses of the wealthiest of the land. But when we rest in God, we may boast ourselves as we may. I stood the other day, as you have often done, by a spring, pleased to see it constantly bubble up with cool, refreshing water. One who came there to fetch water for her house, said to me, "It is always the same, sir, always the same. I never knew the sharpest frost to freeze it or the most burning summer to dry it. The stream is equally full at all times in the year." This was very different from a fountain which I often pass, which more than half the year bears the notice, "This drinking fountain is closed during the winter." And very different from those brooks in our own and other lands which live upon the rains, and therefore do not contain a drop of water in time of drought. Why does the spring always remain the same? Because it has tapped the great fountains, there is a deep that couches beneath. There are vast secret reservoirs in the heart of the earth, and if you can set these astir, you are sure of a perpetual supply. Many a man has his water laid on, as it were, from the water company—his dependence is on man, and therefore it fails him. Or he depends on the circumstances which surround him, and therefore he finds his confidence to be as a deceitful brook. But if you live upon God, and say, "All my fresh springs are in You," you have tapped the eternal deeps, and you never need be afraid of drought. You shall drink draughts of living water—you shall be anointed with oil. Beloved, it is a grand thing to be thrown flat on God, however hard the fall. It is a glorious thing to hang upon the eternal arm with nothing else to hold you up. Just as yon unpillared arch of heaven never starts or quivers, notwithstanding that it is without a buttress; so does faith, when it is

built on God, stand gloriously serene in its mighty strength. "Trust you in the Lord, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed."

We are quite sure of fresh supplies because of our union to Christ. Every Christian is a part of Christ, for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. Now there can be no fear that my little finger will not be supplied as long as the head is nourished. If the head shall have sufficient nutriment, so shall the meanest member of the body, and because we are one with Christ, we shall therefore receive daily grace. Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure, and the sacred oil descends to the very skirts of His garments. And because without measure, the Spirit rests upon Him, therefore every one of us who belong to Him shall be anointed with fresh oil. Why does the branch of the tree expect to live? It sends out no roots into the earth, it makes no search for nourishment among the rocks and stones. No, but the branch expects to live because the sap flows into the stem, and from the stem to itself, and we expect grace because it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. Oh, if we had a pinched and starveling Christ, we might expect to run short. But with one in who dwells all the fullness of the Godhead, bodily we can have no cause for fear. If I have such a Christ as this, I *must* be anointed with fresh oil.

Again, we have another reason. We must have fresh grace because the Holy Spirit dwells in us. It was a good day for the poor widow of Zarephath upon which Elijah came to live with her. If I had been in her place, I would have felt that I was safe enough, for if God did not think of me, He would think of Elijah, and if Elijah lived in my house and went shares with me, I should not need to cry over that little meal in the barrel, or that drop of oil in the cruse. I would feel, "Since Elijah lives with me, I shall share with Elijah. Elijah's God will take care of him, and I shall be taken care of also." O child of God, who is it that lives in your body along with you? Know you not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit? And while the Holy Spirit lives within, shall there ever be famine in the soul? Shall the cruse of oil fail? Shall the barrel of meal be entirely empty, while the Holy Spirit is in us? It cannot be. Beloved, how many forget that precious doctrine of the indwelling of the Spirit in every believer; and yet, if we did but realize it, we should feel that while He who is the anointing oil dwells in our hearts, we must be anointed with fresh oil. There can be no fear about that.

Moreover, look at the promises of God's Word, and they will, at once assure us that we shall have fresh supplies of grace according to our need. You do not need that I quote them to you this morning—they are legion—but I will tell you what I experienced myself in reference to those promises. They are to me a gradual revelation. Not but what they are all in the book now, but I cannot realize, and grasp, and understand them except by degrees. I find a promise exactly suitable for me today, but there is another. I love it, and bless God for it already, but I cannot get

the sweetness of it today, it is reserved for days to come. I shall find it open to me tomorrow. Another is laid up for me in six months' time, and another in five years' time. The promises are fruits laid up to ripen in time to come, and as most fruits become ripest and sweetest in the winter, so have we found that God's promises have a peculiar mellowness in our times of distress and affliction, such a sweetness as we did not perceive in the summer days of our prosperity. The train which starts from London to go to the North continues to traverse the distance day by day—how is it supplied with water? Why, there are trenches between the rails in several different places, and from these the engine drinks as it rushes along its iron pathway. It is supplied as it runs. That is just what our heavenly Father has done for you. You are just like an engine on the road to heaven, and between here and heaven there are many stores of grace awaiting you. You will take up fresh water without slacking your speed, and so will be able to keep on to your journey's end. To use another illustration, when the Eastern nations used to trade across the desert in the olden times, in Solomon's days for instance, there were stations built, wells sunk, and provisions stored at convenient halting places, so that the caravans might pause and take in fresh provisions. The caravans reached their journey's end because the long way was broken up by a series of resting places. Now, the promises are resting places for us between here and heaven. There is a long line of them at well-ordered intervals, and as we journey through this desert world, we shall be constantly coming first to one, and then to another, and then another, and another, and so we shall find fresh provision stored up that we may not fail. The manna will fall daily till we come to Canaan. The promises of God are so numerous that we are sure we "shall be anointed with fresh oil."

Once more, beloved, up till now our experience has proved that we shall be anointed with fresh oil because we have been so anointed many a time already. I appeal to you who have gone for many years forward in the pathway where Jesus leads you. Have you not known many times of refreshing from the Presence of the Lord? You have had times of great depression, for changes are appointed us as long as we are here. Men may promise themselves they shall never see a change, but they are greatly mistaken. David said, "My mountain stands firm; I shall never be moved," but in a very little time he sang another hymn! When I hear brethren so very confident that they shall never doubt again, I am reminded of a story I have heard of the olden times, when a young gentleman who had never traveled before went over Hounslow Heath, and was accosted by another gentleman who rode by his side, and joined in an interesting conversation. Our friend said at last, "I have always been told by my father that this is a very dangerous heath, but the old gentleman, I think, was exceedingly nervous, for we have come all this way without being molested by highwaymen." "Yes," said the other, "but now is the time for you to stop and deliver." And he clapped his pistol to his ear. It

often happens, when we say, "I shall have no more temptations," that our very confidence is, in itself, a temptation. O yes, there have been times of sore trial, but the Lord has appeared for us. Up to this moment not one good thing has failed of all that the Lord God has promised—

"Thus far we prove the promise good
Which Jesus ratified with blood."

We have no fault to find with our God. Jehovah Jireh, the Lord has provided to this day. In the mount of the Lord shall it be seen, Ebenezer, up to now, the Lord has helped us. Well, then, if He has done so up till now, so will He, for He is an unchangeable God. Therefore let us be assured that we "shall be anointed with fresh oil."

III. THIS CONFIDENCE CALMS ALL OUR FEARS. Sometimes, when we are not quite as we should be, we are filled with fear on account of our soul poverty. What a poor thing I am, how little grace I have, how weak in prayer, how slow in service, how frequently depressed, and how easily tossed to and fro. How shall I hope to hold on to the end? Here is the answer to it—"I shall be anointed with fresh oil." I am poor, but I shall receive my daily pension. I am weak and I have no strength in reserve, but my strength is laid up in God. Imagine two Israelites talking together one day, and one of them says to the other, "Your cupboard seems to be very empty, I fear you are imprudent." "But," says the other, "do you know we gathered this morning an omer full of manna, and it exactly supplied my family. I have a wife and a troop of boys with mighty appetites, and very soon the omer which had been full was empty, but we look for more tomorrow." "Nothing in the house!" said the other. "Do you not feel distressed?" "No not at all." "Why not?" "Because I believe the manna will fall tomorrow morning, and that there will be just as much as I shall need, so that I have no need to lay by any in store." "Very imprudent," said the other. "I believe we ought to make hay while the sun shines. If you will come to my house, I will show you the good stock of manna which I have carefully laid by." "No," said the other, "I do not care to see it just now, but I will tell you what I will do, I will come down tomorrow at dinner time and see it." So the man gathered in the morning his own fresh manna, and his family was satisfied with it and delighted. And after they had eaten, he said, "I will go down and see my rich friend's manna. He was much better off last night than I was." He goes to his friend's door, but his friend does not seem pleased to see him. "I have come to see your manna that you stored up so carefully." But the other blushes, and admits that he has none to show. "Why not," his friend inquires. "Well, the fact is, I do not want you to come into my tent at all. I must come forth from it myself. There is a most detestable smell all through the tent. I had to take away the manna and bury it, for it bred worms and stank." "Ah," said the other, "then, after all, I did well to live upon daily manna, and to have no stock in hand. And you did foolishly to lay by a store." Now there may be some professors here who want to feel that they are strong enough for tomorrow or that they have grace

enough for next week. They want to have such a proportion of divine strength given them that they shall feel confident about themselves for years to come. All that will breed worms and stink—all human confidence, glory, and pride must rot. But if you remain a poor sinner and nothing at all, daily depending on the bounty of God, you will have grace from heaven fresh and fresh, smelling of the hand which gives it every morning. Beloved, it calms our fears about our poverty when we remember that the granary of heaven is not exhausted, and that as each morning breaks, we shall find the dew of grace lying about our tent.

This also removes our fears concerning violent temptations. We must, all of us, have felt afraid of being tempted. We are taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Sometimes our unbelief says, "If I am tempted in a certain way, I shall certainly perish." My brothers and sisters, you should remember that you will be anointed with fresh oil. When the temptation comes, there will be a way of escape for you. What a happy circumstance it is for Christians that it is not often that the temptation and the opportunity come together. Have not you noticed that when wrong desires stir in your mind, they come to you at times when you cannot carry them out? And at other times when you have the opportunity to sin fairly before you, you have no desire for it whatever. That is often a way of escape for God's people. Do not be distressed about temptations. There will be such in this world. Lay hold on the shield of your faith, and you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

But it may be you are afraid not merely of temptation, but of backsliding, and that is a very blessed fear, but do not let it depress you, for you will be anointed with fresh oil. If you had to keep yourself, you would certainly perish. If you had to sustain your own spiritual vigor, it would not be long before you would faint. But since you depend upon God, and He has to preserve you, He will not allow you to leave Him. Or if for a while you should depart from His way, He will bring your wandering heart back, and set you in the King's highway once more.

Or it is possible you are afraid of some great and grievous affliction. I know dear sisters who are aware that a certain disease is upon them which will one day come to such a point that either there will be a painful operation or else they may die. Dear friend, do not fret about it. You have not sufficient strength for what is coming, but you will be anointed with fresh oil. Nobody needs tomorrow's grace today. When you are only up to your ankles in trouble, you do not require the grace which you will have when you are up to your neck in it. You shall have grace in proportion. You shall have ballast for your sail, and sail for your ballast, for He is a good captain who intends to steer you into port. Therefore do not be cast down.

Some of us, it may be, have been troubled about the future death of some dear one upon whom we depend, or whose life is very precious to us. We have buried them a hundred times over in our fears. Let us re-

member that when the trouble comes it will be time enough for us to be cast down by it—no, we shall not be cast down, for God, who helps those who are cast down, will comfort us. "I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

And perhaps, dear brothers or sisters, you have entered upon a new state of sorrow. You wear today the name of widow, which you never wore before, or you are now called an orphan for the first time. In this new state, resort to God to be anointed with fresh oil! He who made you a good wife will help you to bear well the trial of losing your husband. He who made you a dutiful child will be a Father to you, and help you to sustain the position of an orphan, well. You shall be anointed with fresh oil whenever affliction comes. I feel as if I could sit down now, and say to myself, "Cheer up, heart, cheer up. Whatever ails you, you shall be anointed with fresh oil. Look into the future—no, do not care to look into it—do not wish to look into the book of fate and see—

'What gloomy lines wait for you,
Or what bright scenes arise.'

You shall be anointed with fresh oil." This is a heavenly forecast of our nativity. We shall be anointed with fresh oil right to the end of our journey, and when death comes, if come it ever shall—for Christ may come and we may not die—we shall be anointed with fresh oil. Very wonderful is the way in which God takes His people to Himself! Two good men have lately gone to heaven in a manner which rebuked their own prayers. They were taught in their church to say, and did say twice every Sabbath for more than 50 years, "Lord, deliver us from sudden death." Dear good men, the Lord knew it was a stupid prayer, and Mr. Robert Aitken, who had for many years served his Lord, fell down dead on the railway platform, and Mr. Pennefather dropped from his chair into heaven. The Lord seemed to say to them, "Why did you ask Me to save you from sudden death? It was the best for you, and I gave it to you." To die in the pulpit preaching—to go straight from testifying about Christ below to seeing Him above—what better thing *could* be desired?! Do not be afraid of dying. Either you will be taken away gently, perhaps in your very sleep, and will never know you died at all—or, if you have to lie a little while and linger, you will be anointed with fresh oil, and you will turn your dying bed into a chariot of fire. You will be transfigured there in the presence of your family, and they will wonder that the grace of God could do such great things for a poor, weak, trembling mortal. "I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

IV. Now I must pass over the next point very briefly—THIS ASSURANCE TENDS TO RAISE OUR HOPES.

We tremble lest we should not hold on to the end, but now we know we shall be anointed with fresh oil, we are filled with hope. Sometimes, when we meet with believers who are full of grace, full of patience, full of courage, full of zeal, full of love, we say, "I can never get where they are." Yes we can, for we shall be anointed with fresh oil. And if we obtain fresh grace there is no place of eminence we cannot reach. What Abraham

was, what David was, what Isaiah was, what Paul was, we may be. There is nothing in the whole range of Christian attainment from which we are debarred.

This raises our hope for useful service. Perhaps we have not done much for the Lord yet, or, having done something in our youth, are growing dull now, and do not honor Him as we once did. Come, we won't give up and say, "I shall never serve the Lord," but we will rejoice that we shall be anointed with fresh oil. We have seen trees bear very little fruit for years, but they will have a splendid year, by-and-by, and then they will be loaded with fruit. Sometimes an old tree looks dead, and yet at the scent of water it does bud and bring forth fruit once more. So some of you may be like a dry, barren tree, but the Lord means to visit you, and you shall bring forth fruit to His name. I would say to every brother here who is conscious that he has neglected a great deal of what he ought to have done, and has not been as useful as he should, "Come, brother, mend your ways, and have good hope of brighter times to come, for you shall be anointed with fresh oil."

Once more, this gives us hope of the fullest fellowship with Christ. Where John was when he leaned his head on His Master's bosom, I may be. Where Mary was when she sat at the Master's feet, I may be, if "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Come lift up your heads, you birds of heaven. Do not sit moping. Lift up your heads, I say, and look the sun in the face, the glorious Sun of Righteousness, and rise with all your wings towards Him. He will bear you up. He will draw you to Himself. Does He not even now attract you by His own superlative beauties? "Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse," He says, "with Me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana." Up, up Christian, higher, higher, higher. The Lord will help you, He will give you new strength, and the highest place of devotion, the loftiest elevation of piety shall be attained by you.

V. Lastly, THIS MAKES US FEEL GREAT PITY FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT HOPE TO BE ANOINTED WITH FRESH OIL. And such are all who are destitute of faith. You have your choice. You who do not believe in the unseen, you have your choice in the seen things which you can see and hear. They are before you and you are very fond of them, and you think they fill your spirit. So they may for the present, but there are evil times coming. The young man's youth will not last forever. Eyes grow dim, as every old man will tell you. The joys of youth will not come to your rescue then. The remembrance of those early joys, as past and gone forever, will only make your cup bitter, and going down gradually to your grave, discontented and fretful, still striving to gratify passions for which you have no strength. Looking again to broken cisterns, and finding only a little mud at the bottom, where once you found what you thought crystal waters, you will begin to cry out for fresh comforts. But you will not find them. It is a blessed thing to be so rich that there is no end to your wealth, and nobody can say that but a Christian. It is a blessed thing to have a stream at your feet which will never fail—and nobody has such a

river but a Christian. If you believe in God, God is yours, and all that your soul can ever need is treasured up in the infinite God, for life, for death, for judgment, for eternity. Without God you are naked, poor and miserable already in the highest sense, but what will you be hereafter? Oh, the poverty of a man who lives without Christ. But oh, the poverty of the man who dies without Christ! Oh, the utter, utter poverty of a man who will live throughout eternity without Christ! He is a naked soul, and the blasts of wrath shall smite upon him without pause. He is a thirsty soul—oh, how he thirsts! But no drop of consolation will ever come to him. He is a crushed and broken soul, but there is no one to heal his broken heart, nor stanch his ghastly wounds. He is forever destroyed and banished from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power. And to that destruction no restoration can ever come. To that agony no relief! To that death no resurrection! Today Christ is to be had. Today all that your soul needs is to be had. And to be had for nothing! To be had for the asking! To be had for the accepting, for whoever believes in Him receives Him, and so is saved—

"But if your ears refuse
The language of His grace,
And hearts grow hard like stubborn Jews,
That unbelieving race!
The Lord in vengeance dressed,
Will lift His hand and swear,
You that despised My promised rest
Shall have no portion there!"

God grant it may not be so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 40.

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"God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink."
Genesis 21:19.

YOU know the story of Hagar—of her being sent out from Abraham's tent with her son Ishmael. It was necessary that they should be sent away from the child of promise. God, nevertheless, had designs of good towards Ishmael and his mother. He still tried them. Whether we are saints or sinners, we shall meet with tribulation. Whether it is Sarah or Hagar, no life shall be without its affliction. To Hagar the affliction came in a very painful manner, for the little water that she had brought with her in her bottle was spent. She must give her child drink, or it would die, and then she, by-and-by, must follow. She laid the boy down, giving him up in despair, and began to weep what she thought would be her last flood of tears. Still there was no real cause for her distress. She need not have thirsted—she was close by a well. In her grief she had failed to see it. The distraction of her spirit had made her look everywhere except in the one place where she would have found exactly what she needed. God therefore spoke to her by an angel, and after having done that, He opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, which, I suppose, had always been there. When she saw it, she went at once to it, filled her bottle, gave her child to drink, and all her sorrows were over. It seemed a very simple remedy for a very sad case. It is but an illustration of what is often happening in human life. Men and women come into sore trouble, and yet, if they could see all around them, they need not be in trouble. They actually come to death's door, in their own judgment, and yet there really is, if they understood all things, no cause for their distress. They will escape out of their present trial as soon as ever their eyes are opened, for they will see that God has made provision for their necessities, prepared comfort for their griefs, and made such a way of escape from their fears that they need by no means give way to despair.

I desire to speak to persons who are in trouble. There are three things I shall bring before them. The first is that it often happens with seeking persons, and troubled persons, that as in Hagar's case, *the supply of their necessities is close at hand*—the well is near. Secondly, it often happens that that supply *is as much there as if it had been provided for them and for them only,* as this well seemed to have been. And, thirdly, *no great exertion is needed to procure all that we need from the supply al-*

ready made by God. She filled her bottle with water, a joyful task to her—and she gave the lad drink.

I. It often happens that when we are in trouble and distress, THE SUPPLY OF OUR NEED, AND THE CONSOLATION FOR OUR SORROW ARE VERY NEAR AT HAND. There is a well close to us at our feet, if we could but see it. We miss it, perhaps, yet not because it is far away, but because our eyes are not open. There is no necessity for God to make a well—that has been done. What is necessary is that He should open our eyes that we may see what is already there.

How true this often is in providence with Christian people. We have known them to be in sore alarm at some approaching ill, or in the most fearful distress on account of some troublous circumstances which already surround them. They have said, "We don't know what we shall do tomorrow." They have inquired. "Who shall roll away the stone?" They know not that God has already provided for tomorrow, and has rolled the stone away. If they knew all, they would understand that their trial is purely imaginary. They are making it by their unbelief. It has no other existence than that which their distrust of God gives to it. While they are inquiring, "Where shall I find a friend? Who will come to the rescue?" the friend is already in the house, or, perhaps, will never be needed at all. While they are saying, "How can I get out of this dilemma?" God has already solved it, the riddle has been answered, and the enigma has been explained. They are troubled about an enemy whose head is already struck off—they are repining about a difficulty which has already been disentangled by the divine hand. We have known persons to be utterly surprised when God has delivered them. This proves that their faith was small. With calm trust there is quiet waiting. They might well have expected that He would do it. Among the surprises such persons have expressed has been this—that, after all, He should have delivered them by a means so simple. "How could it have happened," they ask, "that I could not have thought of this? That I should actually have the blessing I crave hard by me, and yet not perceive it—that I should be thirsty, and crying out to God, in hope that perhaps He will open the heavens, and send a shower of rain, and all the while there is the well bubbling up with fresh water?" We have only to look to find it, and having found it, we have only to stoop down to take and drink for our refreshment. Children of God—you who are troubled about providence, pray God to help you to trust when you cannot trace your God. Ask Him to give you, not what you wish for, but resignation to His wishes, ask to have His will casting its shadow over your soul, and let that shadow be your will from now on. O that we had learned, in whatever state we are, to be content, basing our confidence on this sure promise—He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." This is the best foundation for contentment that will ever be found. Oh, for grace to feel that if we cannot tell how God will deliver us, it is no business of ours to be able to tell, that if God knows, that is enough. God has not set us to be the providers. He does not intend us to

hold the helm, and to pull the leading strings. 'Tis ours to follow, not to lead; 'tis ours to obey; not to prescribe for God. Your deliverance is near, O child of sorrow, or if it tarries for a while, it shall be but the richer blessing when it comes. Ships that are long upon the sea are, perhaps, the more heavily freighted. And when they come to the port, they will bring home a double cargo of blessing. Those plants that come up quickly when they are sown in the ground last but for a little while; perhaps the blessing that is so long in springing out of the soil of your expectancy will last you all your life. Therefore, if the vision tarries, wait for it with patience.

Though this is true of providence, I prefer rather to deal with the matter of spiritual blessings. It often happens that souls are disturbed in spiritual matters about things that ought not to disturb them. For instance, a large proportion of spiritual distresses are occasioned by forgetfulness or ignorance of the doctrines of the Bible. We have frequently met with young persons who have made the astounding discovery that their hearts are desperately wicked. They were converted some time ago and made a profession of their faith. They did then really repent of sin, and they laid hold on Christ, but their experience was comparatively superficial. After a while the Holy Spirit was pleased to show them more of the hidden evils of their nature, and to permit the fountains of the great deep of their original depravity to be broken up—and they have been in perfect consternation, as though some strange thing had happened to them, and they have said, "Where is the comfort for this?" Now, if they had known at first that our nature is hopelessly evil, and that the scripture describes it as such, they would not have been surprised when they discovered that truth. And had they understood that the work of the Spirit is not to improve our nature, that He never tried to do it, and never intends to do it, but that He leaves the old nature to die, to see corruption, to be buried with Christ, and gives us a new nature which comes into conflict with the old nature, and causes an eternal war and strife within the Spirit—had they been acquainted with those truths when they found sin breaking loose in them, and felt the conflict within, they would have said, "This is just what I was told would happen. This is the experience of the children of God. This is what Paul speaks of in the 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and I am, after all, in the same way as the saints of God." Forgetting this, they think there is no comfort for them in what seems to them to be the strangest of all human experiences, but which, indeed, is an experience common to the people of God. They are looking for the well of water when that very doctrine they have forgotten would furnish them with the refreshment they stand in need of.

We meet with others whose trouble is about their perseverance. They believe they are the people of God, but they tremble lest they should fail to hold on and maintain the good profession. Their trials are so severe, and they feel their own weakness to be so extreme, may they not one day slip with their feet to a foul and final fall, and be utterly destroyed? Ah, if

they understood what I feel sure is the indisputable truth of God, that "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that has clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." they would not have been troubled about that question, provided they could answer the other one—are they righteous? Do they belong to those made righteous in Christ? "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." What a magnificent assurance of the safety of all the sheep of God! If I am but one of them, may I not feel a perfect confidence that Christ, who cannot lie, will make good His word? There are, besides this, innumerable other promises to the same effect, and oftentimes a man distressed about that, might be relieved of anxieties at once by the knowledge that it is a perfectly unscriptural apprehension that is agitating him. We are all too prone to judge by our feelings rather than to take counsel at the fountainhead, and rely on the oracle of inspiration.

I used to know an excellent Christian woman whose trouble was of a somewhat strange character, for she said she knew she loved the Savior. And I think all who knew her felt that she did. But though she knew she loved the Savior, she was afraid that the Savior did not love her. Nor was it easy to comfort her about that. Now, truly, if she could have grasped the thought that, *"We love Him because He first loved us,"* the snare would have been broken. Had she perceived that all that is in us must be first put into us if it is of any good, that the grace of God prevents us (goes before us), that it is the root and origin of any good thing in us, that the everlasting and eternal love of God is the fountain out of which our love to God must flow—had she known that, she would not have been troubled on that head. I wonder, sometimes, how those friends who do not receive what is commonly called Calvinistic doctrine manage to be comforted. I certainly never have any quarrel with those on the other side of the opinion, for if the tenets of Arminianism have any sweetness to them, I am delighted to hear that any have tasted it. I am always glad that everything in the world should be eaten up, and if anybody can find any food and comfort there, I am glad to hear it. I could not, and therefore I do not, envy them. I would not wish to deprive them of any comfort they could find there, as I have never been able to find any myself. If I believed that my own final perseverance rested with myself—if I thought that I might have a love to God that sprang up because of my own will rather than as a work of grace—I do not know, but I might be driven to utter distraction. Some persons need solid food and must have it, or their health would fail. So the firm belief that salvation is of grace from first to last, and that where God begins a good work He will carry it on, is essential to my Christian existence, and therefore I cannot give it up. Those who can do without it, let them, but as for me, I cannot. I would not have any comfort left me if anyone should prove that these things are not the truths of Holy Scripture. They *are* the truths of Scripture, however, and let any who are distressed, remember them. May God open their eyes to see them, and they need to be thirsty no more.

Sometimes, beloved, Holy Scripture has its well near to the troubled heart, not so much in the form of doctrine, as in the form of promise. There was never a trouble yet in human experience among God's people, but what there was a promise to meet it. You have only to look long enough, and you shall find the counterfoil. You shall discover that God has in His book that which exactly meets your case. "Oh," said Christian, in Bunyan's *Pilgrim,* "what a thousand fools have I been to lie rotting in this stinking dungeon all these weeks when I have a key in my bosom which, I am persuaded, would fit the locks of all the doors in Doubting Castle. Come, good brother, let us try it." And so Christian plucked up courage, and he found his key of promise, though it grated a little. And Bunyan says that one of the doors went, as he puts it in his old edition, "damnably hard." He did not know how to put it strong enough until he used that word. Yet the key did open every single door, and even the iron gate itself, the external gate of the castle, opened by the help of that key. O, dear hearts, some of you have been fretting and worrying yourselves about things which God has dealt with already in His Word. You have said, "Would God He would do that!" And He has done it. You have asked Him to give you something, and you have got it. I have used, sometimes, the simile of a man in the dark dying of hunger, and yet he is shut up in the pantry. There is food all round him, if he could only put out his hand and take it. Did he know it to be there, and would he grasp it, there is just what he needs. I am persuaded, beloved, if you search the scriptures well—there is not one child of God here that needs despair of finding that the Master has opened a well of promise for him.

At other times the well appears in the form neither of a doctrine nor of a promise, but in the shape of an experience of someone else. Perhaps nothing more effectually comforts, under the blessing of God, than the discovery that some undoubtedly good man has passed through the same state of heart in which we are found. When we see the footsteps of the flock, we hope that we are in the Shepherd's path. Now, if you are in deep trouble, may I invite you to read the 88th Psalm? What a psalm that is—that prayer of David's. Was ever man so cast out from God's sight, and banished from all hope as he? Yet there was no brighter saint in the olden times than that renowned sufferer. If you have deep castings down of spirit, I would invite you to consort with Job. Read that book through. See how terrible are some of his utterances, yet who shall doubt that Job was not only saved from his sins and redeemed from all adversity, but that he holds a name among the most illustrious of those who by faith have overcome the world? Turn, if you need other examples, to the sighs of King Hezekiah, or to the lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet. Surely there you shall find your own case in some chapter or another. And if it is a matter of inward contention, read the Epistle to the Romans, especially that part where Paul, in wondrous paradox, describes himself as doing that evil which he would not, and not doing that good which he would, and yet that which he did, he did not allow—till he cries, "O

wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" You would find, my dear Christian brother or sister, that instead of your present pinch and trial being a strange thing, you are only suffering what most of God's children have suffered. You imagine yourself to be sailing over unknown seas, when you are but following the ordinary track-way of the saints around that cape of storms, which when it is better known, will be to you a Cape of Good Hope. Be of good comfort. Be of good cheer, for the experience of others may refresh you, as well as the promises and the doctrines which abound in the Word of God.

Beloved, sometimes it pleases the Holy Spirit to open a well of living waters for us in the person, and work, and life, and sympathy, and love, of our Well-beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ. Full often, when I have found myself depressed in spirit, I have challenged my soul, as it were, with this question—"Why are you cast down? Did not Jesus feel this?" And the depression has vanished. The thought that Christ has sympathy in this particular trial is an inexpressibly sweet one. When the Holy Spirit brings it home to the soul, we can bless the Savior's name that He did not merely carry our sins, but that He carried our sorrows. That He was not merely a substitute, which is the greatest of all consolations, but a sympathizer, which is also inexpressibly delightful to us. Jesus suffers with you, O child of God—He suffers in you. You are a member of His body, and therefore He endures in you. You are making up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake, which is the church. There is so much of suffering allotted to the entire mystical body of Christ that there is some of it left behind as yet, and you will have your share of it. Be thankful when you hear it, that it is a part of the suffering of the body of Christ. And, oh, to look into His face by faith, and to feel that He is not hard or pitiless, whatever others may be! To look into His face, when we are distressed by reason of the wrongs of others and the dishonor done to Christ's church, and to feel that He knows it, notices it, and has sympathy with us in our sorrow over declining zeal, or over the worldliness of His people—why that nerves us with new strength. Does Jesus feel what we feel? Does He sympathize in it? Are we bearing it for His sake? Then we will welcome the trouble with welcome, and be glad to bear it, that He may be honored thereby. Beloved, if you have forgotten your Lord—(and perhaps some of you may, during this week, have been forgetting Him—it is no unusual thing)—think of Him again, and you shall find a well of water close to you.

Besides, once more, our sorrows often arise from our not observing the Holy Spirit. He is in us, and He shall be with us forever. We are troubled about the little progress of the kingdom of God in the world, but if we believe in the Holy Spirit, we shall soon get our courage back again. There is no reason why the simplest sermon, preached in the humblest place, should not at any time be the commencement of a great revival. There is no reason known to us why the simple preaching of Jesus Christ, on any Sunday, should not prove to be the conversion of all the hearers, and

through the hearers, very speedily of an entire nation. We do not know as yet—we have none of us, probably, any notion of—the great power of the Spirit of God! Some years ago there left this coast a convict vessel full of the lowest class of men that could be got together—convicts sent out for long periods of exile. On board that vessel was a surgeon superintendent who loved the Savior—who believed in the gospel, and prayed mightily. He called the convicts together, stated to them that he had an intense desire for the good of their souls—that he intended during the time of their voyage that such-and-such rules for their good should be observed—that he particularly wished that they should all learn to read, that they might be able to read the scriptures—that he would hold meetings each day—that he would pray for them individually. Within a very short time a few convicts were converted to God. There came a storm in which a companion vessel containing two hundred men went to the bottom, and this alarmed and aroused the consciences of the ungodly on board this vessel, made them more susceptible of impression, and rendered the task of teaching them the gospel much easier than it had been before. Of course the terror was transient, and being but a natural shock, wore away. Still, in the meanwhile, the good man had availed himself of the opportunity. There suddenly broke out in that vessel a divine work, and all over it might have been heard, at almost any hour of the day or night, hardened men, criminals exiled from their country, crying out, "What must we do to be saved?" When they landed, there was not one man or child out of all on board who did not profess to have found the Savior, for the Spirit of God had worked strangely among them. They had become, before they reached the distant clime of their destination, instead of a nest of swearing beings, whose very talk was profanity, and whose breath was blasphemy, a church of the living God. Such results were produced by the power of God's Spirit in answer to prayer. And if the Spirit of God were to come upon anyone here, be he who he might, a like transformation would be worked. Though he were the most abandoned character, though his infidelity might have entrenched itself, as he imagines, behind a thousand arguments, the Spirit of God would pull those down, convict him of sin, renew him, and change his heart at once. Oh, would to God the church could say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," for today she is like Hagar in the wilderness crying, and the angel says, "What ails you, Hagar?" And she says, "I need more ministers, more missionaries; I need more zeal, more earnestness." Good God, open her eyes, I pray You. Were her eyes opened, she would see that in the possession of the Holy Spirit there is a well of water close to her hand, and all she craves is there—more, indeed, than she craves—a great deal more than she yet knows that she needs. Oh, for faith in the eternal Spirit, and the griefs we feel for the church of God would come to an end.

II. But I must pass on. I think I hear someone say, "I have no doubt, sir, that God has provided a supply for necessities, but may I partake of

that supply? May I participate in the provisions of divine love?" I will answer you by saying, in the second place, that THIS SUPPLY IS FOR YOU.

Need I remind you that there are passages of scripture which lay the provisions of the gospel singularly open? There are invitations in the word which are not confined to any spiritual character. "The spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." If there be any limitation there, it is, *"whoever will."* Well, but you "will." O poor soul, you would give your eyes to have Christ; you know you would. You, poor troubled seeking one, if you had a thousand worlds, you would freely forfeit them, if you could but say, "I am pardoned. My sin is blotted out." What, then, hinders you? What keeps you back? *"Whoever will,* let him come," and *you* will—therefore come. We are told to "preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Are you a "creature"? If so, if you believe and are baptized, you shall be saved. That is God's own word to you. Prove that you are not a creature. Then I cannot speak to you. But if you are a creature, to you as a creature is that gospel sent. "Ah," I hear some say, "I was reading the other day—

'All the fitness He requires
Is to feel your need of Him,'

And I don't feel my need as I ought, so I have not got the fitness." My dear friend, do you ever like to be interrupted in the middle of a sentence? "Oh," you say, "no! That makes me say what I did not mean. Let me finish my sentence." Well, then, let that good poet, Hart, finish his verse without your interrupting him. He says—

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requires
Is to feel your need of Him.
This He gives you!
'Tis the Spirits rising beam."

You never have any sense of your need of Christ unless He gives you that sense of need. That is as much His work as full assurance is. The first breath, the first pang that indicates life, is as much the divine work as the songs of angels, or perfect saints before the throne.

There is another passage that has often yielded comfort to the downcast. "Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You are "laboring," are you not? Why, you have been laboring self-righteously to make a righteousness of your own. Give up that laboring, and come to Christ "heavy laden." You are loaded, are you not? Loaded with troubles, loaded with sins, loaded with weaknesses, loaded with doubts, Jesus says, "Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Does not that describe you? The water is for you, then. You "labor." You are "heavy laden." You are "willing." You are a "creature." "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Not long ago I tried to show you that there could not be a case of sin and misery that could not slip in there. "Lost, lost." Is that what

you say of yourself? The Son of Man is come to seek and to save such. If we were to open tomorrow a free dining house, I believe it would be necessary to put up at the door, before long, some kind of prohibition to prevent everybody's coming. We should have to draw a line somewhere. But I am quite certain that there is no poor man in London that was hungry who would refuse to go in if he saw no prohibition there. He would say, "If there is no special invitation for me, yet I mean to go in and try it on till there is a special prohibition against me." I am sure that is the way with most of us. If there were a distribution to be made of gold and silver, I think most of us would go and begin to take some until there was a special order that we were not to have any.

I wish that any sinner who is troubled about election, for instance, would wait till God tells him he is not elected, or, if he has any misgiving about whether he may come to Christ, he would wait till he finds a passage which tells him that he may not come. If he would find that, then there might be some cause for disquiet. Will you also find somewhere in this world a sinner that did try to come to Christ, yet Christ would not have him? If you have ever found someone of that sort, bring him here, for we have been boasting here very loudly that none ever did come to Christ whom He cast away. If you will find one who did come, and to whom Christ said, "No, no, you are not one of those I died for, not one of those I chose"—if you will find us one of the sort, we shall be sorrowfully glad to see him—glad because we would be glad to know the truth, but very sorrowful to think that *that* should be the truth. No, we defy Satan to find one in hell that cried to Christ for mercy, and cast himself upon the Savior, and yet was rejected! All the demons of the pit, if they search to all eternity, cannot find such an instance. There never was, there never shall be one. Stand not back, then, you who are thirsty! When you see the water, the living water, stand not back, but freely come and take. For whoever takes of it, God will make him freely welcome, and the angels will rejoice concerning him. The water is for *you*—assuredly for you.

III. Now to our last point. IT IS AVAILABLE WITHOUT ANY EXTRAORDINARY EXERTION. Hagar went and filled her bottle with water, and she gave her child a drink. No hydraulic inventions were required no exceedingly difficult pumping, no mechanical contrivances to obtain the water when the spring was perceived. She did a very simple thing. She held her bottle in the water till it was full, poured it into the child's mouth, and the dilemma which had imperiled her life was over.

Now, the way by which we get a hold of Christ is faith. A great many questions are asked about what faith is, and there are large books written about it. If you want to study the philosophy of faith till you are bewildered, read a book about faith, but if you really would know its latent power and its potent charm, put your trust in Christ, and you have got all the faith that is needed and that too in vital energy. There are some who hold that the intrinsic virtue lies in the personal appropriation, so they say that faith is to believe that Christ died for me. These same per-

sons tell us, "He died for everybody. Consequently he must have died for me." I do not see anything of a saving character in that belief at all. That does not appear to me to be in any degree the faith of God's elect. Properly, faith is a belief of God—what God says and what God promises. Its practical outcome is reliance upon the *ipse dixit* of the Almighty. "Thus says the Lord," is the warrant of faith. What is it? It is trust. And whoever trusts Christ is saved. I am leaning here now, all my weight, and if this rail gives way, I must go down. I am leaning here. Well, now, that is like faith in Christ. Lean right on Him, lean on Him with all your weight. Lean hard. Have no other confidence, throw yourself on Him. It is not faith to put one foot on Christ as the angel put one foot on the land, and then to put the other foot on our works as the angel put his other foot on the sea. To rest *both feet on Christ*, that is faith. It is to do as the slave said he did—he fell right down flat on the promise—"And den, Massa," he said, "when I am down there I can't fall not no lower," nor you, if you are flat on the promise. God has said it—that is the truth, and I believe it. And I expect Him to fulfill it. This is the testimony that God has given concerning His Son—that we have everlasting life in Him, and if we trust Him we are saved.

"But I cannot believe," says one. "Cannot believe," what? Do you say you cannot believe God? No, but man, when has God ever lied? Find me once when He has forfeited His Word. Find me once when He has broken His promise. If you say, "I cannot believe Him," do you not see that in that incredulity of yours, you have maligned God? You have blasphemed Him. You have made Him a liar. That is exactly what the Scripture says—"He that believes not has made God a liar." "But it seems too good to be believed," says one, "that God, for Christ's sake, forgives men simply on their trusting Christ." Yes, it is good, but then we have a good God, a great God. Can you not believe it when God says it? Do you feel in your heart, "Why, I must believe it if God says it." Then, beloved, if you trust on Christ because God has said it, you have the faith which is the gift of God, the faith which is the work of the Holy Spirit. For this is *the* work of God. The greatest work that He does in us that you believe in Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. "It is so simple," says one. Yes, and that is the reason why it is so difficult. If it were difficult, people would do it, but because it is so simple, they won't have it. It was a very hard thing for Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan, and why difficult, because, it was so easy. If it had been a really difficult thing it would not have been hard and he would have done it. "If the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it?" But when he says, "Wash, and be clean," oh, that is hard—and so it is here because we are proud—that is the hardness of it. It is hard to trust Christ because we are self-righteous, because we need to have a finger in this, ourselves. But, oh, when the Spirit of God cuts us down to the ground, takes away all power, strength, merit, boasts, and glorying, then it seems a blessed thing to

have nothing to do but just to put the bottle in the water, and let the blessed water of life go gurgling into it till it fills up to the brim.

I think I hear another person say, "Well, but surely there is repentance. We must repent if we would be saved." Truly so, but I would put it rather thus—he that is saved always repents—repentance and faith go together; they are born at the same time. They will accompany every Christian as long as he is in this life, but take care that you do not make a mistake about what repentance is. There is a law-work which some believers feel, but that is not repentance. It is quite another thing over and above repentance. There are dark thoughts and horrid forebodings, but those are not repentance. They may or they may not be of advantage to the Christian after he has passed through them, but they are not repentance. Repentance is simply the consciousness of sin, and the loathing of sin. And if you have these—and they are the gift of God, always the gift of God—then do not chastise yourself because you have not all the dark feelings of all the good men that ever lived. Why should you need more midnight? You are dark enough, poor soul, without fretting for more darkness, better far that you pray for more light. You have already, I will take leave to say, the repentance you are sighing after, for I know you hate sin and you do loathe yourself to think you should be a sinner at all, and you would do anything to be rid of sin—to escape from it. Would not you be glad to suffer anything if you could be perfect? I know you would. Well, that is repentance—that is the sign of repentance within your soul.

"Well," says one, "but we must pray, you know." Yes, granted. Every saved soul prays. But look here; do you know what prayer is? Do you think that prayer consists in the attitude of the body, or the ordering of the speech, or the utterance of petitions for a quarter of an hour, as I may have done in the course of the present service? I grieve to say that I may have done all that custom required in that fashion, and not have prayed at all. But it is true prayer if you can only look up to God and sigh, or if your heart does but groan before Him. Do not think that it is necessary to use fine expressions, far from it. "God be merciful to me a sinner," was the prayer that brought justification to the publican—and some of the best prayers that have ever reached God's ears are the shortest prayers that ever escaped man's lips. Do not measure prayers by their length, I beseech you. God will help you to pray. Prayer is His gift. If you cast yourself on Christ, sink or swim, throwing everything away, even your own prayers, and your own repentance—if you come and rest on what Christ is, and what He has done, you cannot perish. Look not within yourself. There is nothing but blackness there. If you look within you, expect to despair. But look yonder to that cross on Calvary. There is life in a look at Him. O, my dear hearers, how I wish we all looked at Him this moment! I have no hope but what I find there in those dear wounds, and in that head bowed down with anguish—

"All my hope in You is stayed,

O Christ of God, made sin for me, my Substitute and ransom!"

And every eye that is now looking to that Christ and every heart that is trusting in that Christ has salvation. There is salvation in none other**.** "There is none other name given under heaven whereby you must be saved." There is life for a look at Him.

God grant you grace to look at Him. "The word is near you," on your lips and in your heart! "If with your heart you believe in the Lord Jesus, and with your mouth you make confession of Him, you shall be saved." Oh, that God would open the eyes of many a Hagar. Let her see that there is the water, that the water is free to her, and that she has but to dip in her bottle, and fill it to the full. I have used an illustration here before, but I cannot think of a better one. At the risk of repetition, I will give it to you again. It just illustrates the case of many persons here present. I heard that a vessel, after having crossed the Atlantic, had arrived in the mouth of the great river Amazon without being aware that it was there. The water was all spent, and they were ready to die of thirst. They sighted another vessel, and ran up the signal. And when the vessel came within hail of them she said, "What do you need?" The answer went back, "Water! We are dying for water." And you may imagine their surprise when there came across the waves this sound—"Dip it up. You are in a fresh-water river." They had nothing to do but to throw the bucket overboard, and get as much as ever they would. So likewise there is many a sinner crying, "What must I do to be saved? Oh, what hard thing shall I bear? What sharp thing shall I feel? What expensive thing shall I give? What tedious work shall I do?" God's answer is, "Throw the bucket of faith overboard, man. It is all round you; it is near you. You are floating on a stream of mercy. You are in a shoreless river of grace. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God. If you trust yourself with Jesus, your sins, which are many, are forgiven you." Go in peace, and God grant you grace to give to Him the glory through all your remaining days.

May God bless these wandering words of mine to the consolation of some of His mourners, and my heart shall give Him praise, and your hearts shall overflow with gratitude! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—GENESIS 21.

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PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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GOD BESEECHING SINNERS BY HIS MINISTERS
NO. 1124

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 27, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God. For He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

MAN became God's enemy wantonly, without the slightest offense given on God's part, but man did not make advances towards reconciliation, or express regret because peace was broken. The first overtures for peace are not made by man, the offender, but by our aggrieved and offended God. Therefore our text begins with the declaration, "All things are of God." Reconciliation of man to his Maker is never achieved by man, but is the work of God from first to last, and to God must be all the glory.

The text enforces this truth by giving us a brief summary. The Lord first finds the messengers of reconciliation by reconciling some men to Himself. He chooses His ministers, having called them into a state of reconciliation. Read the verse—"All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation." The ambassador is sent, not from man to God, but from God to man. Then the matter of the ambassador's message is altogether of God, for it is God who has "reconciled the world unto Himself through Jesus Christ." He gave His Son to be the atoning sacrifice by the ordained method of substitution—thus it is He alone, who has made a way of access between fallen man and Himself. Furthermore, the method by which this atonement is applied to the reconciling of men is also of God. It is not man who beseeches God, but God who beseeches man to be reconciled. It is not man who cries to Christ, but Christ prays man, through His ministers whom He places in His stead, to be reconciled to God. So that from the first thought of reconciliation, right on through the provision of the atonement, to the conclusion of the solemn league and covenant between the heart and God, all things are of God. I am glad to commence my sermon with such a weighty doctrine. I am glad to have such a theme with which to stir the hearts of the reconciled. You owe it all to God, my brethren, therefore render thanks unto the Most High, and

never attribute to your own wills or to any natural goodness in yourselves, your present friendship with the Lord, for all this is of God who has reconciled you unto Himself.

In the process of reconciling the sinner to Himself, the Lord uses means. He might, if He had pleased, have influenced all human hearts by His Spirit, without a pleading ministry selected from among men, but He has not chosen to do so. God exercises His power over the human mind not miraculously, but in conformity with the laws of the mind. The Spirit of God beseeches and prays men to be reconciled. He deals with us not as with marble or wood, carving and shaping us by mere power. Acting upon the mind of man, He does not act according to the laws of matter, but deals with mind after the mode in which minds must be dealt with, and therefore His grace operates upon human wills by persuasion—"As though God did beseech you by us." And by pleading—"We pray you, in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God." But the means used of the Lord are always such as will ensure that all the glory shall be to Him alone—if God beseeches, there can be no honor to man in yielding to the divine persuasion, but great glory is due to Him who in infinite condescension prayed to His own creatures, and stooped from the loftiness of His glory to beseech His own rebellious subjects to have mercy upon themselves.

This morning I shall try to drive at the heart and conscience with all my might, depending upon the Spirit of God to make my appeals effectual. And with that aim, and no other, I shall first of all speak upon *the ambassadors of reconciliation.* Secondly, upon *the matter of their embassy,* the message they have to deliver. And, thirdly, we will speak upon *the manner in which they are to deliver their message.*

I. First, then, dear friends, we will begin with THE AMBASSADORS OF RECONCILIATION.

It appears, from the text that *they were once enemies to God.* "All things are of God, who has reconciled *us* to Himself." Yes, beloved, when we beseech you to be reconciled to God, we give to ourselves no airs as though we were superior to you by nature, or had been superior in our former conduct before conversion. No, rather we are bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. Are you sinful? Such were we. Are you rebellious against God? Such were we. Are your hearts hard? Such were ours. We do not look down upon you from an elevated platform of affected dignity, for we recognize our own nature in yours. Therefore we come to you as to fellow sinners, and albeit it is a sorrowful thing ever to have sinned, we are glad to think that we can speak to you of an evil which has vexed us, the power of which we have painfully felt and penitently mourned, as you must yet do. We hope that our former condition as sinners and unbelievers will make us speak to you more tenderly, and will enable us to reach your hearts the better. God might have sent angels to you, and you would, perhaps, at first have been awed by their glory. But their sermons would have been cold and unsympathetic compared with ours, for they could not know your misery and degradation as we do. They would have felt a horror of you, and would not have cared to come near you. Their

purity would have made them regard you as a healthy man regards a leper. They must have done so, kind as no doubt they would have tried to be. But we have no such feelings. We have a horror of your sin, but not of you. And looking at you as being what we once were, we say to you, brothers and sisters by nature, we trust you will yet become brothers and sisters by grace, and that the blood of Christ, which has made peace between us and God, may also reconcile you to the great Father in heaven.

From the text we gather that though those who are now God's ministers were once His enemies, *they are now reconciled.* They are no strangers to the reconciliation which they have to preach, for they have been reconciled themselves. Yes, we were by divine grace made to feel the evil of sin. We were led to know its bitterness in our inmost souls, and we were led to the cross, and led to look to the Savior nailed there for human sin. Our guilt disappeared, our burden rolled from our shoulders, and we were free. And now we feel no enmity towards God, but, on the contrary, a love to Him which we desire you to feel. We have no quarrel, now, with our Maker. We desire that He should always do what seems good to Him, for we are sure that His will is always kindness, wisdom, and love towards His people. And now as God's friends, we speak to you, and tell you that He is a good Friend, and a kind Father, that He is willing to forgive, and does forgive, most freely, all those who come to Him by Jesus Christ. We have been reconciled, and therefore can speak to you, not theoretically, but experientially. We can tell you what we have tasted and handled of the good Word of God and our hope is that, perhaps, you will be influenced by our testimony as that of men like yourselves who have ourselves been saved.

Moreover, it seems that *the ambassadors of God were reconciled to God by Jesus Christ* in the same way as other sinners. How very different is this confession from the boastings of priests and prelates nowadays. They are not of the same order as the people whom they address, but are reverend, and right reverend, and fathers in God. They speak not as sinners saved, called to be servants to their fellow sinners, but as Brahmins, who by the imposition of episcopal hands, have obtained magical powers wherewith to perform potent ceremonies which shall purify men from their sins. These are not such men as we are, but are very far above us, a superior race of beings—a sacred caste! Do you not observe how they fence off wherever they can one end of the church for themselves? That pen of theirs is holier than the place where the common people sit. Do you not observe how they array themselves in white, blue, and scarlet, and fine linen, because they are the depositories of mysterious powers which reside in none else? It is not that they are any better in character, nor that they have more zeal for the truth as it is in Jesus, nor that even the bishops excel in clearness of doctrine, or courage to defend the truth. Brethren, it is preposterous that these men should claim so much when they have so little to show for it. Here are bishops who can bestow the Holy Spirit, and yet have not the manliness to speak out while the

church is being Romanized, and even the abominable confessional is being set up. I could show tailors and cobblers who are more earnest for the gospel than the occupants of the episcopal bench. We are taught to believe that these wonderful beings, the bishops and priests, are God's clergy or heritage, and all the rest of us are mere stony laypersons who ought to do them reverence. I suppose the day will come when our fellow countrymen will bow their heads in the dust before a priest, and count themselves thrice blessed if they are but spit upon by their reverences. Not thus was it with ministers sent of God in Paul's day. Here is a man who is an apostle and an inspired man, and all he has to say of himself and other ambassadors is this—"All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ." No, dear hearers, we speak to you as brethren in one common fall, hoping that we may also be brethren in the great salvation. If ever I enter heaven I shall owe my cleansing to the blood of the Lamb—not one among you will owe more to the rich, free grace of God than I shall. No, there is not one among you who shall bow in humbler, lower gratitude than I shall before the throne of infinite mercy as he remembers his forgiven sins. Having sinned much, and had much forgiven, we feel we cannot love enough, and cannot too plainly tell the story of our dear Master's grace. And we feel that this is better for you than that we should be something superior to you, for we hope you will be won by a brother's testimony, by the story of one who has received the grace of God just as you must and is cleansed just as you must be.

Again, Paul tells us that the ministers of Christ, having been reconciled to God, have *a message to deliver which has been given to them*—"has given to us the ministry of reconciliation." And he repeats it—"has committed unto us the word of reconciliation." You see, we have nothing to tell you but what God has told us. We have not to stand in our pulpits, and utter original ideas, or to invent a gospel for you. No, we are simply the bearers of a message which God would have us deliver to you, and it is at our peril that we add to it, or take from it. In these days there is a great deal said about "thinkers," and by "thinkers" they mean men who startle their people with a fresh heresy every three months. God save us from such thinkers! I send my servant to the door with a message, and if on the way she, in her wisdom, deliberates and alters my message to suit her own views, I must discharge her, for I need someone who will bear *my* message, and not make one of her own. God would have His ministers be like transparent glass which lets the rays of the sun pass through unchanged, and not like painted windows which color all the rays after their own nature. Through infirmity we all give some amount of coloring to the gospel, but he is the man according to God's order of ministry who longs to let the gospel shine right through him, and does not send upon the people anything of his own except the earnestness which the gospel works in him as it streams through him. As some glass adds heat to light by concentrating the rays, so should the minister add heat to the gospel, but woe unto him if he adds anything beyond! Brethren, we have nothing

to tell you which we have invented—so if you are saved by it, it will not be due to our skill. We have nothing to tell you but what God commits to us, and therefore God will have all the glory if your souls are saved.

Once more, and we add it with all sincerity, when we plead with sinners, our expectation of their being reconciled to God does not lie in our pleading, but in the work of the Holy Spirit. I never expected a sinner to be saved because of anything I said, or the way in which I said it. I have expected God to bless the word, and I have seen it blessed ten thousand times, glory be to His name! But I never reckoned that there was any force in my words, or that there could be any potency in the manner in which I spoke the truth. No, it is God beseeching you by us, who performs the work when He speaks through our lips, makes His own mind to rush like a torrent through our mind, and bears our mind away by its force. When He gives the utterance, and then, by His Spirit, applies it to the conscience and the soul, then are men reconciled to God, but by no other means. Therefore do we feel a trembling when we speak to you lest our Master should leave us to ourselves, and so we should fail to bless you; therefore do we never come to beseech you for God, without first beseeching God for you! We know that you will not be saved except the Spirit of God shall bless the word, therefore do we ask the prayers of our brethren as well as send to heaven our own, that the Lord will be pleased to take of the things of Christ, and by the Holy Spirit apply them to your souls.

So you see, the ambassadors of God are your brethren. Though I might in some respects magnify our office, for it is no small thing to be an ambassador for God, yet after all, we are as nothing in the matter. We cannot stand between you and God to take any share of praise—"We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord." We direct you to the Lord and the Lord alone, for, "All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation."

II. The second point of consideration is THE SUBJECT MATTER OF OUR MESSAGE—and first the faithful minister's message to the sons of men is this, that *reconciliation is only to be obtained towards God on the ground of substitution.* "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." "For He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." You cannot reconcile yourself to God by weeping and lamenting on account of your past sins. There is no efficacy in regret to blot out transgression. You cannot reconcile yourselves to God by any future arduous service. All that you can do is already due to God—you will have done no more than you ought to have done if you should be perfect all the rest of your days. Neither can you be reconciled to God by any ceremony of man's invention, nor even of God's ordaining. He has not made rites and outward forms to be the way of grace, and if you choose them, God will not choose you. There were many in the olden times who went about to establish their own righteousness, and would not submit themselves to the righteous-

ness of Christ, and therefore, they failed of all reconciliation with God. But this is the plan of reconciliation—men were all lost and condemned, for there was no difference between the Jew and the Greek, they all lay under condemnation. Jesus came into the world, the eternal Son of God, and He took upon Himself our manhood in all its feebleness, that He might be our brother. He lived here for 30 years and more in poverty, obscurity, sorrow, and persecution, until at last He died. In His death He bore the whole burden of human sin. God laid upon Him the iniquity of His people, and on the cross Jesus suffered what His people ought to have suffered. What God's justice must have inflicted upon man for sin, He inflicted upon Christ. He laid the whole weight of His wrath upon Jesus. And now, this day, whoever will come to God by the way of the cross may come. Whoever will hide in the wounds of Jesus shall be free from the arrows of vengeance. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." "He that believes in Him is not condemned." "Look unto Me and be you saved, all you ends of the earth," is the voice from the cross of Calvary. And a true voice it is, and whoever heeds it shall find eternal life. Reconciliation by the blood, by the substitutionary sacrifice of the infinite Son of God—this is the message of our ministry. If we do not testify this, it would be better for us that we had never been born. If we do not preach this constantly and incessantly, we have missed our main topic, we have failed in the great commission which our Master sent us to execute. We do declare it this day, in the name of the eternal God—O, sinners, there is forgiveness through the blood of Jesus! There is mercy, grace, pardon, heaven, for as many as believe in Jesus, the great Substitute for sin. But there is no other mode of reconciliation under heaven.

Then we are to tell men that *this reconciliation,* which was made by Christ through His substitution, *was not apart from God,* but that God was in Christ. We often tell you that Jesus Christ's sufferings removed the wrath of God from His people, and that saying is true, though sometimes it is stated in inaccurate language. Yet a great truth is intended by it. But mark this, you must never fall into the idea that God is revengeful and angry, and that the death of Jesus Christ, His Son, was necessary to pacify the Father. Beloved, you know better than this. You know that God was love before Jesus died, always love, always full of grace and truth towards His people. The fact is that the substitution made on Calvary was a substitution provided by God's love, for the Lord Himself, gave His own Son to die as a manifestation of love as well as a vindication of justice. God was in Christ; God came on earth to reconcile men, God made the atonement for us. God was not made to love us by the death of His Son, but because He loved us, and had mercy on us, therefore He gave His Son Jesus that the dishonor done to His law might be wiped out. That the difficulty which stood in the way of His mercy might be removed, that so He might be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. Look at the cross in this light, O sinner, and I trust it may reconcile you to God. It is by that bloody sweat, that crown of thorns, that shame and suffering, it is by those five dear wounds, those extreme agonies, that

God has removed all hindrance to your reconciliation. God Himself has given to you His Son, and He suffered in His Son that you might be reconciled to Him. It is not Jesus, a stranger, who hangs there to gratify the Father's vengeance, God forbid—it is God who, in one of His divine persons, bears the penalty which the inflexible laws of right and justice demanded of sinful men. Oh, that you would come to Him, and be reconciled to Him by the death of His Son.

And now the third announcement of our message is this, that *in consequence of God's having reconciled the world to Himself in Jesus Christ, He is now able to deal with sinners as if they had never sinned,* for that is the long and the short of the expression, "Not imputing their trespasses unto them"? He treats sinners as if their sins were not theirs. They have sinned, and they do sin, but He does not put their sins down to their account. When He looks upon them in His mercy, and they are reconciled to Him, there are the sins, but He lays them upon His Son. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." We are a mass of sin, but He does not account us such, for He has made *Him* to be sin for us, although He personally knew no sin. Substitution is a plan arranged by wisdom for the joint display of justice and mercy, and by its means the Lord comes near to us to commune with us, and gives us countless blessings. Having absolved and pardoned us, He blesses us as if we had never sinned.

Yes, and there is something more wonderful than that. God treats poor sinners who are reconciled to Him as if they were full of good works, for what does the text say? "He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." What a grand expression! He makes us righteous through the righteousness of Jesus. No, not only makes us righteous, but *righteousness.* No, that is not all; He makes us the righteousness *of God.* That is higher than the righteousness of Adam in the garden. It is more divinely perfect than angelic perfection. He makes the guilty sinner, when he believes in Jesus, to be the "righteousness of God in Him." Never did lips have a sweeter message to deliver than mine. And I murmur not if my speech should seem feeble this morning, and if I cannot garnish my message with the flowers of oratory. God forbid I should try to do so! To you who are guilty, there was never a more important message delivered at any time, and having heard it, I charge it on your conscience that you value it and think it over, yes, and accept it. God grant you may.

We are, moreover, bid to tell man that *the atonement of Christ is not confined to the Jew,* that God has not reconciled the Jewish nation to Himself, but the, *"world."* That is to say, Christ has died for all nations, classes, sorts and sizes. The atonement was not made for a class, but for all classes, not for the old exclusively, but for the young too, not for the young only, but for the old as well. This is such an atonement made by Christ upon the cross that it presents a warrant for every sinner born of woman to come to God, and say, "Lord, forgive me, for Christ has died." When we preach the gospel, it is in no stinted terms, looking about, and thinking that perhaps there might be half a dozen in the building to

whom the gospel might honestly be spoken. But looking every man and woman in the face, we preach reconciliation by Jesus Christ to them, and point them to the atoning blood. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." Let no man, woman, or child here say, concerning himself, that there is a difficulty with God which Christ has not removed. The difficulty is in your own soul, and if you are willing to be reconciled, as sure as you live, and as sure as God's Book is true, there is a reconciliation provided for you in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Oh what gladness it is to be allowed to speak thus.

And now we are to tell men that *there is nothing whatever needed in order to their reconciliation and acceptance with God except what Christ has already worked out,* for God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Not reconciling it by some other means, but reconciling it by Christ, doing the work in Christ. You have not to bring Him your good works, or your tears, or your mortifications, or your feelings, or emotions, or anything of the sort. You have only to accept what God has provided. There is the propitiation, and if you say in your heart, "My God, I take it," you are reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Oh, go not abroad to heap together your vanities, for they cannot appease Him. Bring none of your vain oblations to Him. The incense of your self-righteousness will be an abomination to Him. Come as you are, defiled and filthy, polluted and wretched, and put your trust in what He has done in the person of His only-begotten Son, and you are reconciled unto God.

This, then, is the gospel message with which we are sent.

III. And now, thirdly, and very earnestly, I would speak to you a little upon THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS MESSAGE IS TO BE DELIVERED. The text tells us very plainly—

First, it is to be delivered *by beseeching* men, and praying to men. "As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you." Then if I should merely tell you, dear hearers, the gospel, though God might bless it, I have not done all my duty. To inform the intellect is not the minister's sole work. We are to proclaim, but we are to do far more—we are to beseech, and to pray. We are not merely to convince the intellect, but to beseech the heart. Neither are we only to warn and threaten, though that has its place, yet it is not to be our main work, we are to beseech! You know how a beggar bows his knees, and implores you when he is starving, that you will give him bread? With like earnestness we are bound to beseech you to be saved. You know how you will pray a fellow creature to help you when you are in sore distress? In that same way are we to pray you to be reconciled to God. As I ponder this, I feel self-condemned. I have besought you, and I have prayed you sometimes, but not as I ought to have done. Oh, to be taught how to beseech men, how to pray them! God forbid we should fall into the error of those who think beseeching and praying to be unlawful. It is the Christly principle which leads God's minis-

ters so to do. It is the main part of a minister's business, and he who neglects it will have to answer for it before God's great bar.

The text goes on to say that we are to beseech men *as though God did beseech them*. Now how does God beseech them? Read one of the Lord's beseechings in the 1st chapter of Isaiah, how imploring it is! He says, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me." For several verses the Lord expostulates, and then pleads—"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Oh the tenderness of that invitation to reason together! There was first a burst of righteous indignation to arouse the mind, and then came the voice of most tender pity to allure the heart. What matchless pleading! If this is how ministers are to beseech, we have a high standard set before us. We are to plead with men with a boundless freedom of invitation and gentleness of expostulation, so I gather from the 55th of Isaiah, where you have another of God's pleadings—"Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters, and he that has no money; come you, buy, and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Oh, think of God's talking like this to His creatures, and arguing with them—"Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto Me and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Oh what freeness is there, what concern for their welfare, what regret at their mistakes! What gentle upbraiding, as though it were not for His sake but for theirs! "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread?" Why disappoint yourselves, and waste your strength? It is after this fashion that we are to beseech men to be reconciled to God! Then take another instance of matchless pleading. Turn to Ezekiel 33:11—"As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." And then He says to them, "Turn you, turn you from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" He swears first, to show his deep sincerity that He has no joy in a sinner's death, and then turns to entreaty—"Turn you, turn you, why will you die?" There is a passage in Jeremiah 44:4 where the Lord is represented as sending His prophets to say to the people in His name—"Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." There is something so appealing, so pathetic about these words, that I dare not attempt to open them up to you. Their condescension and tenderness are unspeakable.

Perhaps if there is one passage in Scripture in which the entreaties of God are set in a more tender light than in any other, it is to be found in the book of Hosea, 11:8, where the Lord cries, "How shall I give you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, Israel? How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim? My heart is turned within Me, My sympathy is stirred." Oh, how God beseeches men, and He means His ministers to beseech them in the same way, with weeping tenderness,

and melting pathos, if perhaps the stony heart may be softened, and the iron sinew be bowed.

Do I hear some strong doctrine brother say, "I do not like this"? My dear brother, I am not careful to answer you in this matter. If the Lord appoints it, you ought to approve it, and if you do not, you are wrong, and the Scripture is not. If God beseeches, and bids me beseech as He does, I will do it. And though I am counted vile for it by you, then so must it be. Besides, it is no derogation for God to beseech His creatures. You say we make God beg to His creatures. Assuredly that is how the Lord represents Himself—"All day long have I stretched out My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying generation." It is in the Scripture that He represents Himself as crying like a chapman at a fair, "Ho, everyone that thirsts come you to the waters," and bids the passersby to buy His wine and milk. It is wonderful condescension—if He had not so represented it, we dare not have done so. But as He has said it, we do but follow His footsteps, and quote His words. Besides, remember these entreaties of God, in which He stoops to our littleness, even when they do not prevail with man, do mysteriously affect the divine purpose. They are a savor of death unto death wherever they are not a savor of life unto life. But then, blessed be God, in thousands of cases they are the means by which His power works on men's hearts. They do bring men to be reconciled to Him.

But I must pass on. Our text, speaking of the manner of ministers, tells us that we are to *pray souls in Christ's stead.* That is to say, we are to preach as if Christ were preaching. Oh, what a model for the minister! "We pray you *in Christ's stead!"* I am to say to you who are not reconciled to God—"Be reconciled to Him," and I am to say it as if Jesus said it. That would not be in a light or trifling manner. That would not be in a cold official style. That would be with melting eyes and burning heart. How was Jesus Christ accustomed to implore men? Why, sometimes He prayed them by setting before them the evil of their ways. "For which of these works do you stone Me?" He asked. And so I am to inquire, "For which of God's works are you His enemy? Are you His enemy because He keeps you in life, because He has raised you from the bed of sickness? Are you His enemy because He gives you your bread and your water? Are you His enemy because He sends you the gospel? For which of these works do you hate Him?" Oh, wanton malice, to be at enmity with the infinitely good God! Sometimes Christ would plead with men on account of the uselessness of their rebellion. "What king," He asked, "will go to make war with another king without first sitting down to see whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him that comes against him with twenty thousand?" Why will you be God's enemy when you cannot win the battle? The flax may sooner contend with the flame, or the wax with the fire, than you with God. Oh, why, then, are you not reconciled to Him? Sometimes Jesus pleaded with men on account of the result of their sin, as He did when He stood on the brow of the hill, and looked down on Jerusalem, and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets, and

stone them which are sent unto you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Remember that wonderful chapter in Matthew where He speaks of His coming with all the holy angels, and dividing the sheep from the goats? Remember the passages where He treats of the virgins who had no oil in their vessels with their lamps? Whoever puts the doctrine of hell into the background, Jesus never did. It is thought in these days that we had better not say much concerning the terrors of the law, but so thought not the Christ of Galilee. His ministry was full of the honest warning which proves a tender heart. Oh, sinners, you will be lost unless you lay hold on Christ! And to be lost is something unutterably terrible! Oh the wrath to come! The wrath to come! Who among you will endure the devouring fires? Who will dwell in everlasting burning? Thus the Savior invited. Thus He besought men. And so are we to beseech them!

And then you know in what style Jesus pleaded the love of God. I do not say He put it into words that I can quote, but remember the parable of the Prodigal Son—"When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Was not that an eloquent discourse upon the abounding mercy of the great Father in heaven, and did not Jesus then tell how willingly God receives the penitent, and how gladly He puts away every sin? And, oh, how He implored man to be reconciled in such sweet words as these—"Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And what a word was that when He said, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." Never such a pleader as Jesus, His birth among men and dwelling here on earth was a plea. His actions were pleas. His death was the master plea. Each groan seemed to say, "Man, be reconciled to God!" And His last expiring cry of, "It is finished," what was it but saying, "I have put away everything that separates a sinner and his God"? Be reconciled to God was the true meaning of that *consummatum est* with which He closed His agony.

Once more, it is taught us in the text that *the duty of the true minister is to bring this matter home and press it.* We pray you in Christ's stead, *be you reconciled to God.* It comes to this with you, my friend, God says to you this morning, *"Throw down your weapons;* why do you contend with your Maker? What have I done that you should despise Me? Poor creature that I made, what have I done that you should hate Me? I breathed into your nostrils your breath. What have I done that you should spend it in speaking against Me? That throbbing heart of yours, I give it every pulse; what have I done that you should forget Me, that My day should be a weariness, and My worship should be an abhorrence to you? I have raised you from the bed of sickness; I have given you many comforts; I spared your child when she was sick; I have prospered your efforts in business; I have done a thousand things for you—do I deserve to be forgotten? Is it right that your heart should be warm to your wife, and your child, and cold to Me?" My God, my soul is in sympathy with You, that

You should be forgotten of your creatures. There is not one of us that love to be treated unkindly by those to whom we have been kind. Ingratitude is one of the worst of ills. It bites like an adder's fang, and as an unkind child wounds to the quick—and will you be such to your Maker? Will you be such to your Creator?

Come, be quiet for a moment, and let the Lord speak with you, and let your honest conscience answer Him. What has He done that you should be His enemy? What has Christ done—look at His wounds!—that you should not love Him? What has the Holy Spirit done that you should resist Him? What will you gain by it? What will be the benefit in time or in eternity? I have been almost every week to the grave lately with some one or other of my congregation. Soon I may have to be there with you, if I am not carried there myself. Well, and what will be the wisdom, when you are dead, of having lived without God? What will be the profit of having gained the whole world, and having neglected your Maker? "Come, O Man, hear you His words, and be reconciled to Him!"

I said throw down your weapons, but I have, now, another message. *Accept the Lord Jesus.* "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." There is life in a look at the Crucified One. Jesus asks no hard thing of you. God your Father does not ask you to do impossibilities, or to prepare yourself by a long round of performances. His command is most simple and plain. Trust in Jesus, and you shall be saved, and being saved, you shall love your God, and then all war between you and God will be over. God, the Eternal One, will bend from heaven to embrace His once erring child, and you shall feel the kisses of His love, while in your heart there shall be music, dancing, joy, and feasting because you have come back to God. I do not know how to say more, or how to plead more strongly. I would God that He would beseech you, and that Jesus Christ would pray you, and that the Spirit of God would sweetly touch the secret springs of your will, that you might say—

"I yield, by sovereign grace subdued,
Who can resist its charms?
And throw myself, by love pursued,
Into my Savior's arms."

God be thanked for it. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 1.

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THE WORLD ON FIRE
NO. 1125

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 3, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth, also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"
2 Peter 3:10, 11.

MEN have frequently inferred liberty to sin from the apparent absence of God from the world. Because the Lord, in His infinite long-suffering, has allowed transgression to go for a while unpunished, therefore they have wickedly said, "How does God know? The Almighty does not regard us. He will neither interfere to punish men, or to reward them, whether they break or keep His commandments." When for a long time no great changes have occurred in the world, no remarkable judgments, no visitations of famine, pestilence, or war, men are very apt to grow carnally secure, and to take license to sin from the merciful respite which ought to halve led them to gratitude, and through gratitude to obedience. At certain periods it has seemed to the Most High to be imperatively necessary to send great calamities upon mankind lest pride, oppression, and profanity should cause society utterly to rot. The fall of dynasties, the overthrow of empires, devastating wars, and dire famines have been necessities of God's moral government, bits in men's mouths, and bridles for their arrogance, and checks to their licentiousness. The Lord is slow to smite the wicked, for His tender mercy is great, and He delights not in the sufferings of men, and, therefore, He keeps His arrows in His quiver, and hangs up His bow. But, alas, men take advantage of His love to grow grossly sinful, and to blaspheme His name.

Against this spirit the apostle is arguing in this chapter. The profanely secure had said, "Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were. Where then, is the evidence of God's existence? The world goes on like a clock, needing no hand to move its wheels or guide its action. There is no God," they say, "to interfere, and we may live as we like." "No," says the Apostle, "but God has interfered." And though he might have quoted a thousand lesser instances which I have already hinted at, he preferred to forego them for the present, and to put his finger upon the great event of the flood, and say, "Here, at least, God did interfere." He could no longer bear the transgressions of mankind, and, therefore,

He pulled up the sluices of the great deep, and opened the floodgates of heaven. He bade the angry floods leap forth from their lairs, and they swallowed up the earth right speedily. Thus it is plain that all things have not continued in one course, there have been interpositions of divine justice. The apostle then tells the scoffer that there will be another interposition before long. But instead of water, fire shall be the instrument of destruction. God's mill grinds slowly, but it grinds to powder. Justice loiters to commune with mercy, but it speedily makes up for its lingering. Long is the blow withheld, but when it falls, it cuts to the soul. God's wrath is long in kindling, but in the end it shall burn as an oven.

We shall speak this morning upon *the general conflagration* foretold in our text. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Then, secondly, we shall discourse upon *the practical inferences which the Apostle draws from it*—"What manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"

I. Let us turn our thoughts to THE LAST GENERAL CONFLAGRATION. Information as to the future in Scripture is generally very indistinct in arrangement, and though many attempts have been made to form a consistent scheme of prophecy, not one has been even moderately successful. There are, in the Word of God, many clear testimonies as to distinct events in the future, but these cannot easily be arranged in order so as to harmonize with other events. Neither will the most accurate observer, as I believe, ever make a consistent series of them, so as to map them down. They are perfectly consistent and their order is divine, but we shall need the actual fulfillment to make the plan clear. So intricate is the architecture of future history that only the Architect Himself knows where this stone, and that, and the other are ordained to stand. It is not for us to fling any one of the stones away, or censure it as ill-fashioned. We are but children, and our little plans of house-building, like children with their toy bricks, are very simple and elementary, indeed. But God's architecture is of a high class, and we cannot, therefore, conjecture where this event will come in, or where that marvel will find its place. But we may rest quite assured that each one will follow in an orderly manner upon the other, and instead of puzzling our brains over projects of interpretation, we may be quite satisfied to take each of the facts separately as we find them, believingly expect them, and above all, deduce from them their legitimate practical conclusions. The right way of knowing anything is to know how to act in consequence of it. And in spiritual things a man knows nothing until he lives what he knows. If you and I know the truths with regard to the future, each one as we find them in Scripture, and then act according to the inferences fairly to be drawn from them, we shall be wiser men than if we became inventors of elaborate schemes.

In this Epistle of Peter there is one truth very plainly taught, namely, that this present world is to be consumed by fire. We also learn that this

conflagration will take place in connection with the judgment, for, "The heavens and the earth, which now are, are kept in store, unto fire, against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men." The former destruction of the world by water was in consequence of sin, and was a declaration of God's wrath against it. It did not, happen as an accident, or occur without design. Man sinned, was warned, and sinned again, until God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth. The intermixture of the people of God with the world was the crowning offense of all, for, "The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose." Thus were church and state set up, and the church and the world were blended till the Lord's Spirit was grieved, and would no longer strive with man. Floods of sin called for floods of destruction. So will it be with the last fire. It will not happen as an inevitable result of physical causes, but because God intends to purge this material world from all traces of sin. It has been defiled and whenever He makes it into a new heaven and a new earth, He will cleanse it as by fire. Under the Levitical dispensation, the cleansing of vessels which had been defiled was effected by passing them through the fire, as a type of the intense energy needed to remove sin, and the Lord's abhorrence of it. Even thus shall this earth dissolve with fervent heat, and thus the Lord shall proclaim to the whole universe that He hates even the garment spotted by the flesh. When a house was defiled with leprosy, it was destroyed, and so must this earth be, for the plague of sin has polluted it.

We gather, also, from our text that this fire will burn up all the works existing upon the earth—everything which man has constructed shall perish. We have heard architects speak of building for eternity! Aha! Aha! They have built but for an hour, and their noblest fabrics will disappear like children's castles of sand upon the beach. Down will go the vast cathedrals, and the towering palaces in one common crash. Whole cities will flame upon earth's funeral pyre, while forests and melting mountains blend their smoke. The pride of power, the pomp of wealth, the beauty of art, the cunning of skill—all, all, must go. The sea of flame will overwhelm and devour everything without exception. The massive masonry and rock-like foundations of our vast engineering works shall run like wax in the tremendous heat. So fierce will be the flames that everything capable of being burned will be utterly consumed, and the elements, or the solid portions of the earth shall be liquefied by the intense heat—rocks, metals, everything shall dissolve, and the atmosphere, itself, shall burn with fury when its oxygen shall unite with the hydrogen and other gases liberated by the intense heat. Chemists tell us that the great noise which Peter speaks of would certainly accompany such combustion. The whole world shall again become one molten mass again, and this terrestrial firmament shall cease to be. "The heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment." God has impressed nature with His seal today, but He will melt it down, and then, as we

hope, pour out the molten matter, and stamp upon it a yet lovelier image than it has ever borne before.

We may here note that the prophecy that the earth will thus be consumed with fervent heat is readily to be believed, not only because God says it, but because there are evidently the means at hand for the accomplishment of the prophecy. Pliny was known to say that it was a miracle that the world escaped burning for a single day, and I do not wonder at the remark, considering the character of the district in which he spent much of his time. In visiting the country around Naples, the same thought constantly occurred to me. Yonder is Vesuvius ready at any moment to vomit fire, and continually sending up clouds of smoke. Ascend the mountainside, clambering over ashes, and masses of lava, all beneath you is glowing, thrust in your staff, and it is charred. Then go across to the Solfatara on the other side of Naples. Stand at the vent of that ancient volcano, and listen to the terrible rumblings which attend the rush of steam and sulfur. Then stamp your foot or dash a stone upon the ground, and hear how the earth resounds. It is evident that you are standing over a vast cavern. Look around you, and mark how the earth steams with sulfuric exhalations. Observe, also, how the earth in some places has risen and fallen, again and again.

Down there at Puteoli in the Temple of Serapis, there are pillars which have sunk below the tide mark, and then have risen above it several times, as you can see for yourself by the mark of the sea worms. In a single night vast hills have risen in one place like bubbles upon the baker's dough, while in other localities there have been equally sudden subsiding of the surface. Yet this volcanic region around Naples is but one of the many vent holes of the great fires which are in the bowels of the earth—300 or more burning mountains have already vomited flame. According to the belief of many geologists, the whole center of the earth is a mass of molten matter, and we live upon a thin crust which has cooled down, and is probably not so much as one hundred miles thick. When the miner descends no further than 45 feet, he finds that the heat has increased one degree of Fahrenheit, so that it is easy to see how small a distance down the solid shell extends. There is no known rock which would not be entirely liquefied by the heat produced at 60 miles depth. The probabilities are that the whole internal mass is in a liquid, and, perhaps, in a gaseous state. It is well known that the earth is flattened at the poles, just to the amount it would be by rotation on its axis had it been a liquid mass, and therefore there is every probability that it was once liquid, and is cooling down. Everyone who is at all acquainted with the condition of the globe knows that it only needs the Lord's will, and the fiery sea, of which yonder volcanoes are but the safety valves, would burst forth and flood the earth with flame. Or, if God so willed it, the thin crust which divides the ocean of water from the ocean of fire might soon be broken through, and the result would be disruption and destruction.

Astronomers tell us that within the last 200 or 300 years some 13 fixed stars have disappeared, and according to their belief, they have been burned up. They have watched them blaze up in clear flames in quarters of the heavens where no star had ever been seen before, and then they have disappeared forever, being, as it is wisely conjectured, burnt out. If such things happen in other worlds, is there anything improbable in the belief that the same will occur to us? But if there were no internal sea of fire and no instance of other worlds being consumed by fire, who can guess the power which lurks in electricity and other subtle forces? Faraday said that there was enough latent electricity in a single drop of water for an ordinary flash of lightning. What reserves of destructive force there must be in and around the globe! God's dreadful armies lie in ambush everywhere. What if I say God's bodyguard is sleeping in His guard chamber? He has but to speak the word and the servants of His omnipotence will rise, terrible in their destructive power. He spoke to His ancients of the sea, and they marched in gigantic might till they had covered the mountain tops, and laid the race of men dead at their feet. Let Him speak to His ministers of flaming fire, and they will at once subdue the globe by quenchless burnings. Earth is as a pile of wood, and the torch-bearers stand ready to kindle it at any moment. There has always been a cry of fire among men, and the cry grows louder every century, for the burning is near.

But if there were no such arrangements as these, we should still be bound to believe what God has said—and it is His solemn declaration that the day shall come when the Lord Jesus Christ shall appear as a thief in the night, and the heavens, that is the atmosphere, shall pass away with a great noise, while the elements, or rudimentary substances of the globe, shall melt with fervent heat. The earth, also, and the works that are therein, or thereon, shall be burned up.

We gather from our text that this will happen at a time when it will be very little expected. The dread hour will come as a thief in the night. It was not expected in Noah's day that the world would be destroyed. That was not for any lack of warning, but because men could not conceive it possible. They argued against Noah that all things had continued as they were from the days of their first father, Adam, and that so they would be. They thought Noah a fool for going up and down the world proclaiming an absurdity, and frightening people with a bugaboo. Thus speak they now, when God's Word declares that the whole world will be destroyed by fire. They reject the testimony, and continue in sin, in worldliness, and in rebellion against God. And so will they do up to the very moment when the shrill sound of the trumpet shall convince them that the Lord has come, and that the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men has arrived. No preaching will, of itself, avail to make ungodly men expect the coming of Christ, however clear, bold, consistent, and long continued it may be. The world is mad about its idols. Its ears are too dull to hear the truth. Charm we ever so wisely, this adder will never listen to warning.

Men's eyes are blinded, they will not see, and so they hurry on to their doom. And then, "When they shall say, 'Peace and safety,' sudden destruction shall come upon them, as pain upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

It is well for us to remind you again, that the long time which has intervened since Peter foretold the destruction of the world by fire is to be understood in the sense of infinite mercy. We are not to interpret it according to the wicked suggestion of unbelief, for the Lord will surely be revealed in flaming fire. We are to read it with the eyes of faith and gratitude. God waits that men may be saved. He tarries that, in this long time of waiting, hundreds everywhere may believe in Jesus and enter into eternal life. And while we may consistently desire to hasten the coming of the Lord, we may be equally content that mercy's day should be lengthened. While I have prayed, "Come quickly," I have often felt inclined to contradict myself, and cry, "Yet tarry for a while, good Lord! Let mercy's day be lengthened. Let the heathen yet receive the Savior." We may desire the coming of the Lord, but we ought also, to be in sympathy with the tarrying of the Most High, to which His loving heart inclines Him.

Although we read of the world being burned with fire, we are not told that it will be annihilated. We know that nothing has been annihilated yet. No fire has yet been able to destroy a single atom of matter. There is upon the face of the earth, at this moment, just as much matter as when God created it. Fire changes form, but does not obliterate substance. This world, so far as we know, will not cease to be. It will pass through the purifying flame, and then it may be the soft and gentle breath of Almighty love will blow upon it, and cool it rapidly—and the divine hand will shape it as it cools into a paradise more fair than that which bloomed upon the banks of Hiddekel. We believe from various things which are hinted at in Scripture, though we would not dogmatize, that this world will be refitted and renovated. And in that sense we expect new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. Luther used to say that the world is now in its working clothes, and that by-and-by, it will be arrayed in its Easter garments of joy. One likes to think that the trail of the old serpent will not always remain upon the globe, and it is a cheering thought that where sin has abounded, God's glory should yet more abound. I cannot believe in that world being annihilated upon which Jesus was born, and lived, and died. Surely an earth with a Calvary upon it must last on. Will not the blood of Jesus immortalize it? It has groaned and travailed with mankind, being made subject to vanity for our sake. Surely it is to have its joyful redemption, and keep its Sabbaths after the fire has burned out every trace of sin and sorrow. Whether or not it shall be so matters little to the saints, for we shall be with Christ where He is, and behold His glory. And, as to the future, "Forever with the Lord" may well satisfy us.

II. The apostle has drawn PRACTICAL INFERENCES. "Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought

you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" What does he mean by this? What connection can there be between the burning of the globe, and holy conversation, and godliness? The first connection is this. Our position as Christians is, at this moment, like that of Noah before the destruction of the world by water. What manner of person ought Noah to have been? He said to himself, "This fair and beautiful world in which I dwell will soon be covered with the ooze and slime of a tremendous deluge." He looked upon his fellow men, and he thought and said of them, "Except these men fly to the ark, and are sheltered with me, they will, every one of them, be drowned." He saw them marrying and given in marriage, feasting and trifling at the very hour when the flood came, and he felt that if they would believe as he did, they would find something other to do than to be engrossed in carnal pleasures. When he saw them heaping up money, he would almost laugh yet weep to think that they should hoard up gold to be submerged with themselves in the general flood. When men added to their estates acre after acre, I have no doubt the patriarch said to himself, "The flood will sweep away all these landmarks, and as it carries away the owner, so will it destroy all vestige of his barn, and his farm, and his fields."

I should suppose such a man, daily expecting the rain to descend, and the flood to burst up from beneath, would lead a life very free from worldliness, a life the very reverse of the rest of his fellow men. They would reckon him to be very eccentric. They would be unable to understand him, and, indeed, his conduct would be such that no one could understand it except upon the theory that he believed in the destruction of all around him. Now our life ought to be like that of Noah. Look around on the beauties of nature, and when you enjoy them, say to yourself, "All these are to be dissolved, and to melt with fervent heat." Look up into the clear blue, and think that yonder sky, itself, shall shrivel like a scroll, and be rolled up like a garment that has seen its better days, and must be put aside. Look on your fellow men, your own children, and your household, and those you pass in the street or meet with in transacting business, and say, "Alas, alas, unless these men, women, and children fly to Jesus, and are saved in Him, they will be destroyed with the earth on which they dwell, for the day of the Lord is surely coming, and His judgment awaits the ungodly." This should make us act in a spirit the opposite of those who now say, "Go, let us buy, and sell, and get gain. Let us heap together treasure. Let us live for this world. Let us eat and drink, and be merry." They are of the earth, therefore is their conduct and conversation earthy. They build here, on this quicksand, and after their own sort they find a pleasure therein, but you whose eyes have been opened know better—and you, therefore build upon a rock. You understand that the things which are seen are but a dream, that the things unseen are alone substantial. Therefore let loose of all things below the moon, and clutch as with the grasp of a dying man the things immortal and eternal which your God has revealed to you. Such conduct

will separate you from your fellow men. As there is down deep in your heart an objective different from theirs. And as you set a different estimate on all things, your conduct will be wide apart from theirs. Being swayed by different motives, your life will diverge from theirs, and they will misunderstand you. And while trying to find motives for you, as they do not know the true motive, they will ascribe evil motives to you. But so it must be. You must come out from among them, be separate, and touch not the unclean thing. And the fact that all these things are to be dissolved should make it easy for you to do so, no, natural for you to do so, as it must have made it both easy and natural to the patriarch Noah.

I will, however, not dwell longer upon that thought, but remark further that the nearness of the Lord as suggested by the fact that the world is to be destroyed, according to His Word, suggests holiness. The sinner finds a reason for sin when he says, "God is not here; everything goes on in the ordinary way. God does not care what men do." "No," says the apostle, "He is not away, He is here, holding back the fire. He is reserving this world a little while, but by-and-by He will let the fires loose, and the world will be destroyed. He is not far off. He is even at the door." If I give the Greek rendering, it should be, "All these things are dissolving." They are even giving to dissolve. They are in the process of dissolution. God is close upon us; can you not hear His footsteps? Christ is returning. He is on His journey now. Faith hears the tramp of His steeds as they hurry on the chariot of His vengeance. "Behold, I come quickly," is the word which rings over the mountains of division. The King is coming. He is coming to His throne, and to His judgment. Now a man does not go up to a king's door and there talk treason. And men do not sit in a king's audience chamber, when they expect Him to enter any moment, and there speak ill of him. The King is on His way, and almost here. You are at His door; He is at yours. What manner of people ought you to be? How can you sin against One who is so close at hand? How can you rebel against One whose eyes of fire behold, and whose hand of vengeance is uplifted to smite the sinner? The words of the text are very forcible. The apostle says, "What manner of persons ought you to be?" Remember he was talking to saints, and he teaches us that even saints ought to be more saintly than they are. He is not saying to the ungodly, "What manner of persons ought you to be?" He might have so spoken, but with how much greater force does he address those who profess to be loved with the everlasting love of God, to have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus, to be affianced unto Christ in eternal wedlock, to be members of His body, parts of Himself? "What manner of persons ought you to be?" He implies that they are not what they should be, and I am afraid there is no man of God but what will grant the truth of the implication in his own case. We have not attained to what we ought to be, and I may say to the best child of God here this morning, "Dear brother and sister, there is a beyond." Yes, brethren, and the text is so broad in its expression, that it plainly teaches the limitless nature of Christian Holiness. "What manner of per-

sons ought you to be?" As if he could not tell what sort of persons they ought to be, as if holiness had in it no *Ultima Thule,* no Pillars of Hercules beyond which the adventurous mariner might not go. There is a beyond for us all. If we are to be holy as God is, His is infinite holiness, and where can a limit be imagined? He does not say, "You ought to be kind, just, loving, prayerful, truthful," and the like, but as if he held up his hands in wonder, and could not express the obligations of the Christian, he cries, "Because these things are all passing away, what manner of persons ought you to be?"

And then he goes on to specify two branches of holy life. "In all holy conversation," that is to say, all holy behavior towards men; "And godliness," that is, all pious dealing towards God. True religion, by no means, depreciates the duties of the second table of the law. Some professors think very little of the common virtues of daily life, but they err greatly, and will find themselves in an evil plight at last. My brothers, if the grace you possess does not make you honest, God have mercy on you, and take such grace away from you. If you have a kind of grace which does not keep you chaste, and make your behavior decent, if you have a sort of grace which lets you cheat and lie; which allows you to take undue advantage in trade, away with such grace. It is the grace of the devil, and not the grace of God, and may you be saved from it. If our religion does not make us moral, it is a millstone about our necks to destroy us. If you have not reached morality, how can you dare to talk about holiness, which is a far higher and loftier thing? The best morality in the world will not prove a man to be a Christian. But if a man has not morality, it proves that he is not a child of God.

And then as to God—the duties of the first table are not to be neglected. We are to fulfill all manner of godliness. God is to be worshipped by us devoutly, and we are to take pains to worship Him in His own way. How many people have a kind of—what shall I call it?—a happy-go-lucky religion? Whatever their mother or their father was, that are they. A great many of you go to certain places of worship, not because you have ever inquired whether the denomination you belong to is right or not, but because you have drifted that way, and there you stick. How few take the Bible, and search for themselves. Yet no man has obeyed God aright who has not done so. If I could not honestly say, "I am a member of this denomination because I have weighed the truths which are held by my brethren, and I believe them to be according to God's book," I could not feel that I had done right towards the Most High. The idea that there are good people in all denominations is well enough, but a great many have perverted it into an excuse for never caring what God's truths or ordinances are. Rest assured that he who neglects one of the least of Christ's ordinances, and teaches men so, the same shall be least in the kingdom of heaven. Every truth is important. Trifling with conscience is the sin of the present age. Men have even come to occupy pulpits in churches when they do not believe the fundamental doctrines of the church. We

have heard them even claim a right to retain their pulpits after they have denied the doctrines of the denomination to which they belong. From any power to believe in such a conscience, may God deliver every one of us, be right even in little things. Be precise—you serve a precise God. Charity towards others is one thing; laxity for yourselves is quite another thing. Believe that your brother is conscientious though he may be in error, but as for yourself, use your conscience, and practice your judgment in the careful study of the truth, and then whatever your conclusions, carry them out at all hazards. Though you should lose everything thereby, you will lose nothing in the long run. If you count the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, you have made a wise choice, and will rejoice in having made it. Oh, when I think that all I see about me is to be consumed, there remains nothing worth living for but to glorify God. If we were to live here forever, and this world were all, we might perhaps think it some gain to sin. But if we are soon to pass away, and all around us is to dissolve in smoke, there is nothing to do, if we are wise, but to do our duty in the station in which God has placed us, both towards God and man, resting in the precious blood of Christ for our pardon, and in His righteousness for our acceptance. For these things will endure when we are dead, according as it is written, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, yes, thus says the Spirit, for they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

The vaporizing of all things around us suggests our looking away to eternal things. I saw yesterday with much solemnity of mind the spot where the Bishop of Winchester met with sudden death. A cross is cut in the turf to mark the place. The spot is in the midst of the loveliest scenery conceivable. I have often walked hard by, full of delight at the fair prospect. It is a spot too fair to be darkened by so dark a cloud. Death seems hardly congruous with the beauty which everywhere charms the eye. I could only imagine if anyone knew that he should die just at that moment, what would be his conversation? Riding over the downs, what would be the conversation of a man of God who expected to die in the valley below? Such ought to be our constant conversation. We should live always as if we might die in a moment. Mr. Wesley once said, "Now, if I knew I should die tomorrow morning, I would do exactly what I have planned to do. I would take the class meeting at such an hour, preach at such an hour, and be up at such a time in the morning to pray." That good man's life was spent in prospect of sudden departure, and it was therefore active and holy. Is ours the same?

The motive for holiness becomes stronger, still, if the thought is not merely that I shall die, but that all these things around me shall be dissolved. That breezy down, that towering hill, yonder lofty trees, and this overhanging cliff, these rich meadows, the ripening harvest, all, all will, in a moment, be on a blaze. Am I ready to be caught away to be with my Lord in the air? Or shall I be left to perish amidst the conflagration? How ought I to live! How ought I to stand, as it were on tiptoe, ready when He

shall call me, to be away up into the glory, far off from this perishing world! It makes us look upon all these things in a different light, and upon eternal things with a more fixed eye, and a more stern resolve to live unto God. Observe, if sin even on the inanimate world, needs such a purging by fire as this, if the fact that sin committed here makes it necessary that God should burn it all up, what a horrid thing sin must be! O to be purged from it! Refining fire, go through my heart! Spirit of the living God, sweep with all Your mighty burnings through and through my body, soul, and spirit till You have purged me of every tendency to sin. This ought to be the prayer of the Christian. If all these things will have to be purged, what manner of persons ought we to be in daily purging ourselves by a holy jealousy and a sacred revenge from every unclean wish, every false word, and everything that would be inconsistent with that life of God which is in our nature?

And if, again, God is so angry with sin, that when He comes to judge it, He will come with flaming fire, and if the terrors of God against the wicked will be utterly overwhelming, what gratitude ought you and I feel for pardoned sin? What joy for safety in the Lord Jesus Christ? And then, again, as the result of that, what a detestation of the sin which made it necessary that Christ should die to save us from the wrath to come! Oh, believer, you will never have to say—

"Rocks hide me, mountains fall on me!"

Believer in Jesus, you will never have to escape from those tongues of flame which will lick up the sea. You will not be alarmed at the melting mountains—you will be safe—not a hair of your head shall be singed. Oh, what do you owe to sovereign grace for such an escape as this? Bless the Lord Jesus. Fall down at His dear feet, and adore Him. And then, rising up, say, "What can I do to glorify You? O Lord, keep me clear of the sin which would have destroyed me, and help me to live such a life as becomes one who has been saved from the wrath to come." Is there not much force in the apostle's inference? I only trust we may all feel it.

Once more, he meant us to feel that the suddenness of all this ought to keep us on our watchtower. This conflagration will come with no signs to herald it which the ungodly will observe. You who are on the watch will observe them. You will see the tokens of His coming. You will rejoice to go forth to meet Him. But to the ungodly His coming will be as much unawares as was His first advent which happened in the night, when the entire world was wrapped in sleep. Men will still be buying and selling, and getting gain, and thinking of nothing so little as of the last advent. And then the Lord will appear. Christian, let not that day come upon you as a thief. Stand ever watching. Live as if you said to yourself, "Today everything I have may be burned up; today all my lands may run like lava; all my gold may melt like molten lead. Today I may have done with this world, and the world may be consumed." Live such a life as that. "Why," says one, "then we should be pilgrims and strangers." That is just how you should be. "Then," says another, "we should not be minding

much about the stock in the bank, and laying in for the future." Just so! That is how the Master would have you live—He would have you duly prudent and provident, but not covetous or anxious. If you feel that all these things are to be dissolved, you will then do all things as in the presence of God. You will wish to use everything you have as not abusing it, and as reckoning that it will perish in the using. God grant you, brothers and sisters, so to live.

I would to God that all here present were prepared for the future. You remember John Bunyan makes Christian sit in the City of Destruction at ease until he hears from one called Evangelist, that the city was to be burned up. And then he cries, "Alas, alas, woe is me, and I shall be destroyed in it." That thought set him running, and nothing could stop him. His wife bade him come back, but he said, "The city is to be destroyed, and I must be away." His children clung about his garments to hold him, but he said, "No, I must run to the City of Safety, for this city is to be burned up." Man, it will all go! If all you love is here below, it will all go! Your gold and silver will all go! Will you not have Christ? Will you not have a Savior? For if you will not, there remains for you only a fearful looking for judgment, and of fiery indignation. Tempt not the anger of God. Yield to His mercy now. Believe in His dear Son. I pray that you may this day be saved, and God be glorified in your salvation. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 PETER 3.

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A SONG CONCERNING LOVING-KINDNESSES
NO. 1126

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 10, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving-kindnesses."
Isaiah 63:7.

THE chapter opens with a declaration of our glorious Lord, as to His ultimate overthrow of His foes. He declares that He will tread down all the enemies of His people, as grapes are trod in the winepress. The chapter, as you know, begins with that remarkable exclamation, "Who is this that comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" The prophet, having beheld the glorious vision, and heard the proclamation of the victorious hero, felt his soul stirred within him. It is usual for saints' hearts to burn within them when Christ is near. The glowing flames of Isaiah's heart unloosed the bonds of his tongue—he could not but speak, and the theme which suggested itself to him was the loving-kindness of the Lord. He was ravished with what he saw coming in the future, with the future triumphs of Emmanuel, and the overthrow of Israel's foes. But he felt that he must not forget the glorious victories of the bygone ages, and the triumphs of the days that were. And so with determination he declares, "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord." There were some in the prophets' days whose business it was to make mention of the Lord. Do you not remember how He says, "You that make mention of the Lord keep not silence"? Those were persons who publicly spoke *of* Him—"They that feared the Lord spoke often one to another." They were also persons who spoke *to* Him, who kept the Lord in remembrance, and made mention of His mercies to them, as it is written—"You that make mention of the Lord keep not silence, and give Him no rest till He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth." It was in both senses that Isaiah resolved to mention the loving-kindnesses of Jehovah—to the people that they might love God, and to God that He might not forget His people, but might continue to smile upon them in the days to come, as He had done in days of yore.

This morning we have the same task as that which was set before the prophet; may the same Spirit rest upon us as rested upon him.

And, first, we shall have to give you a delightful catalog of the *mercies to be mentioned.* Then, as time serves us, we shall call your attention to *the special points in these mercies which are to be mentioned,* and we will close by noticing *the practical good results of mentioning the loving-kindnesses of Jehovah.*

I. First, then, we have to give you a list of THE MERCIES TO BE MENTIONED. A complete summary we cannot give, for who can count the sands of the sea, or the stars of the sky? Let him, when he has accomplished that task, attempt to count the mercies of the Lord. I have no need, my brethren, to make a catalog of my own, for I have one before me made to hand, and written by an inspired pen in the verses which follow the text.

The list commences with *special electing love.* In the Hebrew the 8th verse runs thus, "For He said, they only are My people." He had chosen them, alone, of all the nations of the earth to be His portion, and the lot of His inheritance. As He said in another place, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." He had chosen Israel to be a people near unto Him. Though they were a small nation, and insignificant among the kingdoms, yet He set them apart for Himself. He chose their father, Abraham, and called him from an idolatrous family, even from Ur of the Chaldees, that he might dwell alone in the land of promise. Having chosen the patriarch, He bound Himself by covenant to favor his seed after him, not because of any goodness in them, but of His own sovereign will and good pleasure. This, therefore, the Jewish prophet dwells upon as a first instance of love. And when we are mentioning the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, it is well to begin at the beginning, or rather to magnify that favor which had no beginning. Praise the stream, but forget not the well-head. He loved His people from everlasting—

"Long before the sun's refulgent rays
Primeval shades of darkness drove,
They on His sacred bosom lay
Loved with an everlasting love."

How ravishing is the thought of eternal love! Try to drink it in—if you are a believer in Christ, you were loved before time began its cycles. In that old eternity, before the earth was born, you were beloved of the Lord. You were dear to Jehovah's heart when this great world, the sun, the moon, and the stars slept in the mind of God like unborn forests in an acorn cup. He loved you with an everlasting and infinite love. Rejoice in this, and let your souls be glad. Never forget that election is the source of every favor, for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.

Pass on to the next sweet token of divine loving-kindness which is found in the *fatherly confidence* which the Lord has manifested towards His people. Read the verse again. "He said, surely they are My people, children that will not lie: so He was their Savior." This has sometimes

been thought to represent, after the manner of men, a mistaken confidence which God placed in His people, but I think it is not so. It is not intended to set forth what the Lord secretly thought and knew concerning us, but it is the apparent language of His dealings towards them. It represents the trustful manner in which the Lord actually treats His people. There can hardly be much love where there is no confidence, and confidence is often a great token of affection. When, for instance, the wife reposes her entire reliance upon her husband, it is because she loves him with all her heart. She proves her love by her restfulness in him. When a father loves his child, he may see many imperfections and much of fickleness, but he does not look on his child with suspicion and mistrust, but in many ways treats him with confidence. Now the Lord trusted His ancient people Israel. Did He not commit to them the law and the revelation of His will? Whose were the Oracles? To no other nation did He give the truth concerning Himself to lay up as a precious deposit. All the prophecies concerning Christ, and the types which spoke of Him, were placed in their custody, and He said, "They are children that will not lie." Yes and how sweetly God has trusted us, also, for He has put us in trust with the gospel. He has trusted us with influence over other men's souls. He has trusted some of us with little ones whose immortality will feel our influence. He has trusted us with His name and honor, for according as we live in holiness, will He be honored among the sons of men.

He has placed wondrous confidence in us. Often does it humble me in the dust, when I think that "unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." It is a wonderful instance of affection that God should pitch upon a poor fallible being, and say to him, "I have made you a chosen vessel to bear My name unto the Gentiles." All believers are, in their measure, trusted in this way; such honors have all the saints. You have all some charge to keep, some talent is entrusted to your stewardship, some jewel is placed in your custody, and the Lord says of you in loving trustfulness, "Surely they will not lie." Alas, how unworthy have we been of the trust reposed in us! He knew what we should be, yet He has acted towards us as trustfully as if we had been truth itself. Some of us feel the tears in our eyes as we remember how the Lord has honored us with great responsibilities, and how far we have fallen short! The Holy Spirit has put us into positions which, in our youth, we could not have dreamed of occupying, and He has said to us, "Be My servant, and be faithful," and so has given us a sweet proof of His loving-kindness and tender mercies. Think that over, beloved. I know that there are here present many Christians who are trusted with the teaching and training of young minds. Look upon it as a special favor that you are used of the Lord to shape the immortality of precious souls. If you are, indeed, His people, you will see much of His love in this, and this will make you the more anxious to be found faithful.

But the prophet goes on to notice another sweet instance of divine love, namely, *His great sympathy with us.* There has been much dispute about the interpretation of the first clause of the 9th verse, but I hope our authorized version is the right one, and I feel sure it must be. It is such a divine sentence, it must be inspired. "In all their affliction He was afflicted." Was there ever anything more worthy of being mentioned as a part of the loving-kindness of Jehovah than this, that He deeply sympathizes with all His tried and afflicted people? He does not merely sympathize as one man with another, but as if His people were one with Him, as indeed is the case, so that He suffers when they suffer. In *"all* their affliction," not in some of their trials, but in all they have to bear, whether little or great, "He was afflicted." There is never a cross upon a believing shoulder, but what the Lord Jesus carries one end of it. There is never a cup put upon a saint's table, but what the Lord Jesus sips at it, and sweetens it by His divine fellowship. "I am with you, Israel, passing through the fire; if nowhere else, I am with you. I will be with you in the furnace, and when the coals glow seven times hotter, there will I, the Son of God, tread the coals with you, and give you strength through My presence." Was ever love like this! Beloved, you are poor worms of the dust, and you never could have dreamed of having fellowship with God, and yet He deigns to be afflicted in your affliction. Are you not glad? Will you not bless His name? Or are your hearts turned to stone? No, we will make mention of the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord because He knows our sorrows, and pities us in our griefs.

The next mercy mentioned is His intimate union with us, for the text adds, "The angel of His presence saved them." The children of Israel in the wilderness were led and guided by the Messiah Himself. Invisible to them, He was none the less present. The Shekinah which blazed between the cherubim was the type of the presence of redeeming love in the midst of the people. The messenger of God's presence saved them—who could that have been, but He of whom it is written, He "is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"? Who but He is the "messenger of the covenant whom we delight in," anointed of the Lord to come forth as the Savior of men? Now, beloved, think of this; that Jesus the Son of God, abides with us spiritually even unto this day. He has been here in body—"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the Glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father." He is here in spirit, still. Yes, we are in Him, for we are "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." Our fellowship with this "angel of His presence" is very near, and very dear. He does not make Himself strange unto His own flesh—He manifests Himself to us as He does not unto the world. Have you ever seen Him? Have you ever felt His shadow falling upon you when alone? Did you ever look up into His face, and see Him regarding you with deepest tenderness? Have you ever walked with Him in the cool of the day? Have you ever taken His arm in the rough places of your pil-

grimage that you might come up from the wilderness leaning upon your beloved? Oh, I know you have, and of all the delightful tokens of His love which you have received, the presence of the covenant angel of God has been the most consoling.

But we can only say a little upon each, we cannot dwell long upon any one. Next, the prophet records the *gracious interpositions of God on the behalf of His people*—"In His love and in His pity He redeemed them." Brethren, we have been saved. Those of us who believe in Jesus do not only expect to be saved at the last, but we rejoice that we are saved already. Already we have come up out of Egypt, and our sins are drowned in the Red Sea—we shall see them no more, forever. Christ has forever put away our sins, so that if they are sought, they shall not be found, no, they shall not be, says the Lord. What a wonderful deliverance ours has been! Forget not, beloved, the destroying angel, and how he passed us by! Forget not the paschal lamb and the sprinkling of the precious blood! Forget not the deep sea through which you passed when you were baptized unto the Lord in the blood of His great atoning sacrifice—yourself saved while all your sins were drowned, like Pharaoh, in the flood. Forget not all these wonders, I pray you. And you have experienced other deliverances since then! Which of us could not tell of choice and crowning mercies? Some of us have newly come up from the sick bed, where we thought we should see men no more in the land of the living, and yet we are still living to praise God. Perhaps you have come up from the deeps of poverty where you thought surely you should famish, but you have known no lack. The Lord has set your feet in a large room, and given you bread enough and to spare. Or, it may be you have come up from soul conflict, wherein you were thrown down by the enemy, so that he put his foot upon you, but you had grace to say, "Rejoice not over me, O my adversary; though I fall, yet shall I rise again," and you have risen again, and this morning you are remembering the loving-kindnesses of the Lord. Sing you, then, of the hill Mizar, and the Hermons. Anoint anew those ancient Ebenezers, when you said, "Up to now has the Lord helped me"—I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord. Have you not many to mention? Cannot you, also—

"Arise and tell
The wonders of Immanuel!
He plucked your feet from the miry clay,
And set you upon the King's highway."

I know you can thus speak. Take care that you do, and mention often the great goodness of the Lord to His people.

This is not all, however. Let us go back to our catalog. The prophet tells you God provided for, led, protected, and upheld His people by a wondrous *special providence* while they were in the wilderness. "He bore them and carried them all the days of old." Like a nurse who carries her little child—it cannot walk, it can only take a few tottering footsteps—she carries it. Or like an eagle, which is said to take its young upon its back

and fly aloft, bearing the eaglets towards the sun—even so did God carry His people in the wilderness, and in like fashion He has carried us. Unto this day what have you lacked, O believers? You fretful people of God, what cause have you had for murmuring? Has He not given His angels charge concerning you, to bear you up in their hands lest you dash your foot against a stone? Has he not been your refuge up to now? Has He not covered you with His feathers, and made His wings to be your shelter? Have you not received daily bread and water? Has not your raiment been given you? Have you not been housed? To this hour where has the Lord failed you? Has He been a wilderness unto you? Has He broken one of His promises? I challenge you to prove a single instance in which He has been untrue. My own witness is that, "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." This is the verdict of all the saints. They can tell of the great goodness of the Lord, and record His loving-kindnesses. Let us join with them. If these blessings were to cease for a moment, where would we be? What if the Lord were no longer to be the God of providence? What if He would no longer hold us up? What if He shuts up the granaries of His grace? What if His tender mercies should be removed and the heart of His compassion should be changed into wrath—where would we be? But as it is not so, and never shall be so, let us make mention of the loving-kindnesses and the praises of the Lord.

Nor is this all; the prophet goes on further to mention the Lord's *chastening,* for I do verily believe he puts it down as a thing for which to bless him. It is to be sorrowed over, that we need chastening, but God is to be praised that He does not withhold it from us. "But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them." Yes, but He loved them, even then, blessed be His name. The mother gives her child a pat, but she still loves it. It often grieves her more that her child should be chastened, than it can ever grieve the child, and this is one way in which, in all our afflictions, the Lord is afflicted, because He "does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." He does not take delight in the sorrows of His people, but His heart relents towards them when He sees their tears and hears their cries. I bless God this day with all my heart that I have not been left unchastened—and every child of God, in looking back upon his life will say the same. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Your Word." O, my brethren, how much we owe to the hammer and the anvil, and the file and the fire. Thanks be to God for the little crosses of every day, yes, and for the heavy crosses which He sends us at certain seasons. He does not gather the twigs of His rod on the mountains of wrath, but He plucks them in the garden of love. And though He sometimes makes blue marks upon us as He smites us heavily, yet—

"His strokes are fewer than our crimes
And lighter than our guilt!"

Love bathes all the wounds which it makes, and kisses away the smart. Blessed be a chastening God! Set down your chastening among your choicest mercies, and mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord.

Notice that the next thing the prophet sings about is *God's faithfulness,* for though He did smite His people, yet in a very short time we find that, "He remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying: "Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock? Where is He that put His Holy Spirit within them? Who led them by the right hand of Moses with His glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make Himself an everlasting name? Who led them through the deep as a horse in the wilderness that they should not stumble?" He remembered what He had done, and He resolved to do the same again. He was smiting them, but it came to His thoughts, "I have loved them of old, I have aforetime blessed them, I have kept them, I have delivered them for My name's sake, and therefore will I do it again." If God reasons thus with Himself, well may we say—

"And can He have taught me
To trust in His name,
And thus far have brought me
To put me to shame?"

If He had meant to destroy me, would He have done so much for me?

"His love in times past
Forbids me to think,
He'll leave me at last
In trouble to sink:
Each sweet Ebenezer
I have in review,
Confirms His good pleasure
To help me quite through."

We will close this catalog with one more choice mercy, for the prophet tells of God's *giving His people rest,* after all. He describes Him first as leading them through the deeps like a horse in the wilderness, where the horse would not stumble. A horse on our stony streets or on rugged roads may stumble, but a horse out on the smooth expanse of desert sand is quite another creature, and he flies like the wind in ecstasy of freedom, fearing no fall. Thus the Lord has made His people to enjoy liberty, and standing safe in an even place. The prophet next uses another figure. He says, "As a beast goes down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest." This is an exceedingly delightful metaphor. As the cattle descend into the valleys to feed under the shade trees by the flowing brooks, so God makes His people to rest. Have you ever seen the cattle and horses make their way to the stream in the heat of the day, and stand there knee deep in the water? They merrily swing their tails to chase away the flies, looking as they lick their foals or calves or drink long draughts of the pure liquid, so perfectly content with all around them, that we may well conclude that they there find all the heaven which cattle can desire. Even so, we who have believed, when we trust

our God, when we rest in Jesus, leave the sun's heat, and find the cool brooks of the Spirit's gracious influences where we bathe ourselves, and rest in sweet content, for we who have believed do enter into rest. Jesus is our peace, and He has given to us the peace of God which passes all understanding, which does keep our heart and mind through Jesus Christ.

What a catalog have I laid before you! If you begin to sing according to this musical score, when will you get to the end of it? Oh, prepare your voices, get your harps. Let every string be well tuned. Here is noble music for you—music which will last you till you get to heaven, and then I think you may go over it again, for what sweeter, nobler work shall you require than to make mention of the loving-kindnesses of the Lord.

II. But now we must turn to the second head. Isaiah calls our particular attention to CERTAIN POINTS WORTHY OF SPECIAL MENTION.

And, first, in the text he directs our thoughts to the fact that whatever has been bestowed upon us by God reveals His *loving-kindness,* His goodness, His mercy, His compassion. In fact, all that we have received has come to us by the way of free grace. Do we need to be told this? I fear we do, but if our sense of our own unworthiness is clear, if we know what worse than nothings we are, what a mass of sin and corruption we are by nature, we shall never think that we receive anything from God by the way of merit. Still, our proud hearts need to be told over and over again that all the blessings we enjoy come to us by the free and sovereign grace of God. Therefore the prophet heaps up words. Notice them: "The loving-kindnesses of the Lord," "The great goodness of the Lord," the "mercies" of the Lord. O believer, nothing of all this goodness is deserved by you. The bread on your table is flavored with grace. Your meat has mercy for its sauce. Every drop of water which cools your tongue tastes of mercy. Charity clothes you. Infinite love feeds you, and as for your spiritual blessings, where are your streams found, from where do they gush but from the inexhaustible fountain of eternal love? Let others boast, if they dare, of what they have done for themselves. Let others talk of the dignity of human nature. Let them glory in the worthiness of their own actions. God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the love which shone from that cross to such poor, unworthy ones as we are. Those are charming bells, indeed, free grace and dying love. Through the ivory gate of grace, all mercies come to sinners. Through this window of agate, this gate of carbuncle, every good gift is handed out to men. That is the first noticeable thing.

The next is the consequent *praise which is due to God* on account of this. Does Isaiah not say, "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord and the *praises* of the Lord"? O praise the Lord, praise Him for every mercy you possess. We ought to keep count of God's goodness. Keep account, I say, by rendering new notes of praise for each new favor. If we did this, we should never leave off singing. We would never have time for complaining if we gave to God due praise for every mercy received. Oh for

a praising heart, for a praising heart is a happy heart. The occupation of heaven should be the occupation of heavenly men, even while they are here. God help us to keep to this!—

"I will praise You every day
Now Your anger's turned away.
I will magnify Your name
As long as I live,
For as long as I live
Your mercies magnify me."

The third thing to be noticed is *the uniform nature of all God's dealings with us.* Observe, "According to *all* that the Lord has bestowed on us." We are to praise God in all and for all. "In everything give thanks" is a Christian precept. I do not like, when I am looking back on my past life, to consider exclusively two or three remarkable mercies, and say, "I will bless the Lord for these." No, I will bless Him for my whole career. Did He take away my comforts? Did He send me that which I judged to be evil? Shall we pick and choose the subjects for our praise? Shall we bless the Lord who gives, and not the Lord who takes? "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away," said Job, "and blessed be the name of the Lord." Mention His providences altogether, for all things work for good. No man knows which the best part of his life is. Perhaps that portion, which we think to be the worst, has been of the most service to us. God knows what is best for us. Let us praise Him according to all that the Lord has bestowed upon us, blessing Him for bitters and sweets, for blacks and whites, for storms and calms, blessing Him alike for all. That should be a special note in our song.

The next notable point is the *grandeur of the goodness* which is shown in every mercy. Observe the words, "The great goodness toward the house of Israel," as if we had received no little goodness, but all was great goodness. Is there a favor that we enjoy from God which we can dare to despise? Ingratitude makes little of much, but gratitude sees much in little. Whatever comes to us is great goodness. But oh, beloved, we need not continue to talk about it, for surely upon the very surface we can see the great goodness of electing love, the great goodness of redeeming love, the great goodness of converting love, the great goodness of pardoning love, the great goodness of upholding love, the great goodness of sanctifying love, the great goodness which has sent a Savior to prepare heaven for us, and the great goodness which is preparing us that we may enter into the heaven. God's goodness is all great. Nothing little comes from our gracious God. O great sinner, is there not a gleam of hope for you in this? A great God full of great mercies for a great sinner! Why, that is the very God you need. Fly to Him by the way of the great Savior!

Yet again, we ought to take peculiar note in our song, of the *condescending tenderness* and pity of God, for such is the force of the next expression, "Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies"—a clearer rendering would be, "according to His compassion." You know a man may be very good to another, but he may not be tender. There is a

way of pitching a shilling to a beggar in the street just as if he were a dog. God never gives His mercies to us in that way. A doctor may cure us, but be so rough about it that we may be glad to get rid of him, but the Lord heals lovingly and tenderly. I have often said in this place, and I venture to repeat it, that I do not know any word in any language which can be compared with that word, "loving-kindness." Thank God we are Anglo-Saxons, and therefore can say, *"Loving-kindness."* Unrivalled word! It is marrow and fatness. Loving-kindness! What a mouthful it is! How it seems to sweeten the soul as it goes down. The Lord has always dealt graciously with us. He has been as tender as a nurse with her child. He has given us the mercy suitable to our condition. When He has been teaching us, He has not taught us too much at once, but little by little as we have been able to bear it, for He knows our frame. He screens off a strong light from weak eyes. He feeds the famished with convenient food. We received the gospel at first, not in the glory of its sublime doctrines, but in the simplicity of the plainer truths. With tenderness did God instruct us, and in every other part of His dealing towards us, the like tenderness is seen wherein He has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. For this we extol Him.

One other special note demands to be heard, and that is the *multitudinous* displays of His Love. "According to the multitude of His loving-kindnesses," of all shapes, and at all times, and in all ways, and from all points of the compass! "The multitude of his loving-kindnesses." Now I am lost. I cannot call in the arithmetician; it is not possible for him to calculate here. Sometimes we have before us a long line of figures which must be multiplied, and the brain aches in the very attempt, but you shall never calculate the multitude of the Lord's tender mercies—this is an endless task. Look over the fields in spring when they are covered with the yellow kingcups, and white daisies, and green grass in abundance till the meadows look as though God had spread a field of the cloth of gold for a celestial coronation. Count these flowers if you can, count their petals, their leaves, the blades of the green grass, and the drops of dew which hang upon them. Then look upwards to the trees. Count the myriad leaves which make the forest. Detain the dust which stirs in the summer's gale. Count all the grains which make the mountains, all the sands which form the seashore, and all the drops which compose the sea. Have you finished? Ah, then, you have but begun to estimate the multitude of the loving-kindnesses of the Lord. O, my soul; bless the Lord! Why be silent? "Why should the mercies He has worked be lost in silence and forgotten?" Break forth, my Spirit! Break forth my whole nature! All that is within me be stirred up to magnify and bless His holy name, for He is God, and His mercies are unsearchable! Past finding out are His favors! Glory be unto His name!

III. We close after occupying two or three minutes in hinting at the PRACTICAL REASONS WHY WE SHOULD THUS MENTION THE LOVING-KINDNESSES OF THE LORD.

First, we should do this that we may have *pleas in prayer.* This is the best way of praying: "Lord, you have done this for Your servant, You have done that for Your servant, therefore I beseech You, do more." This is not after the manner of men, for when we once relieve a man's necessities, we say to him, "Do not come again." But every gift which God gives is an invitation to come again, and the best way in which we can show our gratitude is to seek for further gifts—

"The best return for one like me,
So wretched and so poor,
Is from His gifts to draw a plea,
And ask Him still for more!"

You will pray well when you can mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord.

Next, these memories will act as *stays to your faith*. When you grow doubting and troubled, and I suppose you do sometimes, then you can remember the Lord's former favors. And since He cannot change, you will be confident that He will do the same again. Oh, rest in Him; of what He has been to you He will be to the end. As long as the world stands, trust Him, and He will bring your desires to pass.

Then, next, these remembered mercies will *minister to your present happiness* and comfort. The thought of what God has done for us is enough to make us happy now. If the Lord were not to give me another mercy, I am bound to praise Him for what He has given me already. Blessed be His name, since first I stood a beggar at His door, and He satisfied my soul's hunger with Himself and gave me His own flesh to eat and blood to drink, the sacred nutriment of my hungry spirit, I scarcely have been able to ask for anything before it has come to me. O Lord, You daily load us with benefits till we sink under the burden of obligation, and yet we are so happy.

The thought of all this, dear brethren, should have the other practical influence of *making us love God more, and obey Him better.* Duty becomes pleasure when gratitude rules the hour.—

"It is love that makes our willing feet
In swift obedience move."

Has He done so much for me? Then what is there that I could not do for Him if His grace would help me?

To mention the Lord's goodness enables us, dear friends, to *cheer others,* for when we make mention of the loving-kindnesses of God to ourselves, we do not know who may be standing by. There may be some mourner there for whom the gates of consolation have been long closed, but when he hears what God has done for one of His people, he plucks up heart, and says, "I will even see whether He would not do the same for me." Tell of God's loving-kindness. Be not slow in speech about these things, this will render your conversation such as becomes an heir of heaven. Do you not participate in much idle talk? I am afraid we all do. Do you not often complain when there is nothing to complain about? Do you not murmur? Are you not far too ready to break forth in words of

lamentation? Waste not your breath on such base uses, but consecrate it all on praise. Tell what His hands have given, what His lips have spoken. Tell how He has blessed you with countless mercies, and it will make the daughters of despondency rejoice, and the sons of mourning lift up their heads.

Last of all, make mention of the loving-kindnesses of God, because *it will glorify Him,* and this should always be your main motive. The Christian lives to honor his God. Oh tell what the Lord has done, that men may praise Him. The sons of men are apt enough to forget Him; keep them in remembrance of Him. They are apt enough to speak hard things concerning Him. Tell them of His loving-kindnesses, and make them know what a good Master He is whom you serve. Shout it into their ears. Make them hear it. Tell them again, and again, and again of the great goodness of the Lord to you. Can you give me any reason why you should not mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord? Can you tell me any company in which you ought to be, in which you could not mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord? I know some persons who have hobbies, and you cannot be long with them before they will introduce them. They may be very inappropriate, but somehow or other they bring the conversation round to their favorite theme. I would have you ride this hobby without fear. I would have you take this noble steed, and ride it through all companies. Make them feel that it is your manner and habit to tell of God's goodness, and that you cannot help it. Bring it in somehow. I think you never need be short of reasons for praise. Tell men of His goodness in sending the cool wind in this hot summer, or tell them of His goodness in sending the heat to ripen the harvest. Tell them of His mercy which sends the rain that the grass may spring up again, or of His love which withholds the rain till the reapers' work is done. If this entire congregation went out today to tell of the loving-kindness of the Lord towards His people, we would have such gospel preaching throughout all London as was never known before. The Lord rinse your mouths out, brethren, if you have a bitter way of talking about other people, or about His providence, and lead you from now on, to glory in His holy name. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 106.

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HARVEST MEN NEEDED
NO. 1127

A SERMON
DELIVERED OF LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 17, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Then said He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few, pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest. And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease."
Matthew 9:37, 38; 10:1.

THE circumstances under which our Lord uttered these words are instructive. He saw the people thronging Him whenever He stood up to preach, and He perceived that the regular instructors of the people, those who thought that they were commissioned to teach the nation, were, many of them, leading them into error, and the rest were either shamefully neglecting their duty, or were performing it without heart, zeal, or even sincerity. The poor people fainted, and were scattered abroad like sheep without a shepherd, harassed by different fears and cast down by many anxieties. I do not think that the circumstances under which our Lord spoke these words have passed away, but rather that we are living under precisely the same conditions. I would not willingly be guilty of uncharitableness, and I bless God that there are many left in our land who are preaching the gospel in all its purity, and with great earnestness, but still it is lamentably true that a very great number of those who profess to be the only authorized teachers, are leading the people into spiritual bondage by reviving the old popish and pagan rites. And those who do preach a measure of the truth, too often do not preach it boldly or simply as they should. Neither is there enough of life and earnest concern for the souls of men among them. How many, even of our own churches, where we think the truth is held, have their pulpits so ill-occupied that they might almost as well be empty, as filled as they are, for there is a manifest need of zeal, love, and spiritual power, while the clear testimony concerning Jesus is sadly lacking. At this time the people of many towns and villages are shepherdless sheep, for whose souls no man cares. They are fainting and ready to die, and no man lays it to heart. If the circumstances are the same, and he would be a bold man who would dare dispute it, then the text urgently demands our prayerful attention.

Our Savior looked upon the people among whom He moved in a manner worthy of our imitation. He was a man of great feeling. He was "moved with compassion." As the Greek word has it, "His heart yearned." His sympathies were awakened. He could not look upon a mass of men

with an indifferent countenance—His inmost soul was stirred. But at the same time He was no mere enthusiast. He was as calmly practical as if He had been a cool calculator. If He sighed, He did something more than sigh, He proceeded to aid those He pitied. He had practical compassion on the crowd, and therefore He turned to His disciples, and said, "Pray you the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest." He did not go about among the masses with an undiscerning admiration of them. I do not hear Him praising them as, "The finest peasantry," or, "The sinew of the nation," as such will do. But neither do we see in Him any trace of aversion to them, as though He felt out of place in their society. He was often saddened by their follies and grieved by their sins, but He never loathed them or spoke contemptuously of them. The common people heard Him gladly because they saw that He had sympathy with them. Though in character grandly aristocratic, He was in manner and life, profoundly democratic, He was the King, and yet, "One chosen out of the people," who loved them with all His heart.

It is clear also, that He never grew discouraged in laboring for their good. You never hear Him say that it is useless to preach to the multitude, that they are too degraded, too priest-ridden, or too ignorant. No discouragement ever dampened His ardor. He persevered till His work was done. A brave, glorious heart was that of Jesus, always melted to tenderness, but at the same time, always practical. He was never influenced either by admiration, or aversion, or discouragement, so as to cease from practical methods of bettering the condition of the people among whom He dwelt. Take note, therefore, that we are about to speak upon a practical matter, and I trust it may become so this morning that many may be influenced to pray according to the bidding of their Lord, and that the sincerity of their prayers may be proven by their subsequent endeavors to obtain their petitions.

At the outset, this morning, we shall see how *our Lord states the case*—"The harvest is plenteous." Secondly, that He *indicates the service needed*—more "laborers" were required to gather in the harvest. Thirdly, that *He directs us how to obtain the supply of laborers*—by prayer. And, fourthly, *He answers their prayers in a remarkable manner.*

I. First, our Lord STATES THE CASE of men of His time and ours. The people who gathered around Him He likens to harvest fields, wherein lay the similarity?

First, He thought of the great multitudes. The thought of *multitude* rises naturally from the sight of a harvest field, and when the crop is plenteous, the idea of multitude forces itself upon you at once. You cannot count the grains of wheat; neither will you be able to count the sons of men. I suppose our Savior alluded first of all, to the crowds around Him, but His mind being much more capacious than ours, He remembered all the thousands of Israel. No, I think He could not have restricted His heart to the little country of Israel. He glanced across the seas and beyond the mountains to the myriads of mankind swarming upon this globe. Brethren, it crushes one to think of the millions of our species.

Nobody has been able to obtain an idea of the vast extent of this one city of London. You shall traverse it from end to end as long as you will, and you shall study its statistics, but you have no conception what the population of London is, and you never will have—the mass is too great. But what is London compared with our nation, and with the millions that speak our mother tongue all over the world? Yet even these are but a small portion of the innumerable host. We shall never be able to obtain even a fringe of a conception of China with its teeming millions, or of that other populous nation which owns our scepter, Hindustan. Multitudes are in the valley of existence, as the drops from the rain cloud and as the leaves upon the forest trees, such are the sons of men. You might as well count the stars in the heavens, or the waves of the sea as hope to reckon the myriads which have sprung from the loins of Adam. All these must be reaped and gathered into the gospel garner, or they must perish. All these must have laborers sent of God to gather them in, or they will miss a blissful immortality. Well did our Savior compare the myriads of the sons of men, with the multitude of the grains of wheat in the harvest field!

Our Lord intended to set forth a second idea, which dwelt, perhaps, still more prominently in His mind, and it was that of *value*. He did not speak of blades of grass mark you, in His comparison, but of wheat! He did not talk of tares as He did in other parables. He did not speak of loose pebbles by the sea coast, or worthless grains of sand. But He compared the multitude to *wheat,* and what is there more precious than wheat? Is it not to us most valuable because it is the sustenance of our life? Do we not, for this cause, gather it in with shouts? Harvest-home is always gladsome because we prize its sheaves. Much toil and care have been spent to secure the production of the harvest, and when the yellow fields wave before our eyes, we cannot despise them. We know that they are more precious than anything else that comes up out of the earth. So is it to God and to Jesus, God's Son. He did not look upon men of any sort as things to be despised. He would not have the least among them treated as chattels, nor regarded with contempt. He knew the wisdom which was displayed in the creation of the fabric of their bodies, and in the faculties of their souls. He knew how God takes delight in men, and how good men, sanctified men, give to God's heart a joy like the joy of harvest, and how men who have gone astray, when they are restored, make the great Father's heart leap within Him with a joy which angels cannot give. Of all creatures under heaven, the most precious thing to God is man. He cares nothing for gems of the mine or pearls of the sea, but men He values so much that He gave His only-begotten Son to bleed and die that they might not perish, but have everlasting life. The souls of the multitude are precious in the sight of the Lord, even as wheat is precious to the farmer.

But when the Lord spoke of them as a harvest, He had before His mind the idea of *danger* to them. The fields in our country are just now ripe and ready for the sickle. But suppose the owner of some large estate

should walk through his broad acres, and should say, "I have a great harvest—look at those far-reaching fields. But the country has become depopulated, the people have emigrated, and I have no laborers. There are one or two yonder, they are reaping with all their might; they work long days, and they toil till they faint—but over yonder there are vast ranges of my farm unreaped, and I have not a sickle to thrust in. The wheat is being wasted, and it sorely grieves me. Look how the birds are gathering in troops to prey upon the precious ears! Meanwhile the season is far advanced, the autumn damps are already upon us, and the chill, frosty nights which are winter's vanguard, are on their way. Mildew is spoiling the grain, and what remains sound will shell out upon the ground, or swell with the moisture, and become of no service." Behold in this picture the Redeemer. He looks upon the world today, and He says within Himself, "All these multitudes of precious souls will be lost, for there are so few reapers to gather them in. Here and there are men who, with prodigious energy, are reaping all they can, and all but fainting as they reap, and I am with them, and blessed sheaves are taken home, but what are these among so many?" Look, brothers, can your eyes see it? Can even an eagle's wing fly over the vast fields and unreaped plains without growing weary in the flight? There are the precious ears, they decay, they rot, they perish, they are ruined to the loss of God, and to their own eternal injury. And it grieves the Great Farmer that it should be so. That is still the case today, and it ought to grieve us that it should be so, for His sake, and for the sake of our fellow men. A multitude of precious souls were perishing, and the Savior lamented this.

The Savior had yet another thought, namely, that the masses were *accessible,* for He used the same expression when the people came streaming out of Samaria to the well to hear Him, drawn out by curiosity created by the woman's story. He said to His disciples, "Lift up now your eyes, behold the fields are white already to the harvest." Now, when people are ready to hear the word, then it is that the fields are ripe, and our Lord meant that as the wheat ears do not oppose the sickle, but stand there, and a man has but to enter into the field and use the sickle, and the result will surely follow, so there are times when nothing is needed but to preach the gospel, and the souls which otherwise would perish, will surely be gathered in. I do not believe, my brethren, that at any time the world has had a dull ear to the gospel. Who have gathered the crowds? Such men as Augustine and Chrysostom! And what was their preaching but the gospel of Jesus Christ? Who have gathered them? Such men as John Huss, Jerome, Luther, Calvin, and the like, about whom there was always a sweet savor of Christ. Who have gathered them in this land? Who but our Wycliffe and our Knox? Who gathered them in later days but our Whitefield, and our Wesley, men who spoke the common language of the people, and who had no theme but Jesus crucified! They will not go to hear your philosophers; they leave you and your philosophers to the spiders and the dry rot. But preach Jesus and His precious blood,

and tell men that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved, and they will hear you gladly.

I heard but last week from a missionary who spends nights in working for his Lord in gin palaces, and the lowest resorts of the people, that he has scarcely ever met with an insult. The people received his tracts, and thanked him for his kind words. I find it continually asserted by our city missionaries, and those who visit cab ranks, or omnibus yards, or work among other public servants, that in general there is a willing attention to the gospel. The fields stand asking us to reap them, but there are not reapers enough. The grain perishes for lack of laborers. The people *are* accessible. What country is there where the gospel cannot be preached? Fast closed was China, but now you may go throughout the length and breadth of the land, and talk of Christ, if you will. Japan is open to you, and Africa has laid bare her central secret. Spain, fast shut as with a seal, is this day set free, and Italy rejoices in the same liberty. The entire world lies before the reapers of the Most High, but where are they? "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few."

The idea of *immediate need* is contained in the figure, for the reaping of the harvest is, to a considerable extent, with the farmer a matter of now or never. "Ah," he says, "if I could postpone the harvest; if I could let it be gathered in by slow degrees, if we could work on till the harvest moon has gone, and then through November and December till winter closes the year, then the scantiness of laborers would be a small evil. But there is a limited time in which the wheat can be safely housed, and it must be harvested before winter begins, or it is lost to us."Ah, my brethren, there is no time for us to waste in the salvation of the sons of men. They will not live forever. Yon gray head will not tarry till you have told him the gospel if you postpone the good news for the next 10 years. We speak of what we hope may be accomplished for our race in half a century, but this generation will be buried before that time. You must reap yon harvest at once, or it will be destroyed. It must be gathered in speedily, or it will perish. Today, today, today the imperative necessities of manhood appeal to the benevolence of Christians. Today the sure destruction of the unbeliever speaks with pleading voice to the humanity of every quickened heart. "We are perishing, will you let us perish? You can only help us by bringing us the gospel now. Will you delay?"

Thus we have indicated the design of the Master in selecting the figure of a harvest.

II. And now, secondly, I desire to point out to you THE SERVICE NEEDED. The world being represented as a harvest, the need was for "laborers." I have never seen in any commentary or sermon I have yet met with, any working out of the metaphor of laborers in the harvest field, and yet the meaning lies upon the very surface. I will call your attention to it in a moment, when I have noticed, first, that our Savior tells us that *laborers are needed*. There are certain persons in the world who do not believe in instrumentalities, and habitually depreciate them. Our Savior was not of their mind. He did not say, "The harvest truly is plente-

ous, and the laborers are few, but that matters not, God can bless a few, and make them accomplish as much as many." He believed in His Father's omnipotence, but He also believed that the Lord would work by means, and that many laborers were required to gather in a plenteous harvest—and therefore He told us to pray for them. He believed in results being proportionate to means used, and He therefore bid us go to the root of the matter practically. Neither did our Lord say, "The laborers are few; therefore pray for God to do the work. He can do it alone, and has no need of men. You think too much of men. Your one-man ministry ought to be put away." No, Jesus did not talk so. We do not see any trace of such sentiments in our Savior's teaching. Our Master never made too much of men, but He made a very great deal of men anointed of the Spirit, and sent to preach. In fact He taught us to pray for them.

And the very last thing He did for us when He went to heaven was to give us men, for it is written, "He received gifts for men, and gave some apostles, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." If we despise what Christ evidently prizes as His ascension gift, we may fancy we are honoring God, but we shall grieve His Spirit. He would have us attach great importance to the instrumentality! He bids us know that though God could reap His harvest without men, He will not do it. Could He not bring forth a spiritual reaping machine? Modern invention has done this for the farmer, and the same idea could be carried out in spiritual things, and so thousands would be converted in an hour without human agency. But the Lord asks for no such inventions! He does not direct us to ask for spiritual reaping machines, but to pray the Master to send laborers into the harvest.

And what kind of men does the Master mean to use? This is indicated in the text. First, they must be *laborers*. The man who does not make hard work of his ministry will find it very hard work to answer for his idleness at the last great day. A gentleman who wants an easy life should never think of occupying the Christian pulpit. He is out of place there, and when he gets there the only advice I can give him is to get out of it as soon as possible, and if he will not leave the position voluntarily, I call to mind the language of Jehu concerning Jezebel, "Fling her down," and think the advice applicable to a lazy minister. An idler has no right in the pulpit. He is an instrument of Satan in damning the souls of men. The ministry demands brain labor. The preacher must throw his thought into his teaching, and read and study to keep his mind in good trim. He must not weary the people by telling them the truth in a stale, unprofitable manner, with nothing fresh from his own soul to give force to it. Above all, he must put heart work into his preaching. He must feel what he preaches—it must never be with him an easy thing to deliver a sermon—he must feel as if he could preach his very life away before the sermon is done. There must be soul work in it—the entire man must be stirred up to effort. The whole nature that God has endowed him with must be concentrated with all its vigor upon the work in hand. Such men we need. To stand and drone out a sermon in a kind of articulate snoring, to a people

who are somewhere between awake and asleep, must be wretched work. I wonder what kind of excuse will be given by some men at last for having habitually done this? To promulgate a dry creed, go over certain doctrines, and expound and enforce them logically, but never to deal with men's consciences, never to upbraid them for their sins, never to tell them of their danger, never to invite them to a Savior with tears and entreaties! What a powerless work is this! What will become of such preachers? God have mercy upon them! We need laborers, not loiterers. We need men on fire, and I beseech you, pray to God to send them. The harvest can never be reaped by men who will not labor—they must off with their coats, and go at it in their shirt-sleeves—I mean they must doff their dignities, and get to Christ's work as if they meant it, like real harvest men. They must sweat at their work, for nothing in the harvest field can be done without the sweat of the face, or in the pulpit without the sweat of the soul.

But what kinds of laborers are required? First, they must be *men who will go down into the wheat.* You cannot reap wheat by standing a dozen yards off, and beckoning to it. You must go up close to the standing stalks; every reaper knows that. And you cannot move people's hearts, and bring men to Christ by imagining you to be a superior being who condescends wonderfully when he shakes hands with a poor man. There is a very genteel order of preaching which is as ridiculous as reaping with a lady's ivory-handled pocket knife, with kid gloves on. And I do not believe in God's ever blessing it. Get among the wheat, like men in earnest! God's servants ought to feel that they are one with the people. Whoever they are, they should love them, claim kinship with them, be glad to see them, and look them in the face and say, "brother." Every man is a brother of mine. He may be a very bad one, but for all that I love him, and long to bring him to Jesus. Christ's reapers must get among the wheat.

Now, see what the laborer brings with him. It is a sickle. His communications with the wheat are sharp and cutting. *He cuts right through,* cuts the wheat down, and casts it on the ground. The man whom God means to be a laborer in His harvest must not come with soft and delicate words, and flattering doctrines concerning the dignity of human nature, and the excellence of self-help, and of earnest endeavors to rectify our lapsed condition, and the like. Such mealy mouthedness may God curse, for it is the curse of this age. The honest preacher calls a sin a sin, and a spade a spade, and says to men, "You are ruining yourselves. While you reject Christ you are living on the borders of hell, and before long you will be lost to all eternity. There shall be no mincing the matter, you must escape from the wrath to come by faith in Jesus, or be driven forever from God's presence, and from all hope of joy." The preacher must make his sermons cut. He is not to file off the edge of his scythe for fear it will hurt somebody. No, my hearers, we mean to hurt you. Our sickle is made on purpose to cut. The gospel is intended to wound the conscience, and to go right through the heart with the design of separat-

ing the soul from sin and self, as the wheat is divided from the soil. Our objective is to cut the sinner right down, for all the comeliness of the flesh must be slain, all his glory, all his excellence must be withered, and the man must be as one dead before he can be saved. Ministers who do not aim to cut deep are not worth their salt. God never sent the man who never troubles men's consciences. Such a man may be an ass treading down the wheat, but a reaper he is certainly not. We need faithful ministers. Pray God to send them. Ask Him to give us men who will preach the whole truth, who will not be afraid of certain humbling doctrines, but will bring out, for instance, the doctrine of election, and not be ashamed of it; who will tell men that salvation is of the Lord, and will not go about to please them by letting them have a finger in salvation, as though they were to share in the glory of it. Oh for laborers who can use sharp cutting sickles upon ungodly hearts!

But then a laborer has only begun when he cuts the wheat—much more is needed. As he cuts, he lets the wheat fall onto his arms, and then he lays it along in rows. But afterwards *he binds it together,* and makes it into bundles, that it may be gathered in. So the laborer whom God sends into the field must be a gathering laborer. He must be one who brings God's people together, who comforts those who mourn, and picks up from the earth those who were cut down by the sharp sickle of conviction. He must bind the saints together, edifying them in their most holy faith. Alas, how many have been scatterers, rending churches to pieces? Pray the Lord of the harvest to give His church, binders who can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, unite men's hearts!

Remember, also, that the laborer's work is never done in harvest time till he sees the wheat housed; until it is made into a stack, or put into a barn, his toil is not over. And the Christian minister, if God has truly anointed him to His work, never leaves caring for souls till they get to heaven. He is like Mr. Greatheart, with Christiana and Mercy, and the children—he goes with them from the City of Destruction, right up to the River Jordan—and if he could, he would go through the river with them. It is his business to march in front with his shield, to meet the dragons and giants with his sword, and protect the little ones. It is his to be tender to them as a shepherd with the lambs, and a nurse with her children, for he longs to present them at the last to his Master, and say, "Here am I, and the children that You have given me." Brother minister, ours is a great work, and it never ceases from the first moment when our sickle touches the conscience and wounds it, to the last moment when we are enabled to present our people before the Lord, saved by His grace, forever. The church needs men sent of the Holy Spirit who can do all this, by God's help, for though the Lord works all things, He does it by men, and men are needed everywhere, that the work may be accomplished.

Thus we have described the required service.

III. The third thing is, our Lord DIRECTED HIS DISCIPLES HOW TO OBTAIN A SUPPLY. He bids them pray for such men. Every word here is

instructive. "Pray *you."* Brethren, do *you* ever pray God to send such workers into His vineyard? How long since you heard that prayer prayed, except from this pulpit? Pray you, every one of you. Are you in the habit of doing so every morning and night? Why is there such a dearth of really warm-hearted, loving, earnest evangelists in England? It is because they are not asked for. God will not give them to us if we do not ask for them. If there is one thing noticeable in this church, it is our continual prayer that God may be pleased to raise up among us men who will work for Him, and He has done it. And He will continue to do it if we continue to pray for it. But if you do not pray that God would send forth the laborers, and the laborers do not come, who is to blame? "Pray *you."*

"Pray you *therefore,"* He says, as if the very fact that there are so many precious souls perishing should be our argument for praying, "Lord, it is not a few score that are left untaught and unsaved, but millions in our own land, and hundreds of millions in other lands. Therefore, Lord, we do pray You will send forth laborers."

We are to pray *to the Lord,* for it is the Lord's business. Only the Lord can send us the right men. He has a right to send whom He pleases, for it is His own harvest, and a man may employ whom he wills in his own field. It would be all in vain to appeal to anybody else. It is of no use to appeal to bishops to find us laborers. God alone has the making of ministers and the raising up of true workers, and therefore the petition must be addressed to Him. "Pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest." The Lord's Prayer, in its first three petitions, contains this prayer—"Our Father which are in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, in earth as it is in heaven." Does not that mean, "Lord, send forth men who may teach this world to hallow Your name, that they, through Your Spirit's power, may be the means of making Your kingdom come, and causing Your will to be done in earth as it is in heaven"? We ought to pray continually to the great Lord of the harvest for a supply of earnest laborers.

And do you notice the expression used here, "That He would *send forth* laborers"? Now the Greek is much more forcible; it is that He would push them forward, and thrust them out. It is the same word which is used for the expulsion of a devil from a man possessed. It takes great power to drive a devil out—it will need equal power from God to drive a minister out to His work. I always say to young fellows who consult me about the ministry, "Don't be a minister if you can help it," because if the man can help it, God never called him. But if he cannot help it, and he must preach or die, then he is the man. May the Lord push men out, thrust them out, drive them out, and compel them to preach the gospel. For unless they preach by a divine compulsion, there will be no spiritual compulsion in their ministry upon the hearts of others. "Pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust out laborers into His harvest."

And notice, beloved that our Lord said, "into *His* harvest." I like that, because the harvest is not ours. If that harvest shall perish, it is our

heavenly Father's harvest that perishes. This makes it weigh upon my soul. If they told me that the harvest of some harsh, overbearing tyrant was perishing, I might say, "Let it! If he had it, what good would it be to him or anybody else? He grinds the faces of the poor. Who wants to see him rich?" But when it is our gracious God, our blessed loving Father; one cannot bear the thought, and yet Jesus puts it before us that it is God's harvest which is perishing for need of reaping. Suppose an angel should take you upon his wings, and poise you in mid-space some hundreds of miles above the earth, where you could look down on the globe with strengthened eyesight? Suppose you rested there, and the world revolved before you 24 hours? You would see the sunlight and gradually all portions of it; and suppose that with the sunlight, there should be rendered visible certain colors which would mark where there was grace, where there was idolatry, where there was atheism, where there was popery? You would grieve to see only here and there upon our globe, like little drops of dew, bright marks of the grace of God—and many shades of darkness would show you that the whole world still lies in the wicked one still! And if the vision changed, and you saw the two hemispheres spread out like a map, and transformed into a wheat field with wheat all white for the harvest, how sad would you be to see here and there men reaping their little patches, doing the best they can, but the great mass of the wheat untouched by the sickle! You would see leagues of land where never a stem was reaped, that we know of, from the foundations of the world. You would be grieved to think that God's wheat is spoiling—men whom He has made in His own image, and made for immortality, perishing for lack of the gospel. "Pray you," that is the stress of the whole text—"Pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would thrust forth laborers into His harvest," that these fields may not rot before our eyes.

Will you pray it, my brethren? This text is laid on my heart. It lies more on my heart than any other in the Bible. It is one that perpetually haunts me, and has done for many years. What can one voice, one tongue do? That is why we instituted the College, that men might be instructed in the way of God more perfectly, and you, my beloved people, have helped me these many years, for which I thank you, thank you lovingly, and with all my heart. You have never ceased from that best of works, and therefore you, as a church, can honestly pray because you work as well as pray. Some churches cannot do so, they despise the teaching of a simple man of utterance, but they love him who can read the Scriptures in the original tongue, and speak his own language correctly. But you have taken tenderly and generously to the work, and God has blessed you, and at this very moment some 300 of your sons, nursed at your knees, are preaching the same gospel which we are preaching here, for which let God be praised. While we give, let us pray, and when we have prayed, let us give, that God may send forth laborers into His harvest.

IV. The last point is this—THE LORD JESUS HEARD THEIR PRAYERS—He did send forth laborers. I feel vexed with the fellow who chopped the Bible up into chapters; I forget his name just now, and I am sure it is not worth remembering. I have heard that he did the most of his carving of the New Testament between London and Paris, and rough work he made of it. Surely he was chaptering the Gospel of Matthew while he was crossing the Channel, for he has divided it in such strange places. He has chopped this passage in two. "Pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest." Down comes the meat axe, right across a bone. Let us put the bones together, and read what is next. "And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out." It appears, then, that the Lord told them to pray that God would raise up laborers, and then called them to be the laborers themselves. "You have been praying for men," He said, "and you are the very men yourselves." He puts His hands upon them one by one. "You prayed God to send out laborers, come here Matthew, come here Peter, James, John; I heard you pray as I told you, and behold I send you forth to work for Me." What if God, this morning, should move some of you to feel that men are perishing, and you cannot let them perish? What if you should pray, "Lord, send out men to save souls," and then He should put His hands on you, and say, "You are the man yourself. Behold I send you"?!

I do not suppose the 12 dreamed for a moment that they would be sent forth to be reapers, but so the Lord of the harvest had decreed. Have I not some men here who, if they thought it over, would say, "Lord, I am of uncouth speech, and I cannot serve You as I would, but such as I have, I give You"? And, dear brother, when you begin to talk about the Savior, you do not know how well you will succeed. And if you do not please yourself, that does not matter, if you please God. There is another, a man who has been dumb half his life, and yet, if he did but know it, he has force and power in him. "But I shall never preach," says one. If you do not preach, you can serve God another way. Could you not start a prayer meeting in your house? Some of you live in different parts of London, could you not commence such interests? Do something for Jesus. Some of you good women, could you not get young women together, and talk to them about the Savior? Yes, but perhaps I have some brother here who has been smothering in his heart a desire to go into the missionary field. Brother, do not quench the Spirit. You may be missing your vocation while trying to suppress that desire. I would sooner you should burst into fanaticism, some of you, and become right down fools in enthusiasm, rather than remain as the church now is, in a dead coolness, caring little for the souls of men. What do Christian people nowadays think of? If they hear about Japan, they say, "Oh, we shall have a new trade there." But do they say, "Who among us can go to Japan to tell them of the gospel?"

Do you not think that merchants, and soldiers, and sailors, and such like people who trade with distant parts of the world are the very persons

to spread the gospel? Should not a Christian man say, "I shall try and find a trade for myself, which will bring me into contact with a class of persons that need the gospel; and I will use my trade as the stalking horse for Christ. Since hypocrites use religion as a stalking horse for gain, I will make my trading subservient to my religion." "Oh," says one, "we can leave that to the society." God bless the society, and I was going to say, smother the society rather than alloy it to smother personal effort. We need our godly merchants, working men, soldiers, and sailors everywhere to feel, "I cannot go and get a proxy in the shape of a society to do this for me. In the name of God I will do it myself, and have a share in this great battle." If you cannot labor, yourself, the society is the grandest thing conceivable, for you may help others. But still the main cry from Christ is that you, yourself, should go into the highways and hedges, and as many as you find, compel them to come in to the gospel feast. The world is dying! The graves are filling! Hell is boasting, and yet you have the gospel! Can it be that you do not care to win souls, do not care whether men are damned or saved? The Lord wake us from this stony-hearted barbarity to our fellow men, and make us yearn over them, care about them, pray about them, and work for them till the Lord shall arise and send forth laborers into His harvest!

But I remember that some of you may very well be unconcerned about others, for you are unconcerned about yourselves. Oh, I do implore you, remain so no longer. Live not upon the brink of the grave without a Savior! Sport not between the jaws of hell, but fly to Him, to Him who never did reject a sinner that came to Him, and never will. God hear you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
MATTHEW 9:9-38; 10:1.

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LOVE'S CROWNING DEED
NO. 1128

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 24, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Greater love has no man than this, that
a man lay down his life for his friends."
John 15:13.

I HAVE lately in my ministry very much detained you in the balmy region of divine loving-kindness. Our subjects have frequently been full of love. I have, perhaps, repeated myself, and gone over the same ground again and again, but I could not help it. My own soul was in a grateful condition, and therefore out of the abundance of the heart the mouth has spoken. Truly I have little reason to excuse myself, for the region of love to Christ is the native place of the Christian. We were first brought to know Christ, and to rest in Him through His love, and there, in the warmth of His tenderness, we were born to God. Not by the terrors of justice, nor the threats of vengeance, were we reconciled, but grace drew us with cords of love. Now, we have sometimes heard of sickly persons, that the physician has recommended them to try their native air, in hopes of restoration. So we also, recommend every backsliding Christian to try the native air of Christ's love, and we charge every healthy believer to abide in it. Let the believer under decays of grace go back to the cross. There he found his hope; there he must find it again. There his love to Jesus began—we, "love Him because He first loved us"—and there must His love be again inflamed. The atmosphere around the cross of Christ is bracing to the soul. Get to think much of His love, and you grow strong and vigorous in grace. As the dwellers in the low-lying Alpine valleys become weak, and full of disease in the close, damp atmosphere, but soon recover health and strength if they climb the hillside, and tarry there, so in this world of selfishness, where every man is fighting for his own, and the mean spirit of caring only for one's own self reigns predominant, the saints become weak and diseased, even as worldlings are. But up on the hillsides, where we learn Christ's self-denying, selfless affection to the sons of men, we are braced to nobler and better lives. If men are ever to be truly great, they must be nurtured beneath the wing of free grace and dying love. The grandeur of the Redeemer's example suggests to His disciples to make their own lives sublime, and both furnishes them with motives for doing so, and with forces to compel them thereto.

Moreover, we may well tarry for many a day in the region of the love of Christ, because not only is it our native region and full of bracing influences, but it has an outlook towards the better shore. As shipwrecked mariners upon a desert island have been known to linger most of the day

upon that headland which pushes farthest out into the main ocean, in the hope that, perhaps, if they cannot catch a glimpse of their own country across the waves, they may possibly discern a sail which had left one of the ports of the well-beloved land. So it is that while we are sitting on the headlands of divine love, we look across to heaven and become familiar with the spirits of the just. If ever we are to see heaven while we are yet tarrying here, it must surely be from Cape Cross or Mount Fellowship—from that jutting piece of holy experience of divine love which runs away from the ordinary thoughts of men, and approaches the heart of Christ. There, at any rate, do I long to sit for many an hour till the eternal day shall break, and the shadows flee away, and I shall dwell with all the chosen in the land where there is no more sin. For if there can be found a heaven below, it is where heaven came down from heaven to die for sinful men, that sinful men might go up to heaven to live eternally.

Our subject this morning, then, is divine love, and we have chosen the highest hill in all the goodly land for you to climb. We shall take you today, to love's most sacred shrine, to the Jerusalem of the holy land of love, to the Tabor of love where it was transfigured, and put on its most beautiful garments, where it became, indeed, too bright for mortal eyes to fully gaze upon it, too lustrous for this dim vision of ours. Let us come to Calvary where we find love stronger than death, conquering the grave for our sakes.

We shall speak, first, upon *love's crowning act*—"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." But, then, since the text, grand as it is, and high, so that we cannot attain unto it, yet seems to fall short of the great argument, though it is one of the Master's own sayings, we shall speak upon *the sevenfold crown of Jesus' love.* And when we have done so, we shall have some *royal things* to say which befit the place whereon we stand, when we are gathered at the foot of the cross.

I. First, then, LOVE'S CROWNING DEED. There is a climax to everything, and the climax of love is to die for a beloved one. "Free grace and dying love" are the noblest themes among men, and when united they are sublimity itself. Love can do much, can do infinite things, but greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. This is the *ultima thule* of love. Its sails can find no further shore; its deeds of self-denial can go no further. To lay down one's life is the most that love can do.

This is clear if we consider, first, that when a man dies for his friends, it proves *his deep sincerity.* Lip-love, proverbially, is a thing to be questioned, too often is it a counterfeit. Love which speaks can use hyperbolical expressions at its will, but when you have heard all you can hear of love's speech, you are not sure that it is love, for all are not hunters that blow the horn, all are not friends who cry up friendship. There is much among men of a feeling which bears all the likeness of that priceless thing called love, which is more precious than the gold of Ophir, and yet for all that, as all is not gold that glitters, so it is not all love that walks

delicately and feigns affection. But a man is no liar when he is willing to die to prove his love. All suspicion of insincerity must then be banished. We are sure he loves who dies for love. Yes, it is not bare sincerity that we see in such a case; we see *the intensity of his affection.*

A man may make us feel that he is intensely in earnest when he speaks with burning words, and he may perform many actions which may all appear to show how intense he is, and yet for all that, he may but be a skillful player, understanding well the art of simulating that which he does not feel. But when a man dies for the cause he has espoused, you know that his is no superficial passion. You are sure that the core of his nature must be on fire when his love consumes his life. If he will shed his blood for the object loved, there must be blood in the veins of his love, it is a living love. Who can question the solemn vehemence of a man's love when he passes through the sepulcher, and yields his soul up for the thing he professes to love? "Greater love has no man than this," because he can give no greater proof of the sincerity and intensity of his affection than to lay down his life for his friends.

And, again, *it proves the thorough self-abnegation of the heart* when the man risks life itself, for love. Love and self-denial for the object loved go hand-in-hand. If I profess to love a certain person, and yet will neither give my silver nor my gold to neither relieve his needs, nor in any way deny myself comfort or ease for his sake, such love is contemptible. It wears the name, but lacks the reality of love. True love must be measured by the degree to which the person loving will be willing to subject himself to crosses and losses, to suffering and self-denials. After all, the value of a thing in the market is what a man will give for it, and you must estimate the value of a man's love by that which he is willing to give up for it. What will he do to prove his affection? What will he suffer for the sake of benefiting his beloved? Greater love for friends has no man than this that he lay down his life for them. Even Satan acknowledged the reality of the virtue which would lead a man to die, when he spoke concerning Job to God. He made little of Job's losing his sheep, and his cattle, and his children, and remaining patient. But he said, "Skin for skin; yes all that a man has will he give for his life; but put forth now Your hand, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face." So if love could give up its cattle and its land, its outward treasures and possessions, it would be somewhat strong, but comparatively it would fail if it could not go further and endure personal suffering. Yes and the laying down of life, itself. No such failure occurred in the Redeemer's love. Our Savior stripped Himself of all His glories, and by a thousand self-denials proved His love. But the most convincing evidence was given when He gave up His life for us. "Hereby perceive we the love of God," says the apostle John, "because He laid down His life for us." As if John passed by everything else which the Son of God had done for us, and put his finger upon His death and said, *"Hereby* we perceive the love of God towards us." It was majestic love that made the Lord Jesus lay aside, "His attire and rings of light," and lend their glory to the stars. He

stripped off His azure mantle, and hung it on the sky, and then come down to earth to wear the poor, mean garments of our flesh and blood, in which to toil and labor like ourselves. But the masterpiece of love was when He would even put off the garment of His flesh, and yield Himself to the superlative agonies of death by crucifixion. He could go no further. Self-abnegation had achieved its utmost. He could deny Himself no more when He denied Himself leave to live.

Again, beloved, the reason why death for its object is the crowning deed of love is this, that *it excels all other deeds.* Jesus Christ had proven His love by dwelling among His people as their brother, and participating in their poverty as their friend, till He could say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have not where to lay My head." He had manifested His love by telling them all He knew of the Father, unveiling the secrets of eternity to simple fishermen. He showed His love by the patience with which He bore with their faults, never harshly rebuking, but only gently chiding them and even that but seldom. He revealed His love to them by the miracles He worked on their behalf, and the honor which He put upon them by using them in His service. Indeed, there were ten thousand princely acts of the love of Jesus Christ towards His own, but none of them can, for a moment, endure comparison with His dying for them—the agonizing death of the cross surpasses all the rest. These life-actions of His love are bright as stars, and like the stars, if you gaze upon them, they will be seen to be far greater than you dreamed, but yet they are only stars compared with this clear, blazing sun of infinite love which is to be seen in the Lord's dying for His people on the bloody tree.

Then, I must add that His death *did in effect comprehend all other acts,* for when a man lays down his life for his friend, he has laid down everything else. Give up life, and you have given up wealth—where is the wealth of a dead man? Renounce life, and you have relinquished position—where is the rank of a man who lies in the sepulcher? Lay down life, and you have forsaken enjoyment—what enjoyment can there be to the denizen of the morgue? Giving up life, you have given up all things, therefore the force of that reasoning, "He that spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all, how will He not with Him also freely give us all things?" The giving of the life of His dear Son was the giving of all that His Son was. And as Christ is Infinite, and all in all, the delivering up of His life was the concession of all in all to us, there could be nothing more.

Beloved, I speak but too coldly upon a theme which ought to stir my soul, first, and yours afterwards. Spirit of the living God, come like a quickening wind from heaven, and let the sparks of our love glow into a mighty furnace just now, even now, if it may so please You!

Beloved, we now remark that for a man to die for his friends is evidently *the grandest of all proofs of his love in itself.* The words glide over my tongue, and drop from my lips very readily—"lay down his life for his friends," but do you know or feel what the words mean? To die for anoth-

er! There are some who will not even give of their substance to the poor. It seems like wrenching away a limb for them to give a trifle to God's poor servants. Such people cannot guess what it must be to have love enough to die for another, any more than a blind man can imagine what colors can be like. Such persons are out of court altogether. There have been loving spirits who have denied themselves comfort and ease, and even common necessities, for the sake of their fellow men. And such as these are in a measure qualified to form an idea of what it must be to die for another. But still, none of us can fully know what it means. To die for another! Conceive it! Concentrate your thoughts upon it! We start back from death, for under any light in which you may place it, human nature can never regard death as otherwise, than a terrible thing.

To pass away into the glory-land is so bright a hope that death is swallowed up in the victory, but the death itself is a bitter thing, and therefore needs to be swallowed up in the victory before we can bear it. It is a bitter pill, and must be drowned in a sweet potion before we can rejoice in it. I am certain that no person, apart from sweet reflections of the presence of God, and the heavenly future, could regard death other than as a dreadful calamity. Even our Savior did not regard His approaching death without trembling. The thought of dying was not in itself, otherwise than saddening, even to Him. Witness the bloody sweat as it streamed from Him in Gethsemane, and that man-like putting away of the cup with, "If it is possible let this cup pass from Me." As you think of that soul-conflict, let it increase your idea of the God-like love which took the cup resolutely, with both its hands, and drank right on, and never stayed its dreadful draught till the Lord had drank damnation dry for all His people, swallowing up their deaths in His own most comprehensive death. It is no light thing to die. We speak too flippantly of death, but dying is no child's-play to any man, and dying as the Savior died, in awful agonies of body and tortures of soul, it was a great thing, indeed, for His love to do. You may surround death if you please, with luxury, you may place at the bedside tokens of the tenderest love. You may alleviate pain by the art of the apothecary and the physician, and you may decorate the dying couch with the honor of a nation's anxious care, but death, for all that, is, in itself, no slight thing, and when borne for others, it is the masterpiece of love.

And so, closing this point of love's crowning action let me say that *after a man has died for another, there can be no question raised about his love.* Unbelief would be insane if it should venture to intrude itself at the foot of the cross, though, alas, it has been there, and has there proved its utter unreasonableness. If a man dies for his friend, he must love him, nobody can question that. And Jesus, dying for His people, must love them, who shall cast a doubt upon that fact? Shame on any of God's children that they should ever raise questions on a matter so conclusively proven! As if the Lord Jesus knew that even this masterpiece of love might still be intruded upon by unbelief, He rose again from the dead, and rose with His love as fresh as ever in His heart, and went to heaven

leading captivity captive, His eyes flashing with the eternal love that brought Him down. He passed through the pearly gates, and rode in triumph up to His Great Father's throne, and though He looked upon His Father with ineffable and eternal love, He gazed upon His people, too, for His heart was still theirs. Even at this hour, from His throne among the seraphim, where He sits in glory, He looks down upon His people with pitying love and condescending grace—

"Now, though He reigns exalted high,
His love is still as great.
Well He remembers Calvary,
Nor let His saints forget."

He is all love, and altogether love. "Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends."

II. THE SEVEN CROWNS OF JESUS' DYING LOVE is our second point. I hope I shall have your interested attention while I show that above that highest act of human love, there is a something in Christ's death for love's sake still more elevated. Men's dying for their friends—this is superlative, but Christ's dying for us is as much above man's superlative, as that could be above mere commonplace. Let me show you this in seven points.

The first is this—*Jesus is immortal,* therefore the special character of His death. Damon is willing to die for Pythias; the classic story shows that each of the two friends was anxious to die for the other. But suppose Damon dies for Pythias, he is only antedating what must occur. For Damon must die one day, and if he lays down his life for his friend, say ten years before he otherwise would have done so, still, he only loses that ten years' life, he must die sooner or later. Or if Pythias dies, and Damon escapes, it may be that only by a few weeks one of them has anticipated the departure, for they must both die eventually. When a man lays down his life for his friend, he does not lay down what he could keep altogether. He could only have kept it for a while. Even if he had lived as long as mortals can, till gray hairs are on their head, he must at last, have yielded to the arrows of death. A substitutionary death for love's sake in ordinary cases would be but a slightly premature payment of that debt of nature which must be paid by all. But such is not the case with Jesus. Jesus needed not die at all. There was no ground or reason why He should die apart from His laying down His life in place of His friends. Up there in glory was the Christ of God forever with the Father, eternal and everlasting. No age passed over His brow. We may say of Him, "Your locks are bushy and black as the raven; You have the dew of Your youth." He came to earth and assumed our nature that He might be capable of death. Yet remember, though capable of death, His body need not have died. As it was, it never saw corruption, because there was not in it the element of sin which necessitated death and decay. Our Lord Jesus, and none but He, could stand at the brink of the grave and say, "No man takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." We poor mortal men have only power to die,

but Christ had power to live. Crown Him, then! Set a new crown upon His beloved head! Let other lovers who have died for their friends be crowned with silver, but for Jesus, bring forth the golden diadem, and set it upon the head of the Immortal who never needed to have died, and yet became a mortal, yielding Himself to death's pangs without necessity, except the necessity of His mighty love.

Note, next, that in the cases of persons who have yielded up their lives for others, they may have entertained, and probably did entertain *the prospect that the supreme penalty would not have been exacted from them.* They hoped that they might yet escape. Damon stood before Dionysius, the tyrant, willing to be slain instead of Pythias. But you will remember that the tyrant was so struck with the devotion of the two friends that he did not put either of them to death, and so the proffered substitute escaped. There is an old story of a pious miner who was in the pit with an ungodly man at work. They had lighted the fuse, and were about to blast a piece of rock with the powder, and it was necessary that they should both leave the mine before the powder exploded. They both got into the bucket, but the hand above which was to wind them up was not strong enough to draw the two together, and the pious miner, leaping from the bucket, said to his friend, "You are an unconverted man, and if you die your soul will be lost. Get up in the bucket as quickly as you can. As for me, I commit my soul into the hands of God, and if I die I am saved." This lover of his neighbor's soul was spared, for he was found in perfect safety arched over by the fragments which had been blown from the rock—he escaped. But remember well that such a thing could not occur in the case of our dear Redeemer. He knew that if He was to give a ransom for our souls, He had no loophole for escape. He must surely die. Either He die or His people must—there was no other alternative. If we were to escape from the pit of hell through Him, He must perish. There was no hope for Him; there was no way by which the cup could pass from Him. Men have bravely risked their lives for their friends. Perhaps had they been certain that the risk would have ended in death, they would have hesitated. Jesus was certain that our salvation involved death to Him. The cup must be drained to the bottom. He must endure the mortal agony, and in all the extreme sufferings of death, He must not be spared one jot or tittle. Yet deliberately, for our sakes, He espoused death that He might espouse us. I say again, bring forth another diadem! Set a second crown upon that once thorn-crowned head! All hail, Immanuel! Monarch of misery, and Lord of love! Was ever love like Yours? Lift up His praises, all you sons of song! Exalt Him, all you heavenly ones! Yes, set His throne higher than the stars, and let Him be extolled above the angels, because with full intent He bowed His head to death. He knew that it behooved Him to suffer, it behooved that He should be made a sacrifice for sin, and yet for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame.

Note a third grand excellence in the crowning deed of Jesus' love, namely, that *He could have had no motive in that death but one of pure,*

unmingled love and pity. You remember when the Russian nobleman was crossing the steppes of that vast country in the snow, and the wolves followed the sledge in greedy packs, eager to devour the travelers. The horses were lashed to their utmost speed, but needed not the lash, for they fled for their lives from their howling pursuers. Whatever could stay the eager wolves for a time was thrown to them in vain. A horse was loosed; they pursued it, tore it to pieces, and still followed, like grim death. At last a devoted servant, who had long lived with his master's family, said, "There remains but one hope for you. I will throw myself to the wolves, and then you will have time to escape." There was great love in this, but doubtless it was mingled with a habit of obedience, a sense of reverence to the head of the household, and probably emotions of gratitude for many obligations which had been received through a long course of years. I do not depreciate the sacrifice; far from it! I wish that there were more of such a noble spirit among the sons of men! But still, you can see a wide difference between that noble sacrifice, and the nobler deed of Jesus laying down His life for those who never obliged Him, never served Him, who were infinitely His inferiors, and who could have no claims upon His gratitude. If I had seen the nobleman surrender himself to the wolves to save his servant, and if that servant had in former days tried to be an assassin, and had sought his life, and yet the master had given himself up for the undeserving menial, I could see some parallel. But as the case stands, there is a wide distinction. Jesus had no motive in His heart but that He loved us, loved us with all the greatness of His glorious nature, loved us, and therefore for love, pure love, and love alone, He gave Himself up to bleed and die—

"With all His sufferings full in view
And woes to us unknown,
Forth to the tack His spirit flew,
'Twas love that urged Him on."

Put the third crown upon His glorious head! Oh angels, bring forth the immortal coronet which has been stored up for ages for Him alone, and let it glitter upon that ever-blessed brow!

Fourthly, remember, as I have already begun to hint, that in our Savior's case *it was not precisely, though it was, in a sense, death for His friends.* Greater love has no man than this towards his friends that he lay down his life for them. Read the text so, and it expresses a great truth. But greater love a man may have than to lay down his life for his friends, namely, if he dies for his enemies. And here is the greatness of Jesus' love, that though He called us "friends," the friendship was all on His side at the first. He called us friends, but our hearts called Him enemy, for we were opposed to Him. We loved not in return for His love. "We hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." Oh the enmity of the human heart to Jesus! There is nothing like it. Of all enmities that have ever come from the pit that is bottomless, the enmity of the heart to the Christ of God is the strangest and bitterest of all. And yet for men polluted and depraved, for men hardened

till their hearts are like the nether millstone, for men who could not return and could not reciprocate the love He felt, Jesus Christ gave Himself to die. "Scarcely for a righteous man one will die, yet perhaps for a good (benevolent) man one could even dare to die, but God commends His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."—

"O love of unexampled kind!
That leaves all thought so far behind;
Where length, and breadth, and depth, and height,
Are lost to my astonished sight!"

Bring forth the royal diadem again, I say, and crown our loving Lord, the Lord of love, for as He is King of kings everywhere else, so is He King of kings in the region of affection.

I shall not, I hope, weary you when I now observe that there was another glorious point about Christ's dying for us, for *we had been the cause of the difficulty which required a death*. Among many sailors on rafts and planks who had escaped from a foundering ship, there were two brothers on board a raft. There was not enough food, and it was proposed to reduce the number that some, at least, might be able to live. Many must die. They cast lots for life and death. One of the brothers was drawn and was doomed to be thrown into the sea. His brother interposed, and said, "You have a wife and children at home, I am single, and therefore can be better spared. I will die instead of you." "No," said his brother, "not so. Why should you? The lot has fallen upon me." And they struggled with each other in mutual arguments of love, till at last the substitute was thrown into the sea. Now, there was no ground of difference between those too brothers whatever. They were friends, and more than friends. They had not caused the difficulty which required the sacrifice of one of them. They could not blame one another for forcing upon them the dreadful alternative. But in our case there would never have been a need for anyone to die if we had not been the offenders, the willful offenders. And who was the offended one? Whose injured honor required the death? I speak not untruthfully if I say it was the Christ that died who was the offended one. Against God the sin had been committed, against the majesty of the divine Ruler. And in order to wipe the stain away from divine justice, it was imperative that the penalty should be exacted, and the sinful one should die. So He who was offended took the place of the offender and died, that the debt due to His own justice might be paid. It is the case of the judge bearing the penalty which he feels compelled to pronounce upon the culprit. Like the old classic story of the father who, on the judgment bench, condemns his son to lose his eyes for an act of adultery, and then puts out one of his own eyes to save an eye for his son, the judge himself bore a portion of the penalty. In our case, He who vindicated the honor of His own law, and bore all the penalty, was the Christ who loved those who had offended His sovereignty, and grieved His holiness. I say again—but where are the lips that shall say it aright?—Bring forth, bring forth a new diadem of more than impe-

rial splendor, to crown the Redeemer's blessed head anew, and let all the harps of heaven pour forth the richest music in praise of His supreme love.

Note, again, that there have been men who died for others, but they have *never borne the sins of others.* They were willing to take the punishment, but not the guilt. Those cases which I have already mentioned did not involve character. Pythias has offended Dionysius, Damon is ready to die for him, but Damon does not bear the offense given by Pythias. A brother is thrown into the sea for a brother, but there is no fault in the case. The servant dies for his master in Russia, but the servant's character rises, it is in no degree associated with any fault of the master and the master is, indeed, faultless in the case. But here, before Christ must die, it must be written, "He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many." "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "He made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." "He was made a curse for us as it is written Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree." Now, far be it from our hearts to say that Christ was ever less than perfectly holy and spotless, and yet there had to be established a connection between Him and sinners by the way of substitution, which must have been hard for His perfect nature to endure. For Him to be hung up between two felons, for Him to be accused of blasphemy, for Him to be numbered with transgressors, for Him to suffer, the just for the unjust, bearing His Father's wrath as if He had been guilty, this is amazing and surpasses all thought! Bring forth the brightest crowns and put them on His head, while we pass on to weave a seventh chaplet for that adorable brow.

For remember, once more, the death of Christ was a proof of superlative love, because in His case *He was denied all the helps and alleviations which in other cases make death to be less than death.* I marvel not that a saint can die joyously. Well may his brow be placid, and his eyes bright, for he sees his heavenly Father gazing down upon him, and glory awaiting him. Well may his spirit be rapt in joy, even while the death-sweat is on his face, for the angels have come to meet him, and he sees the far-off land, and the gates of pearl growing nearer every hour. But ah, to die upon a cross without a pitying eye upon you, surrounded by a scoffing multitude, and to die there appealing to God, who turns away His face! To die with this as your requiem, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!" To startle the midnight darkness with an, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" of awful anguish such as never had been heard before—this is terrible. The triumph of love in the death of Jesus rises above all other heroic acts of self-sacrifice! Even as we have seen the lone peak of the monarch of mountains rise out from all adjoining alps, and pierce the clouds to hold familiar converse with the stars, so does this love of Christ soar far above anything else in human history, or that can be conceived by the heart of man. His death was more terrible, His passing away more grievous by far. Greater love has no man than this, that He lay down such a life, in such a fashion, and for such enemies so utterly unworthy.

Oh, I will not say, Crown Him—what are crowns to Him? Blessed Lamb of God, our hearts love You. We fall at Your feet in adoring reverence, and magnify You in the silence of our souls.

III. Lastly, and I must be very brief, as my time has fled, MANY ROYAL THINGS OUGHT TO BE SUGGESTED TO US BY THIS ROYAL LOVE.

And first, dear brethren, how this thought of Christ's proving His love by His death ennobles self-denial. I do not know how you feel, but I feel utterly mean when I think of what Christ has done for me. To live a life of comparative ease and enjoyment shames me. To work to weariness seems nothing. After all, what are we doing compared with what He has done? Those who can suffer, who can lay down their lives in mission fields, and bear hardships, and poverty, and persecution for Christ—my brethren, these are to be envied, they have a portion above their brethren. It makes us feel ashamed to be at home, and to possess any comforts when Jesus so denied Himself. I say the thought of the Lord's bleeding love makes us think ourselves mean to be what we are. And makes us nothing in our own sight, while it causes us to honor before God the self-denial of others, and wish that we had the means of practicing it.

And oh, how it prompts us to heroism. When you get to the cross, you have left the realm of little men. You have reached the nursery of true chivalry. Does Christ die?—then we feel we could die, too. What grand things men have done when they have lived in the Love of Christ! That story of the Moravians comes to my mind, and I will repeat it, though you may have often heard it, how in the South of Africa there was, years ago, a place of lepers into which persons afflicted with leprosy were driven. There was a tract of country surrounded by high walls, from which none could escape. There was only one gate, and he who went in never came out again. Certain Moravians looked over the wall and saw two men—one, whose arms had rotted off with leprosy, was carrying on his back another who had lost his legs, and between the two they were making holes in the ground and planting seeds. The two Moravians thought, "They are dying of a foul disease by hundreds inside that place. We will go and preach the gospel to them. But," they said, "if we go in, we can never come out again. There we will die of leprosy, too." They went in, and they never came out till they went home to heaven. They died for others for the love of Jesus. Two others of these holy men went to the West Indian Islands, where there was an estate to which a man could not go to preach the gospel unless he was a slave. And these two men sold themselves for slaves, to work as others worked, that they might tell their fellow slaves the gospel. Oh, if we had that Spirit of Jesus among us, we should do great things. We need it bad, and must have it. The church has lost everything when she has lost her old heroism. She has lost her power to conquer the world when the love of Christ no longer compels her.

But mark how the heroics in this case are sweetly tinctured and flavored with gentleness. The chivalry of the olden times was cruel. It consisted very much in a strong fellow cased in steel going about and knock-

ing others to pieces who did not happen to wear similar suits of steel. Nowadays we could get a good deal of that courage back, I dare say, but we shall be best without it. We need that blessed chivalry of love in which a man feels, "I would suffer any insult from that man if I could do him good for Christ's sake. And I would be a doormat to my Lord's temple gate that, all who come by might wipe their feet upon me, if they could thereby honor Christ." The grand heroism of being nothing for Christ's sake, or anything for the church's sake, that is the heroism of the cross. For Christ made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. O blessed Spirit, teach us to perform heroic acts of self-abnegation for Jesus' name's sake!

And, lastly, there seems to come to my ears from the cross a gentle voice that says, "Sinner, sinner, guilty sinner, I did all this for you, what have you done for Me?" And yet, another which says, "Return unto Me! Look unto Me and be you saved, all you ends of the earth." I wish I knew how to preach to you Christ crucified. I feel ashamed of myself that I cannot do better than I have done. I pray the Lord to set it before you in a far better way than any of my words can. But, oh, guilty sinner, there is life in a look at the Redeemer! Turn your eyes to Him and trust Him! Simply by trusting Him you shall find pardon, mercy, eternal life, and heaven. Faith is a look at the Great Substitute. God help you to get that look for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 15.

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THE HEART OF FLESH
NO. 1129

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 31, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh,
and I will give you a heart of flesh."
Ezekiel 36:26.

IT is a peculiar feature in our holy religion that it begins its work within, and acts first upon the heart. Other religions, like that of the Pharisees, begin with outward forms and ceremonies, perhaps hoping to work inwardly from without, although the process never ends, for though the outside of the cup and of the platter is made clean, the inside still remains full of rottenness as before. No truth is surer than this concerning all the sons of men, "You must be born-again." There must be an entire and radical change of man's nature or else, where God is, he can never come. The gospel does not flinch from this, but enforces the declaration. The Holy Spirit does not attempt to improve human nature into something better, but lays the axe at the root of the trees, and declares that we must become new creatures and that by a supernatural work of the omnipotent God. Scripture does not mince matters, or say that some men may naturally be better than others, and by an improvement of their excellences, may at last become good enough for God. Far from it, it declares concerning all, "Except you are converted and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." True religion begins, then, with the heart, and the heart is the ruling power of manhood. You may enlighten a man's understanding, and you have done much, but as long as his heart is wrong, the enlightenment of the understanding only enables him to sin with a greater weight of responsibility resting upon him. He knows good to be good, but he prefers the evil. He sees the light, but he loves the darkness, and turns from the truth because his heart is alienated from God. If the heart is renewed, the judgment will, before long, follow in the same track. But as long as the heart is wrong, the affections govern the will, and bias the character of the man towards evil. If a man loves evil, he is evil. If he hates God, he is God's enemy, whatever his outward professions, whatever his knowledge, whatever his apparent good qualities. "As a man thinks in his heart so he is." The heart is more nearly the man than any other of the faculties and powers which God has bestowed upon our nature. What if I say that the heart is the Eve in the little garden of our nature, and she it is who first plucks the evil fruit? And though the understanding follows the affections, even as Adam followed Eve, yet, the first power, for good or evil, lies in the affections. The heart, when renewed by grace, is the best part

of manhood; unrenewed, it is the very worst. Aesop, when his master ordered him to provide nothing for a feast but the best things in the market, brought him nothing but tongues, and when the next day, he ordered him to buy nothing but the worst things in the market, still brought nothing but tongues. And I would venture to correct or spiritualize the story by exchanging hearts for tongues, for there is nothing better in the world than hearts renewed, and nothing worse than hearts unregenerate.

It is a great covenant promise that the heart shall be renewed, and the particular form of its renewal is this—that it shall be made living, warm, sensitive, and tender. It is naturally a heart of stone—it is to become, by a work of divine grace, a heart of flesh. Therefore, very much of the result of regeneration and conversion will be found to lie in the production of a tender spirit. Tenderness, the opposite of that which is stout, obstinate, cold, hard, tenderness is one of the most gracious signs in a man's character. And where God has given fleshiness, or living sensitiveness instead of stoniness, or dead insensibility of heart, there we may conclude that there is a real work of grace, and that God has created vital godliness within. Concerning this tenderness I am about to speak—"I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."

I. Our first remark is that THE TENDERNESS HERE INTENDED IS ABSENT IN THE UNREGENERATE. They frequently have a natural sensitiveness—some persons who are not converted are very tender indeed, as mothers to their children, as fathers to their offspring, as friends to friends. And God forbid that we should say anything amiss concerning that which is good in human nature after its kind. But that is widely different from the spiritually tender heart. Some there are who have a tenderness which arises from timidity, a tenderness which sometimes inclines them to good, not because they love the good, but because they are easily ruled by their company. So that they would be just as easily led towards evil if they fell in with bad companions. They have no principle, no root in themselves. Such tenderness Rehoboam had who was tender, and therefore followed evil advisers to his own injury. Such an unmanly softness as this is to be strived against, for we need to have some grit in our constitution, some firmness and resolution, and that sort of pliability which unman's a man, and makes him a puppet for others to handle is a great evil.

There is also a tenderness which arises mainly from legal terror and fear, which is very different from the evangelical or saving softness of heart which is described in our text. I know some who exhibit a sort of counterfeit tenderness. When they hear a sermon, they are excited by it, and if it is about the world to come, the lifting up of the curtain of the future, they are affected for the time being. But then their goodness soon departs from them. They forget the next moment that which affected them a moment back. They are soon hot, and soon cold; they are inconstant as the wind. That is a not the kind of tenderness to be desired—

goodness which is as the morning cloud, and the early dew which passes away.

In all unregenerate men there is a lack of the real spiritual tenderness of which I have to speak, though all are not equally hardened. In all, for instance, there is a *natural stoniness of heart.* We are not born into this world perfect, so that when sin meets us, it receives a kindly reception, and is not dreaded and shunned as it should be. Those who notice children in their first acts will not have discovered any strong aversion in them to children's sins, or horror at the sight of them. How early does the little child give way to unrestrained passion, and practice little acts of deceit? As the prophet said, "We go astray from the womb, speaking lies." Our children's poet was correct when he said—

"True, you are young, but there's a stone
Within the youngest breast,
Or half the sins which you have done
Would rob you of your rest."

The heart by nature is like the nether millstone, and its hardness is increased by *contact with the world.* A youth fresh from a godly household is not one-half as hard as he who has been for some time in the midst of ungodly company, and has seen the ways of the debauched and the profane. Custom has a great power over us, and what we see others do with impunity, we by-and-by come to think, (unless the grace of God prevents it), it cannot be quite as bad as our parents and guardians taught us that it was. Familiarity with sin does not breed contempt for it, but often causes a measure of contempt for the law which forbids it. We see the sparkling eyes of the drunk, we hear his hilarious shouts, and imagine that there is pleasure in the bowl. Or we hear men speak of the delights of their transgressions and the sweets of lust, and unless we are held back by providence and grace, we are apt to think lightly of those things which once we regarded with abhorrence. This world is a petrifying spring, and all who are of the world are being petrified in its stream, and are growing harder and harder as the years roll on.

Moreover, men harden themselves by *their own sins.* Every time a man sins it becomes easier for him to sin again. Like a stone falling, sin gains impetus and increased velocity. The man who sins once has a stronger tendency to sin again, and there are some sins which almost necessitate a succession of sins. The man that lies, for instance, thinks he must lie a second time to conceal the first. And some transgressions which root themselves in the flesh breed a hunger and a thirst for the sin so that the flesh craves to be indulged again, and those who cannot bridle their passions are thus carried away by them with great force. As labor renders the hand hard, so sin makes the heart callous, and each sin makes the stony heart yet more like adamant.

At the same time, *all the circumstances around* an unregenerate man will be perverted to the same result. If, for instance, a man prospers, nothing is more hardening to the heart than long prosperity. Find me an ungodly man whose course has been one of perpetual gain, and you shall find me, almost certainly, a man who is ready to say unto the Lord, "Who

is Jehovah that I should obey His voice?" Pride is often begotten of fullness of bread. If the man had known what need is, he might, perhaps, have been humbled before God. But now he boasts in his broad acres, and his large estates, and like Nebuchadnezzar, he says, "Behold this great Babylon that I have built." It is also a dangerous thing to be for many years in good health without a sickness. This also hardens a man. The sickness which brings a man to the borders of the grave is often sanctified to the breaking of the heart. To be without ache or pain for a long time is so far from being a blessing from God to the wicked, that I scarcely know anything which may turn out to be a greater curse to an ungodly man. Never chastened! Then you are no child; left to find pleasure in sin! Then surely it must be that God will let you have what pleasure you may in this world, because He knows a terrible future awaits you. O soul in prosperity, disturb yourself, for you are in solemn danger. Hardness of heart will almost inevitably come upon you. You are at ease from your youth—you have not been emptied from vessel to vessel—therefore your scent remains in you, and that scent is pride and carnal security.

The opposite condition of circumstances will, through sin, produce the same result. Affliction hardens those whom it does not soften. There are men who have been in many storms at sea, and though once they feared, they never tremble now. If the mast had to be cut away, and the vessel were almost to go down, they have grown so desperate they would curse and swear in the teeth of the tempest. Those who have escaped many accidents and dire diseases, who have passed unscathed by the hot furnace of fever, or have risen from between the jaws of cholera, are too often men whom nothing can move. What the fire does not melt, it anneals as steel. Alas, of how many may it be said, "Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more." They resemble Ahaz of old, who the more he was afflicted, the more he sinned, of whom the Spirit of God has written, "This is that king Ahaz." This is hardness, indeed, comparable to that of Pharaoh, whom the Lord hardened by judgments which ought to have melted him to repentance.

And alas! Alas, that we should have to add it, *holy influences will come in to complete this hardening* and carry it to an even higher degree! The gospel has a wonderfully hardening power over those who reject it. The sun shines out of the heavens upon wax and softens it, but at the same time it shines upon clay and hardens it. The sunlight of the gospel shining upon hearers either melts them into repentance, or else hardens them into greater stubbornness. You cannot be hearers of the gospel without its having some effect upon you. Some of you have attended this place ever since it was built [12 years earlier] and if you are not the better for it, you certainly are the worse. If the gospel is not a savor of life unto life to you, it will be a savor of death unto death. Among hardened sinners, the gospel-hardened sinner is one of the worst.

Yet, further, when an unregenerate man dares to put on *a Christian profession,* this is perhaps the most rapid and certain process for con-

summating the devil's work. For if a man will be brave enough to join himself with the saints, while he is indulging in private sin, if he will continue to come to the communion table when he knows that his base lusts are still indulged, and if, moreover, he has the face to boast of being a child of God when he knows that he is an utter stranger to divine grace, why, such a man is the raw material out of which Satan can make a Judas. The devil himself could not make a Judas till he had found a false apostle. You must look among hypocritical professors of religion if you would find the worst of men. And I must add, you may succeed best in your search if you can find a false-hearted minister. The higher the place in God's garden the more foul the weeds. The hardest-hearted men of all are not those who have been guilty of crimes against society, and have been put away into our jails—often a little kindness will melt these savages down. No, the worst of all are those demons in human shape that make a profession of being the people of God, and all the while know that they are sinning wickedly with both hands. To cover a vile life with the coverlet of a Christian profession is a sign of reprobation.

Take men, however, at any stage, this is still true—that the heart of flesh is not to be found in any unregenerate man.

II. WHEREVER TRUE TENDERNESS IS FOUND, IT IS A SPECIAL GIFT OF THE NEW COVENANT. A heart of flesh is a gift of sovereign grace, and *it is always the result of divine power.* No heart of stone was ever turned into flesh by accident, or by mere providential dispensations, or by human persuasions. You might argue with a rock a long while before you would persuade it into flesh. Neither is such a change worked by a man's own actions. How shall a stone, being a stone, produce in itself flesh? A power from above the man must work upon him. According to the language of the Scriptures, "Except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God." The Spirit of God must change the nature, or the heart of stone will never become a heart of flesh.

Note that *the first works of the Spirit of God upon the soul tend towards this tenderness,* for when He comes to a man, He convinces him of sin, and so softens him. The man convinced of sin does not laugh any longer at sin; neither does he despise the wrath of God on account of it. When the Spirit of God darts the arrows of conviction into the soul, then the heart begins to bleed, and the man is conscious of feelings and emotions to which he was a stranger before. I trust there are some of you who understand this first work of the Spirit in the heart—He has begun to make you feel the guilt of sin. He has compelled you to tremble before an angry God, and to dread the wrath to come. This early work of grace has already made you more sensitive than you ever were before and the further the Spirit's work proceeds, the more tender will you become.

When the soul comes to be really saved, and to obtain peace through Jesus Christ, one great mark of its salvation is tenderness in heart. Oh, what a place for tenderness the cross is! When for the first time our eyes behold the Savior, we weep. We look and live, but we also look and mourn that we pierced the Lord. Who can behold a bleeding Savior suf-

fering for his sin without being melted down? No heart of stone can bear contact with the cross. Let but Jesus dart a look of love, and we are dissolved, as once Peter's heart was melted and made to flow out in penitential tears. Only let us hear our Redeemer's voice, and we shall cry, "My soul melted while He spoke to me." The fact that He loved us, and gave Himself for us is enough to dissolve a heart of iron, if it could once know it.

Now, as these first works of the Spirit of God in conviction and conversion lead to tenderness, *so it is true of all the divine operations which follow in due course.* The whole tenor of the gospel is towards tenderness. I cannot remember a promise, I cannot recall a doctrine, I cannot remember a fact connected with the gospel which could make a believer hard-hearted. Can you? I think, if you will turn over all that you know, and all God has revealed concerning salvation, you will find nothing to make you stubborn and willful, but everything to make you tender and sensitive. Oh, to think that salvation should be of the sovereign grace of God! How it humbles us. How it lays us in the dust. No more talking about man's rights as a creature, man's claims, and what God ought to do. We are broken down, and feel that the Lord may do exactly what He wills, and thus we are made tender before His face. Oh, to know that there is no pardon except by faith in a Substitute. To understand that God must and will punish sin—how it makes us feel that sin is no trifle. How it leads us to abhor sin as a great evil, and makes us jealous lest we should offend again. When we read that all our help was laid on Jesus Christ, how it cuts away, by the roots, all our self-confidence, and makes us lie low at the foot of the throne. I might go through all the truths, and doctrines, and promises, if we had time, and I think I could prove to a demonstration that their legitimate effect is to render the heart tender, wherever they operate.

So it is with *every Christian grace*. All the Christian virtues promote warmth and tenderness of heart. Have you zeal for God? I know you will be fearful of sinning. You will hate the very garment spotted by the flesh. Have you patience under the divine rod? That patience is only softness of heart in one of its sweetest forms. Have you much love? Then I am sure you have much tenderness, for in proportion as the heart is stony, it is destitute of affection. Every one of the divine circle of graces has an intimate connection with the heart of flesh. And I also venture to say that the more tender a man is, the more advanced in grace he is—and that the more callous and unconcerned he is, the further is he from what he should be. Let the unfeeling professor know, and rest assured that if he is a child of God at all, he is certainly in a weak and backsliding state, or his insensibility would be a great burden and grief to him. Every grace leans towards tenderness, and the whole current of the divine life sets that way. You cannot be strong in piety unless you are tender in heart. Are you a child? Can a child be good if it is indifferent, haughty, obstinate, and stony-hearted towards its parents? Are you a servant? Who is a good servant but he who is tender of his master's reputation, and anx-

ious to fulfill his lord's command? Are you a soldier? Where is there a good soldier that is not jealous of his captain's honor, and careful, lest by any means, he should break the martial law? There must be tenderness. It is an essential point. Unless it is melted down, the hard metal cannot be poured into the mold and fashioned for use and beauty. The Lord Jesus will never set His seal upon cold wax. He stamps His image on hearts of flesh, and not on stones. A tender conscience is an essential ingredient in the perfect Christian character, and where it is not, there is neither the life nor work of God.

III. Let us dwell upon another point, that THIS TENDERNESS, WHEN IT IS GIVEN, IS OBSERVABLE UNDER SEVERAL ASPECTS. The man who has a heart of flesh given him becomes sensitive to fear. He trembles at the thought of a Holy God in arms against him. He no longer jokes about hell and eternity, as so many do, but he says, "My heart stands in awe of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments." He no longer argues that the Lord is too severe, but he admits that He is just when He judges, and is clear when He condemns. The renewed heart is afraid of what other men call little sins, and flees from them as from a serpent. The regenerate man knows that there is death in every drop of sin's wine, and he will not venture to sip thereof, or taste a mouthful of sin's most royal dainties. He fears the Lord, and dreads to offend because he is made alive, so as to know the Lord's holiness, and perceive His justice. The stony heart neither knows nor fears, and therefore abides in death. I have little fear for a soul that fears, but I tremble for those who never tremble. I have sometimes wished that certain, very-assured Christians, as they think themselves, who are I fear, in very truth presumptuous pretenders—I wish they could and would have a dash of fear about them. Fear of the kind we now mean is a holy salt to a man's character. Fear and trembling well becomes even the most eminent saint. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints." "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Though I greatly deplore all doubts of God's truthfulness, I do not equally deprecate doubts concerning our own condition, for there is such a thing as holy anxiety, and I charge you never to think little of it, but remember the poet's lines—

"He that never doubted of his state,
He may, perhaps, he may, too late."

Self-examination will often suggest holy fear and deep searching of heart. And it will reveal so much of sin in us that we shall be sent to our knees, with weeping and supplication, to cry out for help and pardon. To live without fear is to live in sin, for one mark of a believer is that he has the fear of God before his eyes. In this sense, "Blessed is the man that fears always."

Again, a tender heart becomes sensitive as to the decisions of its enlightened *conscience.* The heart changed by grace begins to weigh its own actions towards God, and it comes to the conclusion, "I have acted unjustly towards my Creator and Benefactor. He has been all goodness to me. I have received, at His hands, countless benefits, and yet I have un-

gratefully forgotten Him. When I heard of Him, I treated Him slightingly. I have lived for myself, but not for my good and gracious Creator." The quickened conscience holds a daily court, and its sentences are heard and respected by the heart of flesh. In the ungodly man there is a conscience, but it is asleep, and needs a cannon fired to wake it up, so that the stony heart is never troubled. Let our prayer be—

"Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make.
Awake my soul when sin is near,
And keep it still awake."

The Christian feels that it is a horrible thing to sin against God, against the Savior's love, and against the influence of the indwelling Spirit. He starts back from sin. He is not only afraid of the punishment, but he is wounded by the sin itself. As smoke to the eyes, as thorns to the flesh, and as gall to the palate, such is sin to the heart of flesh.

Then, again, the new heart, the fleshy heart, becomes sensitive of the *divine love*. Is it not one of the most amazing things in the world that the story of Calvary does not flood with tears every eye that reads it? Was there ever such touching, affecting love as that shown by the Son of God towards His enemies when He left the dignities of heaven for the shame and suffering of earth? Silly stories of love-sick maids, or the improbable plots of three-volume romances, will bring showers of tears from those who read them—while this grand narrative, this wondrous tragedy of love, is as a thrice-told tale, and the book which contains it is often put upon the shelf as far too dry for reading. Though it concerns us all, and we are lost without it, and with it are lifted up to be near akin to God, yet this dying love of Christ is disregarded. How can it be otherwise while the heart is made of stone? When his heart is turned to flesh, then the love of God affects the man, humbles him, melts him, woos him, wins him, captivates him, enchants him, enamors him, inflames him with ardent thankfulness, and draws him up towards heaven.

Divine Love begets in the renewed man sensitiveness to *gratitude*. "Has Jesus done all this for me? Then what can I do for Him? Has He bought me with His blood? Then I am His, and not my own, or the world's. What can I do for Him who died to save my grateful soul?" The renewed heart feels that the love of Christ compels it, and it concludes "That if Christ died for all, then were all dead, and that He died for all, that they which live should not live from now on to themselves, but unto Him that died for them, and rose again."

Moreover, the heart becomes sensitive, from now on, to holy *grief*. When it has erred, it chastens and humbles itself for having grieved the Savior. It takes revenge upon itself if sin has been indulged.

It becomes sensitive to *joy,* and oh, what a joy a Christian feels, to which the ungodly man must forever be a stranger. The renewed heart sings at the sound of the Savior's footsteps, and when His love is shed abroad, no precious ointment can be half as sweet. Oh, the exhilarations and delights we have known when we clearly see our acceptance in the Beloved! Oh, the feasts and the banquets when we have fellowship with

the Crucified One! Oh, the ravishments and ecstasies when we look through the open gates of pearl and behold our eternal inheritance, the crowns of gold, and the palms of victory. By regeneration we are made capable of an unknown fullness of joy. Every power and faculty is so quickened as to be able to quiver with delight. Heaven itself seems to flash along every nerve when the heart is steeped in fellowship with Jesus.

And so we become sensitive *with pity for others*. I would give nothing for your religion if you do not desire others to share in it. If you can, without emotion, think of a soul being damned, I fear that it will be your own lot. If you can look upon the ignorant, the perverse, the rebellious, and think of their destruction with complacency, you are no child of God. Your Savior, who is the first-born of the divine family, wept over Jerusalem. Have you no tears? Then you are not a member of the family of which He is the head—

"Did Christ over sinners weep?
And can our cheeks be dry?
Let drops of sympathetic grief
Distil from every eye."

A heart of stone says, "Let them go where they will: am I my brother's keeper?" But a heart of flesh says, "Lord, help me by any means to save some; it shall be a delight to me to turn sinners from the error of their ways."

Where this tenderness of heart is carried to a high point, as it ought to be in every Christian, the believer becomes *delicately sensitive* concerning the things of God. I have seen an instrument for weighing of so exceedingly delicate a nature that it has been affected by a particle of dust quite imperceptible by the naked eye. An invisible atom has turned the scale. We have different kinds of weighing machines. Some are so rough that they would hardly yield to the pressure of an ounce, but others quiver if the smallest particle falls upon them. The believer's heart should be like this last one. A Christian's heart should resemble the sensitive plant, which the moment it is touched, folds up its leaves as a sailor reefs his canvas, or like a wound in a man's flesh which is pained by the faintest brush. Spiritual sensitiveness is fullness of life—insensibility is death. To feel the slightest motion of the Holy Spirit is a sign of high spirituality. I would not wish to be, in my heart, like the Great Eastern upon the sea, needing an Atlantic roller to stir it. I would rather desire to be as the angler's float which mounts or sinks by the force of the least ripple. Spirit of the Lord, thus act upon my willing heart. I want to be so sensitive of the Spirit of God that I may be like the aspen leaf, which trembles even when the breeze is not perceptible to others. We should watch to do God's will, and not need His whip and bridle to force us to obedience.

Yet I have known professors who have clearly seen a certain duty to be taught in the Bible, but they have said, "Well, we think it is Scriptural, but we need to have it brought to us by a deep impression on our mind, and our way pointed out by providential circumstances." This is a diso-

bedient spirit, and ought to meet with grave censure. The Lord's Word is our guide, not our impressions or our circumstances. And to the renewed heart it should be enough to know the Lord's will and our obedience should be prompt. On the other hand, if anything is forbidden in the Word, or is clearly wrong, nothing can justify our continuance in it. We are bound, at once, to forsake it. The great need of this age is sensitiveness about revealed truth and the divine will. We have a church in our land in which there are three distinct classes of men who all declare that they believe the whole of the Book of Common Prayer. And it is clearly impossible that they should do so, since these parties have no points of agreement with one another, and wage incessant war with each other. Yet they each one receive it all *ex amino,* all of it, when no man living, nor angel, nor devil could believe it all, the book itself being self-contradictory. This, however, is of small consequence to supple consciences trained to play with language. Some ministers of this church know their position to be a doubtful one, and yet retain it on the plea that their usefulness might be impaired if they left the church. Is this reasoning fit for Christians? Are we to seek a supposititious usefulness by continuing where our conscience is ill at ease? Surely not! Our rule of conduct is the divine will and that only.

Oh, I long to see a race of men born among us like the old Covenanters, who would die for the least word of Jesus, and would give their blood for the smallest jewel of His crown. But now we are to be charitable, and if any of us speak out for God, straightway we are hounded down for lack of charity, whereas it is our great charity for souls that makes us speak out and run all risks. We have charity for dying men and charity for the age to come. We see deadly error propped up by temporizers, and we cannot be silent. If ministers of the gospel set the example of wresting words, and trifling with the truth, where will this nation's morals be in the next generation? Brethren, we who preach the gospel must follow the highest conceivable standard of strict truth, for God's sake, for our office sake, and for the people's sake. We cannot afford to be lax in our solemn declarations, for we shall have to answer for them to our Lord at the last great day. If we are to be teachers of other men, we must be beyond suspicion. We must be inflexible in the truth, and sooner die than be false of faith, or preach anything that savors of dishonesty, or is tainted with equivocation. We shall never lead God's troops to victory against error and falsehood if we vacillate ourselves. Oh, for great tenderness of heart towards the truth. Even though scrupulosity could beget the revival of a fierce sectarianism, it is infinitely more to be desired than the soul-deceiving charity which is the Diana of this age, and the destroyer of souls.

Translated into plain English, the current charity of the times only means that it matters not one atom what God has said. It means let us make our own systems, and mutually agree to shelve all the inconvenient parts of revelation. Let us be liberal to our fellow men out of our Lord's estate—what matters our Lord's honor, as long as we make things pleas-

ant all round? In the teeth of this, the sensitive heart will be faithful, and will bear the censure of all men sooner than incur the displeasure of the Lord. Tenderness towards God we must have. Oh, for the old Elijah spirit of stern determination, tempered with the John spirit of love to those whose errors we condemn. Jehovah must be King in this land, and the idols must be utterly abolished.

IV. I shall close with a few reflections on the same subject. TENDERNESS OF HEART IS TO BE GREATLY PRIZED, AND EARNESTLY CULTIVATED. Some among you may, for the first time, be distressed on account of sin. I rejoice because of it. Some of you are not what you used to be, frivolous and light-hearted. You are now thoughtful, and with that thoughtfulness, sorrowful. You came here this morning praying that God would give you peace, but you have not obtained it. I pray God to give you your wish, but may you never find peace unless it is the peace of God, peace through Jesus Christ. May your resolution be, "I will never rest until I rest in God's rest, even in His own dear Son." Beloved, do not try to get rid of soul alarms, conviction, or sin except in God's way. There are physicians of no value who would heal your wound if you would let them. Do not endure them, for they will only film it over, and leave an ulcer beneath which will cost you your soul. Ask the Lord to make your minister faithful to you, allow him to use the lance to open the wound, and cut out the proud flesh. Yes, ask the Spirit of God to probe you to the quick sooner than allow you to be flattered into the conception that you are healed when you are not. Go to the Lord for healing—all other healing is worthless. Say, "Lord, make sure work of it in me. Save me Yourself; save me thoroughly. Deliver me from trusting in myself or my fellow man, and bring me to rely only on You and Your dear Son." Do not go to amusements which will help you to forget your true condition. Don't be danced or fiddled, or play-acted, into indifference. Be anxious that this bruising and breaking should go on further, that you may be even more conscious of the exceeding guilt of sin. You will never prize the Savior until you loathe yourself. You will never love His blood until you have been ashamed of the crimson of your own sin. Jesus will never be to you a Savior till you are in your own eyes a poor, lost, ruined sinner. Go to Jesus and put your trust in Him, and harden not your heart against Him.

Next, I speak to you, O child of God. Cultivate tenderness of heart more and more. I would say to you who are Christians, do not believe anything, the legitimate result of which would be to make you callous in your spiritual feelings, or lax in your dealings with your follow men, or careless with your God. I dread lest any of the truths which we profess should come to be so held in unrighteousness as to make us feel easy in sin. Whenever I find a brother perfectly content with himself, I am afraid for him. I know he does not see the sin that God sees in him, or he would rather bemoan himself than give way to boasting. I delight to hear men preaching up a high standard of holiness, the higher the better. But if any man should say that he has reached it, I blush and tremble for him.

He had better begin again upon the ladder of sanctification, for he has not put his foot on the first step of it yet, for that is humility. Be very humble, lie very low. Be more and more conscious of your natural guilt, and repent more earnestly. I proclaim before you all that I believe the very best place for a man to stand in is with his arms around the cross, saying—

"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."

I am nothing, but Christ is everything. I am a mass of loathsomeness in myself, but nevertheless accepted in the Beloved.

Daily may we fear lest we should fall into a routine religion without life and power. We can sing without real joy or praise; we can pray without any earnestness or fervency; we can read the Bible without feeding on its truths; and we can know the doctrines of the gospel without proving their influences upon the heart. Pray against this, yes, pray against all lifeless religion. I would have my soul vital all over and as sensitive towards God as though it were flayed of all earth-hardened skin upon it. Every truth, every promise, every word of God should make me feel intensely, acutely, and at once. I beseech you who are believers to strive after this. Remember how tender the Savior was. There was no stone about His heart. May you be as tender as He was, and you will then be fashioned into the likeness for which God is preparing you by His eternal Spirit. Dread growing hard in your thoughts of sin. Dread growing cold in your thoughts of Christ. Dread growing stony in your thoughts of your fellow sinners. But let this promise be pleaded in your prayers before God, "I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." The Lord fulfill it to you for His truth's sake, and His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EZEKIEL 36.

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THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAT BUSINESS
NO. 1130

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 7, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation; and uphold me with Your free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall be converted unto You."
Psalm 51:12-13.

BELOVED brothers and sisters, sinners are all around us living in their sins. Tens of thousands in our great cities, and our country towns and villages are abiding in the densest spiritual darkness. They do not know their right hand from their left as to eternal things. And an equally numerous class who do know something of the letter of the gospel are yet as men who see but perceive not, who hear but understand not. Some of these wandering ones are in great misery every day, as the result of their sins, and if we knew what they suffered, we would greatly pity them. It would be impossible for us to remain indifferent if we heard their secret groans. And all these sinners, whether they are suffering or not, are living to the dishonor of God, robbing God of the glory which is due Him as Creator, and more or less dishonoring the Lord Jesus who receives no reward from them as Redeemer. If we were in a right state of heart, we could not live where we are without feeling daily anguish on account of abounding sin. Meanwhile, all around us there are potent agencies at work to hold these sinners in their present condition, and prevent their escape into a better life. We may be idle, but the powers of darkness and their agents are busy—busy in working mischief, leading men into one form of error or another, or casting one or other of the nets of infidelity around them. Hell from beneath is stirred at this moment. If there is no revival in the church of God, there is certainly a revival among her enemies. They are compassing sea and land to make proselytes, though when they make them, they will be tenfold more the children of hell than they were before. The activity of the hosts of the Evil One should act as the sound of the alarm to awake the slumbering army of the living God. What are you doing, O sleepers? Arise, for the Philistines are at your gates!

Meanwhile, the case is still graver. Sinners are dying. Every hour hurries a company of them into eternity. They are carried away as with a flood. They fall like grass before the mower's scythe. And where do they go? Alas, we know, but how little do we consider. They are driven from the presence of God, and from all hope of restoration. Their woe is such as cannot be described in language, though in the book of God, the Holy Spirit has employed terms of extreme expressions, whose meaning it

would be hardly possible to exaggerate. I might say, eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the doom which awaits all those who perish in impenitence. Beloved, the thought of souls sinking into everlasting woes stirs me with the desire to awake you. I feel that if my heart is cold, I may share the responsibility of any lack of zeal in you, but if I shall be helped to be earnest, I shall hope that the sacred contagion will spread, and that believers in Christ all around will be deeply concerned for the souls of others.

Our topic, then, is the life business of the Christian—to teach transgressors God's ways, that sinners may be converted unto Him. We shall handle our subject thus—first, we shall show *who are to teach others;* secondly, *what they are to aim at in their teaching;* thirdly, *why they should thus seek the conversion of others,* and, fourthly, *how they can do this,* for there may be some who will need a little practical guidance as to what they shall attempt.

I. First, dear brethren WHO ARE TO TEACH TRANSGRESSORS THAT THEY MAY BE CONVERTED TO GOD? The reply is easy. The text is found in a psalm which is deeply penitential all through, but ends in the joy of forgiven sin. The words before us relate to joy restored by a sense of pardon. Therefore the men who should teach others the ways of God are those *who have, themselves, been pardoned.* Who else can tell of the guilt of sin but men upon whom the burden of sin has pressed, who have felt the arrows of conviction in their own soul, who have been bowed into the dust, because they have felt that the wrath of God rested upon them? They can speak with authority concerning what they have personally felt. When such men speak of pardoning love, and of the blood which cleanses, how sweetly do they tell of that blessed moment when their transgressions were forgiven and their sins were covered? These are not the men to descant upon the dignity of human nature, the excellences of virtue, and the merit of moral reformation. Their story is of quite another kind. They cry, "We have destroyed ourselves, and all our help is found in Jesus. We are condemned, and have no means of self-justification, but there is a precious blood that speaks better things than that of Abel, which pleads for us." Pardoned sinners go, and publish the story of what God's grace has done for you. You are the ones, and none others in the world, who can tell it to advantage. Tell it with the hope that your fellow men will hear it and live.

While, however, all pardoned sinners ought to do this, we should remember that *we are most fit for the doing of it when we are full of the joy* of God's salvation. Notice the prayer—"Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation…Then will I teach transgressors Your ways." If you are doubtful as to whether you are saved or not; the sword of the Spirit is rusted in your hand or hidden in a scabbard. You cannot wield the weapons of your holy war with any force while your arm is trembling with doubt. You must know in yourself that you are forgiven, and that you have proved the power of the precious blood, before you can speak to others with the hope that they will believe your message. When Luther lay sick and sor-

rowing, before he had found peace with God, a truly gracious monk came to his bedside and said, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." Luther looked at him, for he had often repeated those words in the creed, but had never felt their power before. The man of God said, "You believe in the forgiveness of David, you believe in the forgiveness of Peter, believe you in the like forgiveness of your own sins through the precious blood of Jesus." And Luther did believe it, and from that time he spoke like a man whom God had sent, speaking mightily because he believed confidently. In preaching justification by faith, he roared like a lion in the glory of his strength, for the joy of the Lord in his own soul had become his strength to bear testimony to others. I wonder not that some men doubt and waver, and vacillate in their doctrinal sentiments and teachings, and talk about views and opinions. O sirs, if they had once felt a broken heart, and the terrors of a broken law, if they had once known the power of the blood to bind up the wounds of the heart, they would speak of certainties, and would soon come to be accused, as some of us are, of being positive and dogmatic. Who can help being dogmatic about a thing which is his very life, and is as sure to him as his existence itself? While we believe in the joy of the Lord, we shall not come to sinners with, "ifs" and "buts," but with a faith which will, by God's grace, also help them to believe.

To prepare us to win souls, *we must have the Holy Spirit resting upon us,* for the text says, "Uphold me with Your free Spirit." The Spirit of God in the church is the standing miracle which proves that she is of God. Were the Spirit of God gone from her, it would be impossible for the church to hold her ground. But the Holy Spirit abiding in the church is the testimony of God to His church, and the strength of her testimony for her God. Beloved, if the Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and rest on you continually, you will sweetly tell of your Lord's grace, and of His dying love. The right words will come, for it shall be often given you in the same hour what you shall speak. The right emotions will attend the words, for the Spirit of God creates tenderness and pity. The ice will melt in your spirit; the hard frosts of your long backsliding winter will yield to the returning sun of righteousness. The season of cold and death shall be over, and gone and the time of the singing of birds shall have come to your soul. Then will you be able to teach transgressors God's ways. O brethren, pray for a revival in your own souls. Beseech the Holy Spirit to come upon you. Entreat the Lord to send the breath from the four winds, not only upon the dry bones, but also upon the men who have to prophesy in the valley of the dead.

Note, also, that if we would bear good testimony for God to the conversion of souls, *we must, by the Spirit of God, be upheld in consistency of life,* "Uphold me with Your free Spirit." If you are inconsistent in your own daily lives, brethren, how can you hope to be useful to others! The old proverb is a true one, "Actions speak louder than words." If we speak to men upon the evil of sin, and yet indulge in it, what can they infer

from our conduct? If we tell them of the wrath of God against evil, and yet find pleasure in it ourselves, will they believe us?

If we speak of a Savior's dying love, and yet are unloving, how will they believe us to be Christ's disciples? Vain must it be for us to converse upon the power of grace, when it never appears in our own conduct. Inconsistency will mar the most eloquent testimony, and make it no better than silence. If we are unholy, we shall pull down with our right hand dexterously what we in a clumsy manner attempt to build up with our left. We must be consistent, and our prayer must be—"Uphold me with Your free Spirit," or we cannot teach transgressors. Then, brethren, we shall not say, "Stand by, for I am holier than you!" But feeling that we owe our preservation entirely to divine grace, we shall not reckon it any condescension on our part to come down to teach even the most guilty transgressors God's ways, so that the most notorious sinners may be converted to God.

Brethren, the text plainly shows us that pardoned sinners, possessed of the Holy Spirit, rejoicing in salvation, and upheld in consistency of life, are the chosen instruments of God for the conversion of their fellow men. Let us note this and act accordingly. I see nothing in the text, and indeed, nothing in the Scriptures, about a certain class of officials being set apart to convert sinners to the exclusion of others. One of the most deadly injuries ever inflicted upon the church of God was the invention of the distinction of clergy and laity. There really is no such distinction in the Word of God. On the contrary, the apostle says to the saints, *"You are God's cleros"*—you are God's clergy—you are God's heritage, all of you. And another apostle tells you that the Lord Jesus has made you kings and priests unto God, not *some* of you, but all His people. God forbid that we should ever arrogate any superiority over our fellows. The ministry is not ours alone, you also are all to minister according as you have gifts and grace. All the members of Christ's body have a ministry to discharge—not the tongue alone, but the hand and the feet. Even those parts of the body which are least observable, and even less comely, are all necessary for the health of the entire system, and therefore should occupy themselves in their own peculiar service. Do not excuse yourselves, therefore, by saying, "We will pray for *you*, that *you* may teach transgressors, and sinners may be converted unto God." Do it, my brethren, for greatly do I need your prayers, but do not, when you have prayed for me, forget that you also are bought with the blood of Christ, and therefore use all your strength to His service.

Neither does the text suggest that persons of superior abilities are the only persons who should addict themselves to teaching transgressors. The least in ability, the man of one talent, should as diligently serve his Lord as the servant whose talents are more numerous. Neither does it appear that men, because of the pressure of business, are to think themselves excused, for David was a king, and kings have much to do. In any kingdom much thought and activity must be required, and David might therefore, have claimed exemption from spiritual work. But he knew that

he had been a sinner, and he knew that he had been saved, and therefore he was ready to help others. Have you been saved? Then, dear brother, though you are up to your throat in business cares, still, nevertheless, say, "I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted unto You." For, beloved, if the saved ones do not communicate the gospel to the unconverted, who will? Will the devil try to save them? Will the devil's servants try to save them? Will the men who are themselves in error or in unbelief, try to convert others to Jesus? You know they will not. Who else ought to do it? "Unto the wicked God says, what have you to do to declare My statutes." Nobody ought to teach the things of God but the regenerate, and these are bound by a thousand ties to give themselves to the service. My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, if there are no bonds laid upon us, to seek the wandering souls of men, upon whom can the labor be laid? Who else can do it? Shall the blind lead the blind? Shall the dead prophesy to the dead? What other heart but that, which has itself been renewed, can tell of regeneration, and the Spirit's quickening power? Remember, if the tongues of the saints speak not for Jesus, then the testimony for Jesus has ceased from among men. If the saints do not preach the gospel, the angels cannot, for no such ministry has been assigned to them, and therefore sinners must perish for lack of knowledge. O church of God, to you is this commission given. Be not faithless in it, but be clear of the blood of all men.

II. We will consider WHAT THE BELIEVER OUGHT TO AIM AT IN HIS WORK WITH SOULS. Brethren, our great aim is *conversion—the conversion of transgressors*. "I will teach transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall be converted unto You." We are to aim at the conversion of all men, of whatever sort they may be. For Christ has a people redeemed by blood in all ranks of society. We should seek for the conversion of our children, and of those who sit constantly with us under the shadow of the means of grace. Still, lest it should be forgotten, I will mainly dwell upon this point, that if there are any in the world who peculiarly and above all others are transgressors, these are the persons whom our own sense of love to Christ should induce us to teach God's ways. For if there is glory brought to God by one person more than another when he is converted, it is by one who was a notorious sinner. The forgiveness of great sin, the reclaiming of a man from gross habits of vice, the deliverance of a woman who has fallen, these are the things which make the grace of God illustrious. The church of God should remember that the light is most needed where the darkness is darkest, that the physician is most required where disease is most rife. Therefore she should spend her utmost strength against the most fully developed sin. The point to aim at is the *conversion* of sinners, not merely their reformation. It is a good thing to improve a man by reforming him; he is all the better for being sober, honest, and industrious. It was a good thing that the beasts, when they were in Noah's ark, were so tame. But they came out as they went in, lions were lions, and vipers were still vipers.

The work we long to see accomplished is far greater than mere restraint or education; it is a thorough transformation. We pray that the lions may become lambs, and the serpents become doves. Less than this it is not worthwhile for the Christian to live for, for there are philanthropic minds abroad apart from the church that will look after moral reformation, and sufficiently discharge the service. Let us help them if we can, but it is a side issue. Our business is a more radical one, the laying of the axe to the root of the tree by the change of the nature. Our objective is more lasting; we have to do with immortal souls and their eternal future. Beloved, we must keep to this, and be content with nothing short of the conversion of men. But it must be their conversion to *God*—"Sinners shall be converted unto You." I am very glad to convert a brother to scriptural views upon baptism, church government, and the higher doctrines. It is always desirable to see brethren learn the truth, but what will be the use of it if the individual is not first converted to God? The main objective of all Christian work should be that sinners may be converted *to God,* that they may love the God whom they have forgotten, that they may adore the Christ whom they have despised, that they may feel the power of the Holy Spirit whom they have grieved. This is what we desire, O sinners. It is not your outward washing to make you appear as Christians, it is your inward renewing, and it is your possession of a new heart and right spirit that we desire. "You must be born-again." It will not do for us to mince matters with you. Our prayer is that you may be turned to God, as the prodigal son was when he said, "I have sinned against heaven, and before you." May such a blessed turning as this come to you, for this, and only this, can fit you for glory. Unless you are converted, and become as little children, you can in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.

This work is to be accomplished by teaching. "Then will I *teach* transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall be converted." It cannot be done by processions, pictures, incense and performances after the manner of the Romanists and the Anglicans. And it cannot be accomplished by excitement, bawling, stamping and shouting, after the manner of certain brethren of our acquaintance, who cry, "Believe! Believe! Believe!" but who do not tell the people what they are to believe, nor instruct them in the faith. Teaching is needed. All the earnestness possible should go with the teaching, but there must be sound doctrine, real instruction, solemn truth made known. It is by such means that sinners will be converted to God.

The most important teaching is that which dwells upon the *Lord's ways*—God's way of punishing sin, God's way of forgiving sin, God's way of mercy through a sacrifice, God's way of pardon through faith in Jesus, God's ways of wounding, of healing, of killing, of making alive. God's ways of sending forth the Eternal Spirit, and working as He wills among the sons of men, neither waiting for man, nor tarrying for the sons of men. The more of God's ways we proclaim, the more likely is it that sinners will be converted to God. You see, then, brothers and sisters, what

you are to aim at, and you are not to be satisfied without it. Did we not, at the beginning of this year, propose the one to the other, that we would, each one, seek for the conversion of at least one soul? Brethren, we have now passed into September. Has your desire been fulfilled? Has your labor of love been blessed? I know that some of you have been the means of bringing several to Jesus. I could point at this moment, if I chose, to one who would blush to have his name known, who during the last few months has led several to Jesus, and that by inducing them to attend here, lending them his seat, and taking care that they were comfortably accommodated. He has also a kind, encouraging word for them, and he looks after them with much anxiety and therefore he has had the joy of bringing them to Jesus. God be thanked for this. May this be the joy of you all! Brethren, are you doing something of that sort, or striving for Jesus in some other way? If not, God grant that in the few weeks of the year we have left, you may yet accomplish something for the Lord, by the power of His Spirit.

III. And now, thirdly, gathering up all my strength for it, let me try to show you, my beloved brethren, WHY WE SHOULD SEEK THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS.

And it should be done first—and I will begin with the lowest motive—because *it will save us from many ills.* I believe that the not seeking to win souls brings many spiritual maladies upon Christians. The lepers outside the gates of Samaria found that the Syrians had fled. They went from tent to tent and feasted, and at last they said, "We do not well. Let us go and tell this to the king's household, lest some mischief befall us." They felt that if they did not reveal the good news, some evil might happen to them. And I tell you solemnly, God, in discipline, often brings sorrow upon His own people because of their unholy silence as to gracious things. An eminent surgeon, who was also an eminent Christian, visited a lady who was a professed believer in Christ, but who, like some ladies I have heard of, was frequently troubled with imaginary diseases. The good doctor was frequently called in, until at last he said to her, "Madam, I will give you a prescription which I am certain will make a healthy woman of you, if you will follow it." "Sir," she said, "I shall be so glad to have good health, that I will be sure to follow it." "Madam, I will send you the prescription this evening." When it arrived it consisted of these words, "Do good to somebody." She roused herself to relieve a poor neighbor, and then sought out others who needed her help, and the Christian woman, who had been so constantly desponding, nervous, and fanciful, became a healthy, cheerful woman, for she had an objective to live for and found joy in doing good to others. I can recommend that medicine to many whose lives are subject to bondage, for I know brothers and sisters who are never a day free from pain who are, nevertheless, full of happiness because they live to serve the Lord with their substance. Some of you might do great good with articles which you might very readily spare. You have ornaments which Christian men and women are better without, which, if broken up or sold, would aid the good cause. I wish many

would follow the example of Oliver Cromwell when he went into Exeter Cathedral and saw 12 massive images of the apostles in silver. "Oh, oh," he said, "why are these gentlemen here?" "They are the 12 apostles," was the reply. "Very well," he said, "melt them down and send them about doing good." I wish Christians would do that with some of their gold and silver jewelry. Anyway, for our own sakes, lest the canker get into our gold, and the rust into our silver, use it for doing good. Yes, by all means, seek the souls of men for God. Some evil will befall you if you keep the gospel to yourselves.

Secondly, *it will greatly add to your joy.* Who does not like to be the bearer of good news? The pleasant tale of redeeming grace and dying love, the pleasant story of a Savior who came from heaven to earth, to lift us up from earth to heaven, the story of our own conversion, the story of God's goodness since our conversion—why, it must be delightful to tell it. And when you have spoken for Jesus, if you succeed in converting a sinner to God, then really comes the pleasure. Great is the mother's joy when she looks upon her first-born child. She remembers no more her travail for joy that a man is born into the world. I am sure, however, there is more pleasure looking upon a new-born child of God, and remembering no more your anguish over that soul, and your care in seeking to bring it to Jesus, because you have such bliss in knowing that there is one soul the more to decorate the Redeemer's crown. Happy are our lives who can win souls! I am very apt to be cast down and distressed in soul, but, next to fellowship with my Lord, my greatest consolation is found in receiving glad tidings of souls saved. Here comes a letter of loving thanks from Ceylon, and another from the north of Norway, saying, "Blessed be God that I read your sermons and found a Savior." From America I hear of an eminent Jewish Rabbi who has become a Baptist minister through reading one of my discourses. And recently I received a letter from Havana from a sailor who had just left the hospital. He told me how the man who died in the next bed told him that he had a treasure which he would give him if he would take care of it, and he then handed him a number of my sermons stitched together. "They have saved my soul," he said, "and I hope they will save yours." The sailor who writes blesses God in a warm-hearted way that it is so, and the sermons have led him to Jesus. Is this not joy? Would you not like to share it? From almost every quarter of the globe the good news comes to me—comes like manna, almost every day, and my heart is glad within me. I want you to know the same gladness, all of you in your measure. This honey is so sweet that I would have your mouths filled with it. You are each one helping me in the work of the College, which aims at helping our young brothers to preach, and, therefore, I do not speak as if I found fault, but still, dear brothers and sisters, you may *personally* be engaged in the Master's work, and so, in a larger degree, have a share in the joy of seeing transgressors converted to God.

I have, however, better reasons than these. We will get out of these selfish motives into something higher. Unless you tell abroad the gospel,

how will you prove the sincerity of your prayers? You bow your knees, and say, "Your kingdom come; Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven." How can it be if you never try to speak a word for Jesus, and never seek to bring new subjects into His kingdom? Your prayers—what can they be but hypocritical if they are not supported by your actions?

Again, *what proof is there of the sincerity of your love to Christ?* You say you love Him, and I believe you do. I believe there are thousands here to whom Christ is dearer than all besides. Show then, a proof of your love. Do you ask, "How?" Out of your Master's mouth shall you receive the answer, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?" Do you answer, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You"? Here, then, is the proof which He demands—"Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs. Distribute unto others the heavenly food which you receive from Me. What I tell you in the ear, speak upon the housetops!" Abundantly yield to your Lord this proof of your affection.

Indeed, beloved, *is there any proof of the sincerity of any man's religion who does not try to spread it?* You have found this good thing, if it is indeed good; you will wish others to have it. What a disgrace it is that Christians should be so indifferent to the spread of the truth in these days! There has been, lately, a revival among Muslims. We had all thought that the crescent was waning, and that Muslims would never endeavor to make converts again. Instead, there appears to have been, in many parts of the world, a singular awakening of the old enthusiasm which marked the early days of Islam. What? And shall the false prophet command the zeal of his followers, and shall not the Son of God possess the souls of His people? Let it not be said Christians are cold. Tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Ashkalon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice over us. Can lies and falsehoods lead men to martyrdom, as popery has done full many a time? Does it lead men and women to seclude themselves, and give all their lives to the service of Antichrist, and is there no zeal left among the believers in Jesus? Followers of God, is there no zeal left among you? The Lord help us to answer this question, as we shall wish to have answered it when the Judge sits upon His throne.

I will go further, and say that if we do not try to bring sinners to Christ, let alone our religion, *where is our humanity?* If I believed that sinners could be annihilated, I would have no particular reason for preaching to them. In fact, I should have a very urgent reason for never doing anything of the kind. Certain heretics teach that if men do not hear the gospel at all, they will be annihilated at death, but if they do hear it, and reject it, they will live and be punished for a time. Then, I say, let them die, they will be better without hearing the gospel, and he is a traitor who preaches it to them and makes them run so great a risk. But we, beloved, who believe the solemn truth which has often made us tremble from head to foot, that the wrath of God *abides* upon the ungodly forever. If we do not attempt their salvation, we are demons! That was a harsh word, but I will not change it; I leave it where it stands. I care not what

pretensions you are making to Christianity. If you are doing nothing in any way for the souls of men, you act like demons! If there is a wreck at sea, and a mariner refuses to aid in saving when he is strong and able, men cry shame of him. A man is dying for need of bread at your door, and if you have plenty, but refuse to give him a crust, and let him die on your doorstep, the whole neighborhood will censure you. But a *soul* perishing; a *soul* perishing for lack of knowledge, for lack of the bread of life, and you have it, and do not hand it to him—O sirs, how dwells the love of God in you? Is there a spark left? You are without grace, for you have fallen below the humanity of nature. In vain are your years of profession, your long prayers and loud professions, if neither your substance nor your tongue is consecrated to God.

Beloved, there is one argument which ought to touch us all, and it is this. Can *any* of us refuse to teach the sons of men if he has really seen and known the Savior? There, stand a minute and look at Him upon the cross. Do you see His wounds and the blood distilling from them? Mark you the traces of agony in that dear face, so lovely, and yet so marred? Have you caught a glimpse of your Master's shoulders, where the plowers made deep furrows with their scourges? Can you gaze through His body into His heart, and see the deeps unknown of anguish which He endured for sinners—guilty, lost, and ruined sinners. And have you no love for them? Does He come to you this morning, and put His pierced hand upon you, and say, "I laid down My life for you, and as My Father has sent Me into the world, even so, I send you." And can you look into His face and say, "My Master, I have never done anything for poor sinners, and I never shall"? No. I think you will say, "My Lord, forgive the past, and help me in years to come." The seraphic Summerfield, just before he died, said to those around him, "I have been looking into eternity, and if ever I should rise from this bed, I shall preach very differently from what I have done." And yet he had preached most fervently the gospel of Christ. Some of us might well say, "I have looked at Jesus; I have seen His selfless Love; I have marked His agonies and groans, and I must preach differently. I must live differently. I must teach differently from anything I have ever done before." O, Holy Spirit, make it so, and Yours shall be the praise.

IV. And now we have to close with the last point, which is to be most practical. The question will arise—HOW, THEN, ARE WE TO TEACH TRANSGRESSORS GOD'S WAYS, that, sinners may be converted to God? I would say to you, dear brothers and sisters, "Wait upon the Lord for direction." But one of the directions you need not wait for is this, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." Some of you, who cannot speak, at least not to many, can assist those who do. If your own tongue will not serve your heart, get other men's tongues to help you. In connection with our College there are always needs, and by helping others into the ministry, you may have a tongue to speak for you if you cannot speak for yourself. Yet still, at your own house talk about the Savior,

or write about Him, or in some other directly personal way try to serve your Lord.

To all believers far and near, be it known at this time, that almost all our Missionary Societies are in need, not so much of money, as of men. The Baptist Missionary Society has sent out a circular requesting the prayers of the churches that God will raise up men who will go abroad. Our older missionaries are dying off, many are coming home through sickness, and very few come forward to fill their places. Surely some brave young men whose hearts God has touched, who have been doing work at home, will cheerfully surrender all they are and all they have, to go and proclaim among the heathen the unsearchable riches of Christ. I would be a recruiting sergeant this morning, and I pray the Lord that some of the right kind may join the noble army of missionaries.

At home we greatly need evangelists to travel throughout the land. I do not see where funds will come from for their maintenance, but if men of some small property who can preach, would retire from business, and go from town to town preaching the gospel, it would be the grandest work they could undertake. If we had 100 such men in our own denomination, which would go from place to place like the apostles, the missing link in the church would be supplied, and we would see many sinners converted to God. When any of you move into the country, as you do when you increase in wealth, should you not feel that you ought to seek the good of the people? And if there is no church of your own faith and order near, should you not commence one? Rest not till you see the gospel preached in the neighborhood and that fully, that sinners may be converted to God.

Ministers also are needed, and especially ministers who can support themselves. How much good might be done if the many merchants in London, men of education, would, on Sunday, go into the villages and preach the gospel, bearing their own expenses, and helping to find their own preaching room? It is impossible, in a poor community like the Baptist denomination, that we can ever cover the country with the gospel if all ministers must be supported. We need a body of men who do not need support—who can do without it—who would think it their highest honor, like Paul the apostle, to be no burden to the churches. I feel that if I were a business man, I would like to make money for Jesus. And with a prosperous business, such as some of you have, it would be delightful to me to be the father of a church in some destitute locality where it would be a pleasure to give, rather than to take. Whereas by our present mode of action, a poor little church must be presided over by a brother who is pretty nearly starved, and does not obtain a stipend equal to the average wages of a common artisan, and therefore the cause of God is spoken of evilly. The fault does not always lie with the church, which may be too poor to do better, but with rich brethren who ought to be preaching the gospel, instead of hearing it. Many here, I daresay, among my own hearers, possess latent talent which only needs to be dug out of the earth and delivered from the napkin. Lord, stir them up, and set their tongues on

fire! If the Lord hears that prayer, and touches your lips with a live coal from off His altar, you will say, "Here am I! Send me."

"But these things are beyond our power," you say. Then there is our own Sunday school. Do you know that because I am constantly urging our friends to go out and teach anywhere, the result has been that a large number of the Sunday schools in our neighborhood are well supplied by our people, and our own schools are often short of teachers? I do not desire to narrow your spirit which prompts you to work in the schools of other churches, but do not forget your own home work. Thanks be to God for the zeal of our young people, but the best women in the church, and the best men ought to be in the Sunday school, teaching there what they experientially know. I pray you see to it that our Sunday schools are well sustained. There are enough of you to do this.

Then, again, time was when we had in our Evangelist Society, for preaching in the streets, many young men, and some who had better have learned a little more before they began. Now we have not so much of that. Is zeal for preaching the gospel diminishing among us? Brothers, it ought not to be. That Society needs many more who will proclaim the gospel of Jesus by the wayside, or in the lodging houses. Let me say to every man who can speak for Jesus, do not let that excellent work flag, no, not for a moment. And the visiting societies, and the tract societies, all these need helpers. Are there not some here who will come to their rescue? I love to see our brethren opening little prayer meetings in back streets, in places where the gospel is not proclaimed, or among people who do not go to hear it. Try to start fresh places of worship in regions remote from others. For all this kind of service Christ needs you, brethren. Shall He call in vain? We wish those we love to show their love to us. Do, therefore, by the love of Jesus, by the blood of Jesus, if there is any love in you towards Him, and any gratitude for what He has done for you, go forth from this day forward, and teach transgressors His ways, that sinners may be converted to Him. The Lord seal this address with His blessing. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 5.

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NO. 1131

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Gather out the stones."
Isaiah 62:10.

"GATHER out the stones"—that is to say, out of the King's highway. Clear the road; make room for coming sinners. Take away all stumbling blocks. Make the gospel plain and simple, and come to the help of those who find hindrances and impediments in their progress to the Savior. Such stones are there and Satan tries to increase their number. The Lord's servants must gather them out. That is my objective. I do not intend to attempt anything beyond that. I shall only try, with great simplicity of thought and speech, to deal with those things which prevent sinners from getting to Christ, for perhaps while we are trying to do this, the Eternal Spirit may bring them to Jesus, and they may find salvation on the spot. To that end let all who are already saved cry mightily to the Lord for His saving health, and consoling grace.

Beloved friends, when poor souls are coming to Jesus, they are generally their own worst enemies. They have a singular ingenuity in finding out reasons why they should not be saved. A strange infatuation seems to possess them so that they ransack heaven, earth, and hell to find discouragements. They become inventive of difficulties where difficulties are not, and often the pastor, whose business it is to look after the little ones, finds himself, notwithstanding his former experience with persons of like character, utterly bewildered. He is often put to a nonplus with the strange and novel difficulties which awakened sinners will imagine, and the reasons which they invent why they should not believe in Jesus Christ. One would hardly think that the human mind could twist itself into such knots. So many sinners, so many new arguments, for each one has a logic of his own by which he labors to prove the impossibility of his own salvation. Upon consideration, this will not appear very remarkable, for they have long been living in sin, and it is no wonder that when they begin to see their state, they should be bewildered with fear. Who would not be full of fear if all of a sudden he saw hell opening right under his feet? Lately they have been eating nothing but unsatisfying husks which may nourish swine, but cannot support men. No wonder that they are very weak and scarcely can stagger towards the Father's house. Poor souls, their hearts are in their mouths, for they cannot tell what is to come next. Only a dreadful sound is in their ears, as of the destroying angel pursuing them with vengeance. They know that God is angry with them, and they do not yet understand His great love to penitent sinners. And so they are like men in an upper chamber who start up in the night

when a cry of fire is raised, and they know not which way to turn. Or I may compare them to mariners in great jeopardy at sea, when they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. I wonder not, I say, that they refuse the comforts which we offer them, for it is one of the effects and symptoms of great sickness that the patient refuses all manner of meat. He has lost his appetite; he is too ill to eat, and his soul draws near to the gates of death.

Moreover, in addition to fear and weakness, seeking sinners are generally the prey to severe assaults of the great enemy of souls. When Satan sees a soul coming to Christ, he hastens to aggravate that sinner's doubts and fears, and raise a double tempest in his spirit. It is "now or never" with the devil. He perceives that if he does not tear poor souls in pieces right now, and drive them to utter desperation, they will soon be in Christ's fold where he will never be able to touch them again. They are just escaping from the old slaveholder's hand, and if he does not bring them back and chain them up with fresh irons, he will lose his captives. For they will follow the morning star, and enter the land of liberty where his whip cannot reach them, therefore he uses double craft and cruelty to oppress and puzzle poor seeking sinners. They are in a state of mind in which they are ready to believe anything which he will tell them, and therefore upon this string, the arch-deceiver plays right horribly. What with a troubled conscience, and with Satan, it is no wonder, that the seeking sinner falls into a maze, and scarcely knows which way to turn. He sees no ground for hope, but a thousand reasons for despair. It is therefore a holy and necessary work to endeavor to remove some of the stumbling blocks out of the poor beginner's way. When I have attempted this good work, I shall do far better still. For I shall point the coming sinner to Him who in His own person has effectually removed every real stumbling block, so that there is now nothing that can keep a sinner from his God, if that sinner is but ready to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. First, then, by way of LIFTING SOME OF THE STONES OUT OF THE ROAD, let us begin with a very old, and very common difficulty. I refer to the doctrine of election. Many will say, "Perhaps I am not one of God's chosen. It may be that my name is not written in the Lamb's book of life." Unbelief hammers away at this. It is a favorite topic with doubters. And think not, my dear friends, that I am about to attempt an explanation of the mysteries of predestination, or mean to deny the doctrine of election for an instant. I believe the doctrine of election to be as certainly true as the doctrine of the existence of God. I am not about to attempt to clear up the metaphysical difficulties which could be suggested, world without end, by a subtle thinker. Those I leave to others, and I wish them joy in their task. If I were to venture upon such a labor, I should only be like Sisyphus who rolled a stone uphill which always rolled down again. The difficulties about free agency and predestination have existed, do exist, and will exist to the world's end, yes, and

throughout eternity too. Both facts are, to my mind, certain, but where they meet, none knows but God, Himself.

Here is the way John Bunyan met the difficulty in his, *"Grace Abounding,"* which book I earnestly recommend to every tempted soul. In that autobiography, which he entitles, *"Grace Abounding,"* he says that he was perplexed for many days together over the doctrine, till at last this thought came into his mind: search in the Book of God, and see whether ever there was a sinner that trusted in Jesus who was refused. So the good man set to work and read the Book through from the first of Genesis to the last of Revelation, but he could not find an instance of a sinner that ever did come to Christ who was rejected because he was not elect. And the snare was broken, and he said, "I will go, even I. He will not reject me." There is a practical, commonsense way out of the difficulty. I know not any better way of practically treating the matter than of saying, "I will go to Jesus because He bids me and because He has said, 'Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.' If I go to Him, and He casts me out, then He has broken His promise. But that He can never do, so now I venture to rest upon His blood, and leave my soul's salvation in His hands." In other matters you act so, when you are ill, you do not know whether you are ordained to get well, but you send for the doctor. You cannot tell whether you are predestinated to be rich, but you endeavor to make money. You do not know whether you will live through the day, but you work to provide yourself with bread. Thus common sense cuts the knot which mere theory can never untie. Leave the subtleties of argument alone, and act as sensible men. Go to Jesus, and try whether He will reject you, and you will be saved.

Another difficulty which is very common is *a deep sense of sin.* In some persons, conviction of sin and terror concerning the wrath to come, arise out of the recollection of one glaring sin. I have known persons more troubled about one atrocious offense, than about all the transgressions of the rest of their lives. The one great blot has appeared to stare them in the face both day and night, and to burn its way into their souls. In others, however, it is the whole series of their iniquities, the indefinite but most crushing weight of a life of careless unbelief. They could not count their sins, they know that, and they do not try to do so, but all their sins together surround them like raging waves of the sea, or a pack of hungry wolves howling for their prey, or the dense clouds and fierce winds of a gathering tempest hastening to overwhelm a half-shipwrecked vessel. They can hardly believe that salvation is possible in their case. Give me your hand, my brother, and let me say to you, "Do you think Christ died on the cross for nothing? There must have been some great reason for His being put to such a cruel and shameful death. That reason was great sin. If there had not been great sin, there would not have been need of a great Savior." Know assuredly that the Savior is greater than your sin, and His merit is greater than your guilt—

"If all the sins that men have done,
In will, in word, in thought, in deed,
Since worlds were made, or time begun,

Were laid on one poor sinner's head,
The stream of Jesus' precious blood,
Applied, removes the dreadful load!"

If the blackest sinner outside the gates of hell would believe in Jesus, in that moment all his sins would cease to be. For there is, and there must be an infinite efficacy in the blood of such a one as Jesus Christ, who "counted it not robbery to be equal with God." Does the Son of God smart beneath the lash of justice? Then, beloved, that substitutionary suffering must have a merit in it which it is not in your power or mine to measure. Does sin trouble you? Then remember that it is written, "All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Remember this, again, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." And hear, yet again, this word, "Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Do you know, I feel right happy to have to talk to you about this, and yet I feel a dart going through me lest I should not speak of it as I ought to do, for, oh, I would that poor troubled sinners would see that sin need not deter them from coming to a reconciled God. The blood of Jesus Christ has already removed from before the throne of justice all the transgressions of all those who come and rest in Jesus. If you believe in the Savior sent of God, your sin is already gone, and you are accepted in the Beloved.

Another stone in the road, in the case of some, is a fear that *the day of grace has passed*. Probably there may only be one or two in this place who have ever fallen under that trouble, but those one or two are precious, and I must seek them. Read again Bunyan's, *"Grace Abounding,"* and you will find him recording that he said to himself, "Oh, that I had given my heart to God seven years ago, but now it is certainly too late." And then he remembered that there had been a large addition to the little Baptist church at Bedford, and he said to himself, "Now God has saved all the people He means to save in Bedford, and as for the poor tinker, He will never save him. My day of grace is over." I do not quite know where that notion of, "a day of grace," came from. I am not quite sure about the truth of that teaching, and if it means that any man, who repents and believes, will find it too late in this life, I deny it altogether. But without controversy I will tell you one thing for certain—there never was a sinner who believed in Jesus who believed in Him too late for salvation. There never was a man in this world who cried to God for His mercy through the blood of Jesus, and who had for his answer, "Your day of grace is past." No such thing. How dare I say, how dare any man say that a fellow creature's day of grace is past? When the thief's hands were nailed to the cross, and the cross was lifted up, and he hung bleeding there, soon to die, and to be devoured by the carrion crows, it looked as if his day of grace were past, and yet his day of glory had dawned. For the Savior said, "Today shall you be with Me in Paradise." The Lord's grace can come to a man at any time, and at any hour. It is never too late to believe in Jesus. Dear heart, it is not too late for you. Do not believe the suggestion of Satan, but come, and welcome. Mercy's gate is not shut. Mr. Bun-

yan escaped from that temptation by this excellent method—he read the scriptures diligently, and he came upon that verse, (you remember hearing our friends, the Jubilee Singers, sing it), "Yet there is room!" "Oh!" he thought, "Then my day of grace is not past." "Yet there is room." Lay hold on that, I pray you, you who think your time of hope is over. "Yet there is room."—

"Don't stay away,
Brothers, don't stay away!
For the angel says
There's room enough in
Heaven for you!"

Let not the demon of unbelief tempt you to limit God's mercy, and set bounds to His power. Come and learn the infinite compassion of your gracious God.

Here and there I have met with persons who have stumbled at a very terrible stone in the road. It may never have occurred to some of you, and I hope it never may, but it is this—they have a tendency to *blasphemous thoughts.* The more earnest a man is about religion, the more likely he is to meet with this peculiar temptation, especially if there is some bodily disease about him. I should never have believed it if I had not experienced it—what intolerably wicked, atheistic, and profane thoughts will come into the minds of pure-minded people, against their will and without their consent, to their utter horror and dismay. I can remember as a child hearing a man swear. I think it was the first time in my life I had heard such profanity, and I felt as if I had been cut by a whip. It was the only word of blasphemy I think that had ever passed my ears then, and yet, when I was under conviction of sin, seeking the Lord, thoughts that I dare not even think of now, would thrust themselves upon me when I tried to get alone in prayer. And I rose astonished, as though I was scared from my knees. When I attempted to cry for God's mercy, there would be sure to come some hideous sentence which I had never heard from anyone else, and certainly thought I could never have invented in my heart, which would well near drive me from the mercy seat. Well, now, beloved, it may be you cannot grapple with these thoughts, and I would advise you not to try. I believe they are works of Satan who is darting his thoughts into your soul in a secret manner. They are not thoughts of yours. They should lead you to go and tell Jesus Christ about it, but they should not drive you to despair. Tell the Lord that these thoughts, if they are yours, are hateful to you, and pray Him to remove them. If they are not yours, but come from Satan, ask Jesus to rebuke the evil spirit that you may have a little peace. And I will tell you another thing. If these thoughts, are yours and you are guilty of them, do Christ the honor to believe that He can pardon even these. And throw yourself, with all the defilement of your thoughts, black as you are, right down at His feet, and He will save you notwithstanding all. A little sinner can, as it were, only give to Christ little glory by trusting Him, but now you feel yourself the greatest of sinners, give Jesus the great glory of believing that His precious blood can cleanse you—that He is able to save

to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. O soul, let these blasphemous thoughts drive you to Jesus, and the devil will find that they do not answer his purpose, and will cease to assail you with them. Stand at the foot of the cross and resolve never to depart from it, and Satan will depart from you.

Another stone which frequently cause some to stumble is the need, or rather *the absence of anything like a horrible thought, or a terror, or an alarm.* I have known some who have believed in Jesus Christ as soon as ever Christ has been preached to them, and consequently, they have found joy with but little difficulty. And then, a little while afterwards they have said, "This cannot be real conversion because I did not suffer the terrors and distresses which some others have experienced." There is a numerous class to whom we have preached Christ who have replied to all encouragements, "Oh, but we don't feel the terrors of the Lord. We are not plunged in despair, we are not haunted with horrible forebodings, and therefore we are not in the right road, and cannot expect to be saved." Oh, my dear friend, if you are allowed to come to Jesus without being so molested by the Evil One, do not fret about that, but rather rejoice. If you have not those horrors, be thankful you don't. Be thankful to God that He brought you to Christ without your first having run into an excess of outward sin and wicked unbelief. Repentance of sin is necessary, but to doubt the mercy of God, and to run into despair are not necessary, but they are even injurious and sinful. Do you think that Christ needs the devil to prepare you for Him? Unbelief cannot lead to salvation. If you do not happen to be hunted about by the hell hounds of remorse and despondency, you quite as much need the Good Shepherd, and are quite as welcome to Him. There is no need to go round by hell's gate to get to heaven. Trust in Jesus just as you are, and you are saved. Those who have those dreadful thoughts would be glad enough to be rid of them. Don't be asking for needless vexations, but come to Jesus. Rest in His atoning blood just as you are, and He will give you all that is necessary, to fit you for His kingdom.

There are some, again, who are troubled because they think they have *a lack of sensibility with regard to their sins.* They argue thus—"I understand that whoever believes in Jesus shall be saved, but I must feel my sinfulness. I hear you, sir, describe sometimes the deep contrition, and brokenness of spirit which many have felt, and I fear I have not felt anything of the kind. May I hope that Jesus is able to save me notwithstanding my insensibility?" Our answer to that is—a broken heart is a gift of God's grace. It is not a ground or reason why Jesus Christ should save you, but it is a part of salvation. A man is saved by having his heart broken, and being led to cast himself upon Jesus. And if you have not yet received this part of salvation, your business is to come to Jesus for it, not to stay away till you get it of yourself, and then come to Christ with your feelings as a recommendation. If you were to come to Jesus, and say, "Lord, I have broken my heart down to the right state, now I will believe that You can save me." I think He would say to you, "If you have

done so much, go and do the rest. If you can make yourself fit for grace, go and make yourself fit for glory." No, but if you have not a broken heart, come to Jesus Christ for it—

"True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you near,
Without money—
Come to Jesus Christ and buy."

You have not to do something for yourself, and then look to Jesus for the rest. Shame upon you for thinking of such a thing! To melt your heart in the furnace of love is a divine work, and Christ must do it. Come, you stony-hearted sinner, come with the flint and the granite still within you. Come, though you cannot feel, and believe that Christ can make you feel. Come, you who have been annealed like steel in the furnace of transgression and familiarity with sin. Come to Him, for He is able to give you a heart of flesh, and take away your heart of stone. I am fully persuaded that those who mourn their need of feeling are the most feeling people in the world, but I will not dwell upon that truth. It is the greatest mistake for us to imagine that we are to make ourselves feel something, and then Christ will save us. Feelings of contrition are as much His work as is the atonement for the remission of sins. Christ is Alpha as well as Omega in salvation. You must begin with Him, and go on with Him, and end with Him, if end there can ever be.

Now I hear another say, "Ah, but the stone in my road is that I cannot believe. I have not the faith I need to have." Well, beloved seeker, perhaps you have made a mistake about your faith. Do you think that you need to believe with full assurance before you can be saved? If so, listen. The smallest grain of saving faith will save a man. To embrace Christ in your arms like Simeon is a grand act for a full-grown saint, but to touch the hem of His garment is as surely saving as to embrace His person. If you have faith but as a grain of mustard seed, God will recognize that faith, and make it grow, and that faith will save you. It is not quantity, but quality that the Lord looks at. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? That is the point. For remember, the whole of your salvation rests not on your believing, but on the merits of Jesus Christ. Some sinners look too much to their own faith, and not enough to the object of faith. It is the object of faith we should look to, and if we did, our faith would grow. You may look at faith till you think you have none. But, on the other hand, you may look at Christ till you feel you cannot help believing in Him. How many a time, in my little vestry behind there, have I charged this truth home upon those who have said they could not believe? I have said, "What cannot you believe? Cannot you believe God? Is He a liar?" "Ah!" say I to these inquirers, "Suppose you said to me when I told you something, 'I can't believe you,' should I not at once say, 'Why not? What do you know of my character which leads you to think that I am untruthful?'" And they say at once, "Oh, sir, I would not say that to you. I would feel sure if you told me that you knew a thing to be true, that it was so. I would believe you." "Well, then," I have said, "how dare you tell me you cannot believe Jesus Christ, and cannot believe God the Eternal One?

What reason on earth can there be why you should not believe God is speaking the truth, and believe what Jesus Christ says? We will not have it that you cannot believe." Awake, quickened sinner, at the same moment that God gave you spiritual life to feel that you were a sinner, He gave you the principle in which dwells power to believe in Jesus Christ, the sinner's Savior. And we charge you to exercise that power, and to cast yourself, once and for all, upon the finished sacrifice of Christ the Lord.

Again, we have heard persons say, "But I do not think I can be saved, because *I am not like so-and-so."* Well, who is this so-and-so? "Why, my dear grandmother, who died so triumphantly." Ah, and you are a little baby, and you expect to be like your grandmother? You are only just born into the heavenly life, and yet you expect to know and to do all that an old experienced Christian would know and do? I am sure that no man, who has planted an apple tree in his garden, goes the next autumn and expects a crop of apples, as if the tree had been in his orchard for 20 years. Besides, the Lord is not looking for fruit on you in order to recommend you to His mercy, nor ought you to be looking for it. Your fruit must grow on another tree, on that tree where the Savior died. From Him is your fruit found. You be content to have nothing good in yourself, and to be nothing good, but to take all your good from Jesus Christ. "Ah," says one, "but you don't know how bad I am." No, nor yet do you. You are 10 times worse than you think you are. Yes, you are a thousand times worse than you think you are. You are so bad that you are good for nothing. You are neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill. But it is good-for-nothing people who Jesus Christ came to save. Not the worthy, the excellent, the valuable, but those who are humble in their own eyes—those who think themselves nothing, and feel they never can be anything unless a miracle is worked for them. These are they whom the Lord loves to look upon. "He has put down the mighty from their seat, but He has exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty." This is the way He always deals with men. The worse you feel yourself to be, the more you need God's mercy, and the more likely you are to get it. Come and lay hold on eternal life by a simple faith in Jesus Christ. May the Spirit of God lead you to do so.

I will only speak once more about these difficulties. "Oh!" says one, "But *I never have any joy and peace.* And I hear those who are saved say they are so happy and so glad." Ah, there is the door of the house of mercy wide open, and you are outside in the frost and snow. Inside that house—(there, can't you see through that window pane?)—there are happy children sitting round a fire, and they are singing merrily as they eat their evening meal. And you stand out in the cold, and you murmur, "How can I ever enter? I am so cold; I am shivering in this winter's blast. They are so happy in there. How can I be one of the family, and yet stand shivering here?" Now, you need not ask that question. There is the door, and it stands wide open. When Christ's hands were nailed, He set that

door wide open, and the devil cannot shut it. And if you enter in you shall have the same joy as those who are sheltered within. But if you stand outside and expect to get the warmth enjoyed by those within, and hope to sing their cheerful song in the cold, you are greatly mistaken. You shall receive the joy when you exercise the faith. Oh, believe in Jesus, or, in other words, trust in Him. That is the grace which enters in by the door, and participates in the blessings of His mercy. Trust in Him wholly, solely, entirely, and in Him, alone, and, "Being justified by faith," you shall "have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The Lord grant it, and He shall have the praise.

One of our friends at the prayer meeting prayed that I might give God's people this morning, a thick slice such as he gave his hungry children. Now that was a very quaint and suggestive prayer, and I sometimes try to act up to it. But tonight I have been trying to cut a thin slice, because I have sometimes heard of schools where the slice was too thick for the children's mouths. And therefore I have tried to cut mine thin, that if there is a babe here, he might be able to feed on it. I would even crumb down the subject, and mix it with the milk of the Word that it might suit those who cannot feed upon strong meat as yet. My anxious prayer is that the Holy Spirit may help the weaklings to feed on it and be glad.

II. But I said that in the second part I would do better than remove the stones, and so I will, for I will POINT YOU TO HIM WHO IS "THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE" who has already cleared the stumbling blocks out of the road. Traveler to heaven; pilgrim of the night, cast your eyes upon the Captain of our salvation, even Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of God, and see how He has cast up the highway in the desert, and prepared a path through the wilderness. Looking unto Him, the crooked will grow straight, and the rough places plain, and you shall see the salvation of God.

Let me ask you to look at Him, first, as He was on earth, the Son of Man. In order that men could be saved, it was necessary that God, Himself, should take into union with His Godhead the nature of the poor, feeble creature called man. Now, I must confess that had I never known by revelation that the mysterious, divine, omnipotent spirit who made all things, did actually alight upon this earth, and take to Himself a body of flesh and blood—had I never known it by revelation, I could never have imagined it possible. It would never have crossed my mind. But now I do know it, and am sure of it, and it still utterly astounds me. The angels, when they saw God in human flesh, wondered, (it is a mystery that He was seen of angels), and they have never left off wondering since. Sinner, in order that you might be saved, God must dwell here in human flesh. He has been here! He has been here! He has been here! The fact is as certain as it is strange! He nursed on a woman's breast at Bethlehem. He was swaddled as other babes have been. God has been with us! As Man He worked in a carpenter's shop! He has been here! He ate and drank among men, and slept and suffered as men do! He has been here. God has become man to save sinners. Is anything impossible after that?

It was necessary that Jesus Christ should abide here for a while, should work miracles of love. We read some of them just now in the Lesson of the evening: He healed the sick, He opened blind eyes, He raised the dead. Yes, the Savior has been here, and raised the dead. Can He not raise you? He has not lost His power. If anything, He is greater, now, in heaven, than He was here below. Can He not open those eyes of yours, and those ears of yours, and unloose that stammering tongue of yours, and make your lameness to depart till you leap like a hart? Yes, He can do it, can do it tonight. And from that pew, though you came into it heavy-laden, you will, I hope, go out like one who is ready to dance for ecstasy, because you will cry, "The Lord Jesus has saved me, even me." I say that Christ incarnate and Christ working on earth are two grand sights, or two phases of the same glorious sight, and they take away the stones out of a sinner's pathway.

But ah, beloved, I want you, most of all, to give the eyes of your heart to the strangest sight of all. It was necessary, before you could be saved, that in the person of man, the Son of God should die. I can conceive Him living on earth, but who shall conceive Him dying*?* God was in Christ as He died upon the accursed tree. He who spread the heavens, and made the earth, and piled the mountains, He was here, here in the form of man. And the soldiers came and seized Him in the garden as though He had been a thief, and they took Him away to Pilate's hall, and there they scourged Him. There they spit in His face. There they crowned Him with a crown of thorns, and then condemned Him to bear His cross. They hounded Him—Him, the Eternal God, I say, in human flesh. They hounded Him along Jerusalem's streets, then flung Him down upon His back upon the transverse wood, and drove cruel nails through His blessed and tender hands and feet. Then they lifted up the cross, and dashed it into its socket in the earth till all His bones were dislocated, and He cried, "I am poured out like water: all My bones are out of joint." It was He who but a little while before had heard the songs of angels, and at whose feet the seraphim and cherubim adored. He, on that bloody tree, was fastened and lifted up, and there He died in infinite agonies. It is not possible to describe them, for none know their terror. God forsook Him. His Father turned away His face, and in the bitterness of His anguish He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Thus on the tree He died, and in that death He took the punishment due on account of the sin of all who shall believe on Him. He suffered in their place an equivalent for all that they would have had to suffer had they been cast into the pit of hell. This being done, salvation is not only possible, but it is achieved. Believe in it, sinner! What stone remains, now that Jesus has died? God has made Atonement—the eternal God, Himself, has put away human sin. Why do you doubt? Come, I say, hasten to the cross. Gaze upon this wondrous spectacle of divine love, and as you gaze, you shall live, for, "There is life in a look" at Jesus—life for everyone who rests in Him.

But I want you to see a lovelier sight than this. The other is divinely encouraging, but this is more encouraging, still. Look there! Look there! There is the sepulcher where He lay. They took Him from the cross, they wrapped Him in spices, and fine linen, and they laid Him there. Look there! Christ is not there, the tomb is empty. There is the napkin; there are the grave clothes, but He is not there. Where is He? Why, He has come forth in the full glory of resurrection, and is saying to the women, "Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended." He died for human guilt, but He lives, again, for the justification of His people. Why does He live? It is because no human guilt remains to keep Him as a hostage in the grave. All the guilt which He took upon Himself, He has put away. He has buried it—it is gone. It went from *us* when He died; it has gone from *Him* now that He has risen. The risen Lord has "Finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness." Who would not believe in a risen Christ? If God has set my Surety free, I am sure that I am clear. If Christ laid as a hostage for my sins in the cold prison of Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, I bless Him for it. But when I see Him set free, I bless Him yet more, for I know that my sins are gone. There remains no wreck or relic of them—

"Covered is my unrighteousness,
From condemnation I am free,"

for Christ has risen from the dead. O, sinner, I pray God to lead you sweetly to read the mystery of the resurrection, and to give you peace tonight.

But this is not all. Now lift up your eyes away from the garden, to the top of Olivet, and away from the top of Olivet, for, lo, He mounts the skies! His disciples gaze, and as they gaze, He ascends. He rises higher and higher, till a cloud receives Him out of their sight. But though that cloud has come between us, faith's eyes can pierce it, and we can see the angels meeting Him on the way—

"They brought His chariot from on high
To bear Him to His throne,
Clapped their triumphant wings, and cried,
'The glorious work is done!'
'Hail! Prince,' they cry, 'forever hail,
Whose unexampled love
Moved You to quit these glorious realms,
And royalties above.'"

Don't you hear their song as they approach the golden gates of the New Jerusalem? They sing, "Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be you lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in!" Can you hear the watchers from above the gate as they challenge the cavalcade, "Who is the King of Glory?" Can you hear, yet again, the song of those who answer, "Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be you lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in!" He enters. His Father receives Him. "Well done," He says, "well done." He sits at His Father's right hand, for His life-work is finished. No more sacrifice is needed. No other will ever be offered. But while He sits there, mark what He does—He intercedes. He pleads! He pleads! And for whom does He plead?

For sinners bought with His blood. He pleads for all that come to God by Him—for *you*, if now you trust Him. You blackest sinner out of hell—He pleads for you, if you trust Him. Utterly lost, ruined, condemned, dissolute, debauched as you may have been, yes, all but damned—but if you will trust Him, there is infinite mercy in His heart, and in His plea there is infinite power.

Oh, that I knew how to preach the gospel! Oh, for a great trumpet to blow such a blast that every ear should hear it! Oh, will you reject Christ? I pray you will not. At your peril you will do it. If I were called at this moment from this pulpit to the bar of God, I could dare to say that I have tried to tell you all the comforting truths that I know about my Master. If I could weep you to the Savior, I would do it. If my arms about your necks would bring you to His feet, I would be glad, my brethren, to try the affectionate embrace. But what more can a mortal do? Do you reject my Master, or will you receive Him? I would do as the Roman ambassadors did to the eastern king, when they made a ring in the sand, and said, "Pass that ring, and you proclaim war, or you make peace. You must stand and decide within that circle." I draw such a circle around you tonight, and I say, "Do not stir from that pew till Christ or sin, heaven or hell, faith or unbelief, is chosen by you." And may the Holy Spirit help you to such a gracious decision that you may say, "I will believe. Lord, help my unbelief. I cast myself now, whether I am saved or lost, upon the finished work of the risen Lord." The Lord grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
MARK 5:25-34; 7:24-30; 10:46-52.

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THE SEED UPON STONY GROUND
NO. 1132

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 14, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth, and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away."
Mark 4:5, 6.

THE gospel seed, according to the parable, falls upon all kinds of soil. Some of its precious grains drop upon the hard pathway, some upon the rock, some among the thorns and only a portion, perhaps a smaller proportion than one in four, falls upon good ground in which it finds a congenial abiding place. The preacher, therefore, will not meet with unmixed success in all directions. He may look for a full recompense from his work as a whole, but he must not fondly suppose that everywhere the good word will become effectual. For in many it will be a savor of death unto death, and not of life unto life. Even when Jesus preached, only few received Him, and of Paul's ministry it is recorded that "Some believed the things which were spoken and some believed not." It is for the beginner in holy service to go forward with reasonable expectations, lest he should before long weary of the work, and leave it because of his bitter disappointments.

Mark, with care that the sower in the parable is not blamed for having scattered his seed upon soil which proved to be unproductive. Not a word of censure is recorded against him on that account. From which it is fair to infer that he did no more and no less than his duty, and that the minister of Christ is to scatter the seed of the gospel broadcast among all mankind. It is God's work to direct the saving word into the chosen hearts which He has prepared to receive it, but as for us, we are to preach the gospel to every creature, and going out into the streets and lanes of the city, as many as we find we are to bid to the supper. Many are called but few are chosen. It was never intended that the external call should be as narrow as the election, yet there are some ministers whose preaching consists far more of an analysis of soils than of sowing of seed. Leaving the analyzing of the soil to God, I take my commission from His hands, and desire to fulfill it. Stony-ground hearer, there is a handful of seed for you. You, who are hard like the trodden road, there is a handful for you. And even among the thorns, which are plentiful enough in this age, shall the good seed fall like a heavenly shower. And if God shall graciously direct it to His own chosen, and they, like the good ground, shall

receive it, it will be His doing. It will never be accomplished by any skill of mine. It is mine to sow beside all waters, and His to give the increase. The best shot that was ever made with bow and arrow was taken at a venture, as Ahab the king was pierced between the joints of his harness. So also, while drawing my bow to preach the gospel to every creature, my faith feels confident that the Lord will direct the arrow, and fulfill His purposes of grace.

I feel that I have very solemn work on hand. I have always pleasure in preaching upon encouraging topics, but this morning my themes are for sifting and testing. We have to deal with certain apparently good people, and to show that they are not what they seem. We have to put wheat from the barn floor into the sieve, and it may be there will be much chaff to be blown away. This is an operation not pleasant to the flesh, and one which needs much of the Spirit of God that we may perform it aright, lest the weak ones are sorely troubled, which is far from what we desire. Solemn discourse should have a solemn heart to utter it, and solemn hearts to hear it. May God grant it may be so at this time, that the sermon may be greatly profitable to every one of us, whether professors of the gospel or not.

First, we shall *read the history of stony-ground hearers;* secondly, we shall *mark the radical defect of their character,* and, thirdly, we shall try to *learn a lesson* from the whole.

I. First, we have here A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CERTAIN PROFESSORS OF RELIGION. Let us read it carefully. It is said of them, first, that *they heard the word.* "These are they which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness." They enjoyed the great privilege of hearing God's Word. They heard the real gospel; they did not attend upon ritualistic falsehoods, or philosophic speculations. It was *the* Word which they heard. The sower did not sow tares, but he sowed good wheat. How happy are those who sit under a downright gospel ministry! May God be pleased to multiply such ministries everywhere—and the lovers of them! How can we expect salvation to come to us if we do not hear the soul-saving gospel? If we are listening merely to opinions and notions, and philosophies and superstitions, and not to the very Word of God, we cannot expect to find salvation. The Holy Spirit does not save men by means of lies, but if we hear the truth as it is in Jesus, we may hope that He will make it effectual to our conversion.

Remember, next, that hearing is not enough. "Hearers only" will not enter heaven. There must be a doing of the word as well as a hearing of it. These people were good hearers, capital hearers, for they went further than hearing—*they received the word,* but not in the divine power or supernatural efficacy of it, but they nevertheless received it. That is to say, they never quibbled at it. They assented to it as they heard it, and recognized it as God's truth. Receiving it, it produced an effect upon them. They were, in a measure, impressed by it. If the sermon spoke of the

wrath of God on account of sin, they were alarmed. If it told them of the love of God in Christ Jesus, they were encouraged. They did not always hear with dry eyes. They were not always like the seats they sat upon, unmoved and stolid, but they received the word. It stirred their affections and their emotions. They felt its moving effects, and were thus led to many changes of life. They went home and swept the chambers which had been full of filthiness. They cleansed, at any rate, the outside of their cups and platters, and took care that the sepulcher, if not cleansed of the dead men's bones, should be decently whitewashed so as to shock no passersby. They were improved and reformed externally by what they heard, and so far they received it.

And there is this said about them, in the third place, that they *received it immediately.* In them it excited no questions, doubts, or conflicts. The preacher said, "This is the Word of God," and they were content to believe him, though they knew not why. While other minds were asking for the authority of the message, and then, having recognized the authority, were battling hard with a thousand difficulties, these persons saved themselves a world of trouble by never thinking at all. It was their father's religion and their mother's religion, therefore they believed it, they swallowed the pill with their eyes shut, caring not whether it was God's truth or Satan's lie. Anything like spiritual mastication of the doctrine they did not attempt. They endorsed, wholesale, whatever they were taught. Priests, themselves, could not desire more plastic material. These hearers had no hard struggles to get at the Savior, no sense of sin to hold them back, no horrors of conscience to make them afraid, no alarms lest they should not be the Lord's own people after all. They had no tests and sifting to see whether they possessed real repentance and acceptable faith. They sprang into religion as a man may leap into a bath, head over heels at once. They said, "Surely this is the right thing, and we will have it." And after a certain sort they did have it. Not with any depth of consideration or weight of judgment, but they immediately received the word.

It is added *they received it with gladness.* The immediate effect of receiving the word was to make them very happy, and there are not a few who suppose that to be made very happy is a sure sign of being converted. Believe me, it is a very dubious sign, indeed. No doubt, one grand effect of the reception of the gospel into the heart is to bring joy and peace through believing, but there are many kinds of joy and many sorts of peace. There is a joy which is not the fruit of grace, but the growth of nature, and a peace which comes from delusion, and not from the Spirit of God. We must take care we do not conclude that we are safe because we are "so happy." The rich man who went to hell was happy when he fared sumptuously every day. The farmer, who said he would pull down his barns and build greater, was happy when he surveyed his grain. And so was the prodigal son happy, while he was spending his living riotously—but theirs was a very different kind of joy from that which is the fruit of

the Spirit. The characters in our text looked exclusively at the happy side of religion. "There," said the stony-ground hearer, "there is my mother. What a happy Christian she is. I have seen her in deep trial borne up by the Spirit of God. I have marked her when we have had deaths in the house, and seen how peaceful and quiet she has been. I will lay hold on Christ, for then I shall be as happy as she is." These stony-ground hearers think what a happy thing it must be to be forgiven, and so, indeed, it is, but they dwelt upon that alone. To be pardoned, to be a child of God, to be accepted in the Beloved, what precious things these must be. And what a delightful thing to be numbered with God's saints, to go to the communion table, and to be thought much of in the church! Are not all these ways of pleasantness? And to go to heaven at last, to die triumphantly, to be taken up to dwell where Jesus is amidst the glory—what joyful things! Who doubts it? But these people dwelt only upon this view of the matter, and did not remember that between this and heaven, there are temptations to be combated, and to be overcome. There are trials to be endured, stern trials, too, through which we can only be brought by divine help. Right arms must be cut off, and right eyes must be plucked out. There are costs to be counted, and reckonings to be made as to whether the future will repay for the labors of the present. Young Hopefuls vow that they will have the brave country of Canaan, but they do not remember the roughness of the road there. Like Pliable, they set out for the Celestial City, but they have not reckoned upon the Slough of Despond. And therefore after the first mouthful of mud, they are ready to turn back and let those have the brave country, which care for it. As for them, if they can keep whole bones in their body, they will be well content to let the future go as it may.

These people, then, immediately received the word with joy. How hopeful all this must have looked to the sower! Do you not see how easily ministers may be deceived? When you have only to preach, and men are willing to hear, only to preach, and men are willing to receive—to receive the gospel at once, without causing you any difficulty in arguing with them. When they receive it with gladness, and you have not the trouble to cheer them up, and to meet their doubts and anxieties with a thousand promises selected out of the Word of God—is not this splendid work which will richly repay the sower? Alas, we must not reckon our fruit by the buds! All is not gold that glitters and it is not every egg that will be hatched.

We read further that these characters *made rapid progress*. They sprang up because they had no depth of earth. Because of their shallow soil, they were very rapid in their growth. These people heard the gospel one day, received it, and felt sure that they were saved. At once they were full of joy and transport, and hastened to make a profession. They did not require time to sit down and see whether they could bear out that profession, or seek grace that they might not run before they were called. But away they went, just as if a spark had been dropped into so much

powder. They made a profession, and the next week they were teaching in the Sunday school. They were so sure they were on the right road that they were very vexed with other pilgrims who did not travel so rapidly. When they heard of Christians being anxious as to their condition, they said, "What nonsense! What reason is there for it?" If they saw a deep-taught Christian tremblingly examining himself, they said, "Oh, you must not look at all at yourself. Never consider what is going on within." They had received a one-sided gospel, only, and that quite contented them. But as to anything like the work of the Spirit of God in the soul, and the holy jealousy which is one of the best fruits of vital godliness, these they quite dispensed with. They were going to drag the church behind them, and drive the world before them. And very soon they would distance even the ministry which had been the means, as they said, of their conversion. They grew from hyssops on the wall to cedars of Lebanon in about a week. They were THE men, and wisdom would die with them. Grand work to have to deal with these men, is it not? We shall see, by-and-by, and shall have to learn that not every stem that puts forth leaves is a fruit-bearing branch.

In due time, according to the parable, *came the trial!* The seed was up, and soon the sun was up too, and began to scorch it. None will get to heaven without being tried on the road. Ask concerning those who stand in their white robes before the throne of God, who are those, and from where did they come? And the answer will be, "These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." There is not a fragment of gold in all God's temple but what has passed through the fire. Untried faith is no faith; untried grace is no grace. God will try His people, and discern between the precious and the vile.

According to the Savior's explanation of the text, the trial came in the form of persecution. Ah, how many there are who have received the word with gladness, which, if there were a stake in Smithfield, would very soon drop the profession of Christianity, for it would be too hot for them. Or if there were a prison ready for them in which they must lie till the moss grew on their eyelids, they would soon forsake the truth, and turn aside to error. We need not be much afraid of the revival of such tests, but there are other forms of persecution which mere professors are equally unable to bear. A sneer in society, a remark against Christianity from a person whom you are accustomed to respect, a look from someone who is above you in wealth, as he despises you for professing to be a follower of Christ. Unkind remarks from a father, opposition from a husband, the desertion of some young companion with whom you hoped your life would be linked. Such matters—nothing like the stake or the prison—are yet quite sufficient to overcome flimsy professors, so that they are offended, and turn their backs upon the religion which they once so quickly espoused. In many instances, to follow principle would involve a great loss in business. They could not afford to incur such a loss. If Christ

could be had at a cheaper rate, they would have Him, but to lose all the treasures in Egypt! No, they could not do that, and so they renounce, again, that Christ whom they once called their all-in-all.

With others it has not been such a trial as that, but providential affliction. I painfully remember a man and his wife, who were members of this church for some time, and it was certainly true, as they affirmed that from the very hour they made profession of religion, they began to be in trouble. And therefore they renounced the consolation because of the affliction, for they drew the conclusion that surely they could not be the people of God, or else God would not have so tried them, a conclusion which is the reverse of the teachings of Scripture. Many will have Christ if He will pat them on the back, but not if He flogs them with the rod. They will follow the Lord while He is on the giving hand, but they cannot believe in a God who takes away. They can bless Him while He enriches them, but they know nothing of that Job-like faith which exclaims, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Or, perhaps, it may be that when they first made a profession of religion, they did not know much about the temptations of life, but now they have moved from home. They have obtained a job where there are young men who tell them of haunts of pleasurable vice. Or they have left the circle of godly people in which they once moved, and are cast among ungodly ones, and alas, their mouths are watering for the sweets of the world. The serpent of sinful pleasure has cast a spell over them, and now Christ may go for Belial, true religion for worldliness, and following God for the indulgence of the flesh. Ah, how often this is the case!

Or, perhaps, another shining of the sun has come upon them. They thought they believed the gospel, but they have fallen among debaters. They are surrounded by a skeptical circle, where they have heard arguments they never heard before, and never having weighed anything, or considered the reasons why they believed in God and in Christ, they are quite staggered. They have no depth of earth, no root-hold of the truth by conviction and solemn judgment of it. And so as soon as they meet with an atheist or a deist, or a skeptic of any form, they are like thistledown before the wind. Having no ballast in their vessel, the first breeze oversets them, and they are lost. What a grand thing it is to be established in the faith, rooted, grounded, and settled. I remember reading of one who said, "When I read the arguments brought by infidels against the gospel, I laugh them to scorn, because they are nothing like so deep, cunning or so hard to answer as the arguments which my own heart has brought against the Lord in years gone by, which having answered and overcome I feel myself more than a match for the puny oppositions of ungodly men." It is a grand thing not to be moved in these skeptical times, but to know the Lord by secret communion with Him, to know His truth by inner consciousness, and by a devout reading of His Word with eyes opened from above. Alas, many hearers and receivers of the word have

been destroyed by critical infidels. They knew nothing thoroughly, and so were readily deceived.

It is said of the stony-ground people that *immediately they were offended.* They were just as soon out of love with the gospel as they were in with it. "Immediately they were offended." They did not, at first, stop to inquire why they should be Christians, and now they do not stop to argue why they should renounce their profession. They took their religion hot from the oven and dropped it before it was cool enough to feed on. Somebody said, "Believe, believe, believe!" And they were excited; and now another speaker says, "Do not believe! Do not believe!" And they are excited the other way. They went in with a crowd of others all of a sudden during a revival, and now they are going out with the crowd during a season of lukewarmness. The minister took them in at the front door, and now he has to let them out at the back door. They have disappointed him. They have brought scandal upon the church, and double responsibility upon themselves, and now they are just as earnest to give up religion as they were to profess it. Unhappy souls, volatile in everything, frivolous about the solemnities of eternity, ready to be right if rightly led, and as ready to be wrong if wrongly driven. Having no mind of their own, they are snail-like creatures—without a backbone, mere jellyfish. Nothing solid or consistent can be found in them. Their sand-built houses are no sooner up, than they are washed down by the tide. They have no rocky foundations, no strong grips of the truth, no principles. Their motive powers are submission to persuasion, admiration of eloquence, and desire of approval. Unhappy! Unhappy! Unhappy! God grant that we may not belong to such a class.

II. I shall show THEIR RADICAL DEFECT. Their radical defect, in the first place, is in *an unbroken heart.* The parable does not refer to ground with stones in it, such as we commonly call stony ground, for that will grow some crops well enough, but to soil where there was a hard rock underneath, and only a very thin covering of earth. A hard pan of iron rock was at the bottom, and it was barely hidden by a little mold created by the lichens and mosses, enough to catch the seed, and make it germinate, but not enough to feed its roots for any length of time. In these people their hearts have never been broken. "Is not My Word like a hammer, says the Lord?" They do not know, for it never hammered them. They got their joy and peace without a blow. What is to be done with a piece of ground which has the rock so close to the surface? Nothing can be done with it by man. The only thing that can be done is for God to come in, and when God, in His infinite mercy changes the rock into good soil, then the wheat will grow, but not till then. "A new heart also will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." There must be a work of the Holy Spirit by which the natural rock of nature shall be turned into the good soil of grace, or else all the sowing in the world will never produce a harvest. These people skipped over that, and,

in fact, they did not like to hear of it. They liked preachers who always preached simple faith in the work of Jesus, but never mentioned the work of the Holy Spirit—lopsided preachers, messengers whose legs are not equal, who deliver half God's message, and no more. And under such teaching they found peace without soul-trouble, and comfort without the new birth. As for repentance, that old-fashioned grace, they despised it. Weeping before God on account of sin, terror under a sense of God's wrath, or fear lest the sentence of His law should be executed, they never knew. They passed into the land of hope without going round by Weeping Cross, and every day I grow more and more suspicious of a man's religion if he has not gone round by that road. A man who was healed before he was wounded, clothed before he was stripped, filled before he was empty, made alive before he was slain, has good reason to suspect whether sovereign grace has ever laid its hand upon him.

These people with the unbroken heart had gladsome hopes and joyful confidences, but they all came to an end, as they will do in your case and mine if we are strangers to contrition. Always be it remembered that true as it is that whoever believes in Jesus Christ shall be saved, it is equally true, "You must be born-again." "Except you are converted and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." And "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." It is only the birth of the spirit, the spiritual nature that can enter into spiritual matters and become a possessor of truly spiritual joys. An unbroken heart is a fatal defect.

This led to a second fault, namely, *lack of depth.* The stony-ground hearer was all surface; everything about him was superficial. The rock, never having been broken, provided no depth of earth to plow. So in many men who profess to be converted, there has been no real estimate of sin. "Yes, we are sinners," they say. "Oh yes, yes, of course we are all sinners." But to feel what it is to be a sinner is quite another thing. To be crushed down to the earth under a sense of having violated the thrice holy law of God, many have never felt this. And Jesus Christ—yes, He is a Savior, and they will say they take Him for a Savior, but what it is to be saved, what it was He suffered, why He needed to suffer, what was the tremendous guilt that compelled such a sacrifice, they have never considered. In fact, they have never thought at all, and they do not mean to think. Bees descend into the flowers and suck out the honey, but butterflies alight on the lilies for a moment, and are away again, true emblems of flippant pretenders to grace. Many persons who profess to be Christians seem to have no acquaintance with the plague of their own hearts. They believe that there is something amiss within, but they do not know that their heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Consequently, though they admit they need divine grace, they do not know how much they need it. They would subscribe to the truth, "Without Me you can do nothing," but they do not know it experientially. They

are strangers to those failures and inward disappointments which lead a man to feel his nothingness. It is only surface work; nothing is deep about them. When they became professors of the religion of Christ, they never weighed the truth, or searched the Scriptures to see whether these things are indeed, so. They were Calvinists because the preacher was a Calvinist. They would have been Arminians quite as readily if the preacher had been Arminian. In fact, they would have been anything they were taught to be. They never judged, weighed, and considered for themselves. In espousing the truth as it is in Jesus they never calculated the difficulties of a religious life. It did not strike them that they would have to fight with sin without, and sin within. They never looked at that mighty trinity, the world, the flesh, and the devil, with which they would have to wage a life-long combat. They took the sweets, and thought not of the bitter herbs. They were volatile, and are still volatile. They cannot think, neither can you persuade them to attempt it. This is a fault, indeed.

And then there was a third defect—*the secret part of their religion was a failure.* The seed on the stony ground did not fail in the sprouting, or in the blade which appeared above, but it had no root. If you were to trace some professors home, you would find no secret prayer. Let that word go through this congregation if there are any of you living in the neglect of secret prayer. No secret prayer, no secret reading of the Word of God, no chewing of it to get the essence and the juice out of it, no vital contact with Christ in private, no communion of the soul in secret with the living God! This is a deadly sign! They were at the public meeting, they were fussy enough about committees, they could be first and foremost if there were any singing to be done, or if there were any preaching required. But oh, the secret prayer, the secret living with God, the soul-searching, the trying of the reins to see whether they were right or wrong—they had given this all up. Taking it for granted that they must be right because they have a sort of faith, they look upon every question as to their safety as so much unbelief, and the work of Satan, and so they wrap themselves up in their delusions. They think they must be the people of God because they profess themselves to be such, but they have never looked for the fruit which must be borne by every branch of the true vine.

And fourthly, there was another thing, which I do not think you will find in Mark, but you will see it in one of the other evangelists—*they lacked moisture*. Now, a plant must have moisture. Dew, rain, or some sort of watering must come to it. On that little soil with a hard rock at the bottom, there was plenty of heat when the sun shone, and so the little moisture it had made the seed sprout at once, but it had no further moisture, and therefore became parched. So certain hearers get a little moisture, as it were, by contact with an earnest preacher. They come under that word which drops as the dew, and distils as the rain, but they have not the vitalizing Holy Spirit at their root to be the perpetual source of life. They have their lamps, but they have no oil in their vessels to keep them trimmed. They lack the moisture of the Holy Spirit. He it is that

comes to His own people secretly, at the roots of their life, so that from Him they suck up the life of God, and so they live. But the mere stony-ground convert has not the Holy Spirit. And oh, permit me to say most solemnly to everyone here, if we have no more than nature gave us under its best conceivable circumstances, we have no more than the Pharisees, and that landed them in hell. We must have the Spirit of God, and from first to last the religion of our hearts must be worked of the Spirit, sustained by the Spirit, and if it is not, the sooner we are rid of such a religion the better, for it will only deceive us. I feel the necessity of preaching such a sermon as this because I perceive church members going aside into open sin, and others turning aside to one or another of the new delusions of the present age. There seems to be a new one every month. Some foolish people stand with their mouths open ready for any novelty to fly down their throats. They are as dry straw, only needing for some impostor to apply the spark to them, and yet they call themselves Christians. There are so many, nowadays, who do not know what they believe, and so become the prey of Romanists, Ritualists, Atheists, or some other deceivers. There is a little plant in the garden, and a thief comes along and takes away root and all. But he will not do so with a well-rooted oak, I guarantee you. And if we were well-rooted like the oak, we would believe what we do believe, and know what we do know, and should have principle to keep us steady. The old Nonconformists might have been dragged to prison or to the stake without difficulty, but to get them to yield their nonconformity, or put aside their principles was not possible. Alas for the degenerate sons of such sturdy fathers. If what you believe is not true, fling it away. But if it is true, let your faces be like flints, and your natures like iron against all the temptations of this wicked, ever-changing age, which flies this way and that, but always away from its God. Oh, when shall it be that those who know the Lord shall stand fast, and having done all, shall still stand!

III. Thirdly, I must close by trying to teach THE LESSON OF THE TEXT. That lesson is four-fold. It says to each one of us, *be deeply in earnest*. Do not play at religion. Do not think of a religious profession as a garb which you can put on and take off. Pray God to make sure work in your soul, sure work for eternity. You have to die; you have to face the judgment seat. Have a religion that will bear those ordeals. Pray to have such a work of the Spirit in your soul that neither death nor judgment can alarm you. Cry to God that repentance may be cut deep into you, making lasting marks in you. Pray that your faith may be no sham faith, but a giving up of your soul entirely into the hands of Christ; that your love to Christ may be no rhapsody, but a matter of real heart-affection; that your religious walk may not be for other people to see, but a walk before God. Pray that all your actions may be the result of principle, and that you may not be swayed by company, but rather may sway company, and may have a vital force within yourself of God's implanting that will bear you on in the straight road, whichever way others may take. I say

again, be awfully in earnest about everything that concerns religion, and pray God to forgive you if in any measure you have been flippant concerning it.

Secondly, *watch the effect of your own daily trials.* See how they affect you. If a boat is ready to sink in the Thames, it ought never to be trusted at sea. If your religion already begins to fail you, what will it do by-and-by? You were laughed at, and you were half inclined to give it all up. What would you do if you were more sternly persecuted? You have already been willing to go back; your heart has faltered. What will you do if fiercer temptations assail you? You have already been terribly put to it by the arguments of a fool. What would you do if some of the deep thinkers were to argue with you? "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, how will you contend with horsemen? And if, in the land of peace wherein you have trusted, they have wearied you, what will you do in the swellings of Jordan?" I do not object to your growing slowly if you grow surely. If my house takes a long time in building, I would rather give the builder his time, than tell him to run it up in a week or two, and make it so frail that the first wind would blow it away like cardboard. You have to live in this house eternally, pray God to build it surely. As to building fast, that little matters. O you who can hardly go a step towards heaven without question and dispute, I do not so much tremble concerning you, as about some who never have any questions or doubts, because they have never any thought at all, but pass it all by with a heedless carelessness, taking things for granted. See, then, how you stand in your present trials. You have grown richer. Do you love the Lord as much as you did? You transact more business. Can you still keep the world out of your heart? You have received more praise of late. Can you still cling to Christ as you used to do when you had but few friends? You have been in health lately. Have you lived as near to God as when you were ill? Or you have come down in the world, and are numbered with the poor. Do you love the Lord as much as you did when He enriched you? You have lately heard the remarks of a cunning hater of the gospel. Were you able to feel that though you could not answer him in words, yet your heart answered him, and threw off his lies as the roof throws off the rain? If not, look to it. If your vessel is ready to go down in smooth water, what will she do in a storm? If you cannot keep the water out of her, now, what will you do when the hurricane overtakes her? It will be all over with you then, I fear.

Another lesson is, *constantly examine yourself*. A great many persons get into the Bankruptcy Court, but as far as I remember, never one came there through too much attendance to his business. I never heard of a farmer losing his crop through being too diligent in husbandry. And of all the souls that are lost, not one has perished through being too much in earnest as to self-examination. Dear brethren, choose a faithful, testing ministry. Do not look after a smooth-tongued preacher who will always cry, "Comfort You, comfort You, my people." You need comfort and

should have it, but you need searching as well, and you must have it. Pray that you may be faithfully dealt with. That there may be no glazing over matters, no filming of wounds, but that there may be honest dealings between you and the minister, and between you and your God. God grant that we may be willing to be searched, for when we are unwilling to be searched, we may reckon it quite certain that there is something amiss with us. When we say, "I am afraid I am a hypocrite," there is very little fear of it—but presumption is fatal.

Now, lastly, let all this show us *how necessary it is that we cast all the stress and burden of our salvation entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ,* because whenever a man does that, there is honest and good ground in his soul and the seed has sprung up aright. Whenever a man can truly say—

"I rest alone in Jesus,
Nothing in my hand I bring:
Simply to Your cross I cling,"

that is the great secret of a true hope. Jesus lived and died for us—and if we do entirely depend upon Him alone, it is well with our souls.

It is well to live continually at the foot of the cross, looking up to Jesus, finding all our hope in Him, and none in ourselves. Beloved, it is the work of the Spirit of God to bring us there, and keep us there. If we search ourselves in the light of the cross, we shall be willing to judge ourselves, that we be not judged. In the presence of those dear wounds from where distils the atoning blood, we shall cry, "Try my reins and my heart." But if any man says, "I believe in Jesus, therefore I will not search. I trust in Jesus, therefore I will live as I like," that man's religion is vain. He has profaned the cross by his reckless reasoning. Let him take heed how God shall judge him, for of all judgments, surely that will be the heaviest which shall come upon the man who dared to take the doctrine of the cross as a reason for careless living, and made the mercy and the cleansing power of the Redeemer an excuse for walking heedlessly before God, and continuing in vain presumption. God grant us grace to receive the seed into good ground, for Jesus' sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark 4:1-34.

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PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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A FATAL DEFICIENCY
NO. 1133

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 21, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."
Romans 8:9.

THIS is one of the most solemn texts in the whole Bible. It is so sweeping, it deals with all of us. "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." And it deals with the most important point about us, for to belong to Christ is the most essential thing for time and eternity. But we are not Christ's unless we have His Spirit. The text does not treat of external rites and ceremonies, it does not discuss a vexed question in doctrine, it does not speak of rare attainments and unusual virtues, but it lays its axe at the root of the tree, it points its sword at a vital part. The text probes to the quick. It pierces to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, dealing with the thoughts and intents of the heart. It speaks to the soul, and though it is the voice of the gospel, yet is its sound as terrible as the thunderclaps of Sinai. "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

Since the subject leads us to think upon the Spirit of Christ, let us entreat Him to help us at this hour, so that our thoughts shall be honest, heart-searching, and therefore profitable to us. The preacher has prayed that he may be helped to discourse upon the text. Let each hearer pray that what shall be rightly said may also rightly affect his heart and conscience. Do we not all earnestly desire to belong to Christ? Do we not tremble at the bare idea of its being said of us that we are "none of His"? With such desires and fears, I trust we shall come with the greater readiness under the influence of the heart-searching text before us.

I shall, at the outset, try to lead you to consider *the remarkable title which is here given to the Holy Spirit.* When we have considered that point, we will next observe *the absolute necessity of possessing the Spirit.* And thirdly, meditate upon *the evidences which may help us to discover whether we have the Spirit.* Then we will close by weighing well *the consequences of being found without the Spirit of Christ*—"We are none of His."

I. First, then, let us consider, well, THE REMARKABLE TITLE WHICH IS HERE GIVEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT—for certainly it is the Holy Spirit who is here intended by, "the Spirit of Christ." He is called, in the first part of the verse, "The Spirit of God." And then He is styled, "The Spirit of Christ." Christ and God are essentially one. The Holy Spirit stands in in-

timate relationship to both the Father, and to the Son, and is rightly called by either name.

Inasmuch as He is here called the Spirit of Christ, we may rest assured that a deep mystery is here dimly revealed. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father. Upon this we will say but little, for we know but little. There was a great dispute, many centuries ago, between what are now called the Eastern and Western Churches, upon this question—whether the Spirit of God proceeded from the Father only, as said the Greek Church, or proceeded from the Father and the Son, as said the Latin Church. I think, if we must have an opinion upon such a subject, that our text decides the point by declaring that the Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of God, but the Spirit of Christ, and proceeds, doubtless, both from the Father and from the Son. But when we have said that, what do we mean? Does any theologian know what he means by these words? Will anybody ever know what is meant thereby? Can any of us, by searching, find out God or know the Almighty to perfection? Is not this a mystery into which our eyes will never be able to see? And, therefore, is it not better to leave it among the inscrutable things which belong to the blessed Trinity in unity, where understanding is swamped, but where faith finds waters to swim in?

Leaving that deep matter, we pass to notice that the title, "The Spirit of Christ," signifies, first, that *the Spirit peculiarly and especially rested upon Christ.* The Holy Spirit had much to do with the person of our blessed Redeemer. The manhood of Christ was begotten of the Spirit of God when the power of the Highest overshadowed the Virgin Mary. When our Lord first appeared in public to be recognized as the Son of God, when He went down into the waters of Jordan, and came up from them, the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, and rested upon Him while the divine voice proclaimed out of heaven, "This is My beloved Son." No sooner had the Son of God passed from Jordan's brink, than He was, "Led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil"—guided by the Spirit of God to undergo those processes of trial which were necessary to make Him perfect as the great High Priest, enabling Him to sympathize with our infirmities, because He was "tempted in all points like as we are." We read that He returned into Galilee in the power of the Spirit. When He began to preach, the first chapter that He read in public was, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor." His ministry was not a dead ministry of the letter, but it stood in the power of the Spirit of God. He spoke not according to the flesh, with the garnishing of human eloquence and winning flatteries, but with those forcible words of wisdom which the Holy Spirit teaches. He taught the people as one having authority, and not as the scribes. All through the life of Christ you see that the Spirit of God rested upon Him in fullness of power, for God "gives not the Spirit by measure unto Him." In Him "dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily," and all the sacred gifts of the Holy Spirit were treasured up in His

blessed person that out of His fullness we, also, might receive grace for grace. Was it not so written of Him in the Psalm, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness: therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows"? Because upon Christ, the Anointed One, the Holy Spirit rests in fullness, the term, "The Spirit of Christ," is most instructive.

A second explanation is equally to the point. *The Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of Christ," because our Lord Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit.* John the Baptist said concerning Him, "I, indeed, baptize you with water unto repentance, but He that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire." The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a choice result of our Lord's work among men. Jesus spoke of giving to men living water which should be in them as a springing well, and this spoke He of the Spirit which was given when Jesus was glorified. After His resurrection He breathed on His disciples, and said, "Receive you the Holy Spirit." But indeed, the whole ministry of Jesus was a revelation of the things of the Spirit. He did not preach upon points of ritual and ceremonial observation, but He went into inward matters, and with the fan in His hand, thoroughly purged His floor. His precepts concern not the washing of hands, the straining out of gnats, the wearing of phylacteries, and the observance of holy days, they deal with the heart, the affections, the spiritual nature of man, and thus are far removed from the traditions of superstition, and the frivolities of false philosophy. Beyond all this, beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ at His ascension procured for us the descent of the Holy Spirit. "It is expedient for you that I go away," He said, "for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." He rose to His Father, but when the fullness of time was come, the rushing, mighty wind was heard, and the cloven tongues, as if were fire, were seen sitting upon the disciples. And from that moment the Church of God was baptized into the Holy Spirit. God grant that she may never forget that day of days, but walk in the power bestowed upon her at Pentecost. On that glorious day, the word of the Lord by the Prophet Joel was fulfilled—"I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit." This being so gloriously fulfilled, we are waiting for that other promise, "I will pour upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for their sins." Therefore the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ because He is the choice gift of our ascended Lord.

Mark a third explanation of the passage—the Holy Spirit may be called, "the Spirit of Christ," *because Christ lived peculiarly in the power of the Spirit.* Understand the "Spirit," as used in the text, in opposition to the "flesh," and you will see my meaning. Never did the flesh rule Christ.

Never in one solitary moment did bodily cravings and appetites master Him. No, He even forgot to eat bread, finding meat to eat which even His disciples knew not of. His love sought not its own, but made Him lay down His life for His friends. The Spirit of God shone forth upon Him in full luster of unsullied light, revealing Him as pure and spotless, a glorious person in whom the prince of darkness could find nothing. Our Lord Jesus Christ was never moved by any passion of a sensual kind, or swayed by a motive of a fleshly tendency. It would be blasphemous to think of such a thing in connection with so divine a character. Some cry aloud, and strive for mastery, but not He. Some have high ambitions, and would thrust down others, but not He. Some smite on the right hand and on the left, for their spirit is full of vengeance, but not He. The flesh that lusts for vengeance, and that cries after power had no rule in Him. He was meek and lowly of heart. The Spirit of holiness and love were in Him—that Spirit which brings power and peace. Always was the Holy Spirit to be seen in connection with the character and work of our blessed Lord. His life was a life in the Spirit. His teaching was a teaching of spiritual things. The objectives that He aimed at in His teaching were all spiritual. There was nothing carnal, nothing gross, nothing earthy about Him, but every thought, desire, and aim were of the highest, noblest, and most spiritual order. And therefore it is, I think, that the Holy Spirit is called The Spirit of Christ.

Mark, also, that the *Holy Spirit is He who quickens the entire mystical body of Jesus Christ*. All the saints are members of Christ's body, and all the members of that body are distinguished from other men by this—that they are spiritual men, and seek after spiritual things. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling." It is the Spirit that quickens the entire mystical body, and by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, whether we are bond or free. The true church of Christ, being in herself a spiritual body, acts in a spiritual manner, and strives after spiritual goals. Yonder church which is wrapped up in formalism, which cannot speak a word of prayer without her book, is she moved of the Spirit, or may it not be said of her sons, "Are you so foolish; having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?" Yonder church, which bows before images and pictures, and flaunts her banners, and uplifts her crucifixes, burning her candles in the sunlight—is she the spiritual church of Christ? I think not. You shall find the church of Christ where faithful men worship God in the Spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh. Men, who, if they speak, seek to be moved by the Holy Spirit, or else had rather keep silent—who desire not the wisdom that comes of man, nor the teaching which is the fabrication of human reason, but desire to wait upon the Scriptures for instruction, and upon the Spirit of God to show light upon the Scriptures. *This* is the church of God.

O beloved, the times are just now very dangerous, and require of all Christians to bear their testimony as to the spirituality of true religion.

True religion consists not in outward forms, peculiar garbs, or modes of speech, or anything that is ritualistic and external. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." Men are again becoming subject to human ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men, saying, "Touch not, taste not, and handle not." But the true faith stands not in will-worship, nor in the inventions of the flesh. Neither is that acceptable worship which men's fancies have devised that they may display the beauty of carved stone, and wood, and the glory of gold, silver, and copper together with blue and scarlet, and fine linen, and glass of many colors, and sweet odors of the merchants. The true worshippers of God worship in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him. Therefore is the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Christ, because, wherever the faith of Christ and the mystical body of Christ are found, there you will find spiritual worship, worship rendered by mind and heart; the worship of love, the worship of humility, adoration, and obedience. The church of God brings not rivers of oil to Him, or the blood of ten thousands of fat beasts. She seeks to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with her God. Sacrifices and burnt offerings are abolished. But broken and contrite hearts are still in the sight of the Lord of great price. Therefore the Spirit of God is rightly called the Spirit of Christ.

II. Now, secondly—and may the Lord help and guide us in our thoughts and utterances—let us observe THE NECESSITY OF POSSESSING THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST.

Notice that according to the text, *it is necessary in every case*—"If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." It does not say, "If any minister is destitute of the Holy Spirit, he is unfit for his calling." That is quite true, but the text is not dealing with any supposed divisions of laity and clergy. It speaks not to a class, but utters its warning voice to men as men. "If *any man* does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." It may be urged that some have an especially amiable nature and disposition. They were never known to speak an untruth, or to do an unkind action, from their youth up. They grow up in the garden of the family like lovely flowers, the admiration of all. Yes, I admit that it is even so, but I cannot help it, I must speak the truth as I have it in my text. "If any man," however amiable he may be, "does not have the Spirit of Christ," I must say the same of him as of the drunk, and of the thief, "He is none of Christ's." The fairest flowers, as surely as the foulest weeds, are none of Christ's if they are not of the Spirit's own planting. But we meet with instances in which, in addition to a natural amiability, the refinements of good society have exercised their best influence. The man has lived among Christian people. He has a title to birthright membership, if such a right can be. He has never mingled with the coarser sort of sinners, or learned the vulgarities of vice. The man is lovely to look upon, yes, and as I repeat the words of my text, I say the truth and lie not, I feel a love to such a one, even as Jesus did to that young man

who said, "All these things have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?" But we must not shirk the truth even in this case. This one lack, the lack of the Spirit of Christ, is fatal to the noblest character, and Christ disowns utterly every man who has not His Spirit in him. But can we not, by adding outward religiousness to moral excellences, somehow or other, rise, by our own efforts, to be true Christians without the Holy Spirit? Can we not be baptized and kneel as God's people kneel, and sing as they sing, and take the sacrament as they do? Yes, you can readily do all these, but you will still be condemned, for the text will still remain true, "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." And if it were possible (which it is not) for you to produce the same virtues in yourself which are produced by the Holy Spirit, yet even those would not suffice, for the text is absolute, and it does not say, "If any man does not have the works of the Spirit," or, "the influences of the Spirit," or, "the general results of character which come of the indwelling of the Spirit." No, it goes deeper and declares, "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

The difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate is not one of degree, but of kind. A dead soul cannot develop into a living one, nor can the carnal mind improve into a spiritual mind. Almighty power is needed to bridge the separating gulf. This ought to lead every rational man to utterly despair of saving himself by any strength of his own. You must resort to divine agency. You are driven to the Holy Spirit because without Him, whatever you may do or be, my text like the cherubic sword which kept the entrance to Eden, prevents your hoping to obtain eternal life by your own power. "Except a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Note well that the text does not make any sort of exception, or so much as hint at any. For some might have said, "But, surely, those who have long been members of the Christian church, and those who are officers in her midst, and those in high esteem, surely they are Christ's, and will be saved in any case?" No, by no means, if they have not the Spirit of Christ, even these are none of His. We are all on a par here. The doorkeeper in our assemblies is, in this respect, exactly on the same footing as the presiding elder of the church. "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." I might even have said that the officers of the church are in a worse position than other men, for their responsibility is so terribly great, and their temptation to mere official religion so immense. Chrysostom said in his day, "I wonder if any of the rulers of the church will be saved?" And had he lived in these times he might, with equal force, have said the same. Can't you see how the great ones of the church, who call themselves, "the bishops and shepherds of the flock," are allowing this nation to drift away to Rome? They are leading this nation into all the devilries of Rome's idolatry and superstition, and yet they neither lift a finger nor speak a word to stop the evil. Hirelings as they are, what do they care for the sheep? They sit in worldly

state among the peers of the realm, and it frets them not though the whole land reeks and rots with superstition! God have mercy on them! Well did you say, O John of the golden mouth, "I wonder if any of the rulers of the church will be saved?" If in any other position men so shamefully neglected their master's business, they would be discharged in disgrace. I speak thus in solemn soberness grieving that the charge is all too true. Nor is this all, what must be the lot of those of us who are ordinary ministers if we have not the Spirit of Christ? And is it clear that all of us have? How many there are who occupy the pulpit, the object of whose preaching is the display of their own eloquence or learning, by the giving out of well-turned periods, and pretty essays upon philosophical subjects, instead of striking at men's consciences, and dealing with their souls in the name of God. The world is perishing, and the church is going to sleep over it. God have mercy upon all of us who are church officers, and make us faithful. Instead of needing less of the Spirit, we need a double portion. And if there are any men about whom it may be said, "If they have not the Spirit of Christ, they are none of His," it must be said with the greatest solemnity concerning the ministers, deacons, and elders of our churches. If they have not the Spirit of Christ, they are worse than other men. Their position puts them under extraordinary responsibility, and if they are false to it, it will bring them under terrible condemnation.

"If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Now observe that this is put in opposition to everything less than itself. For instance, there are some who glory in the *name* of Christians as if the name were some great thing. We have a certain unbrotherly company who call themselves "brethren," and certain others who disapprove of denominations, and therefore in the name of Christian unity set up a denomination of their own, infinitely more exclusive than any before known. These frequently claim to be especially denominated Christians, I suppose because they would insinuate that they, alone, are Christians. Brethren, in Paul's day one said, "I am of Paul," another said, "I am of Apollos," a third said, "I am of Christ." Now there was not a pin to choose between them, they were all equally sectarian. It is not wearing the name of Christ, but having the Spirit of Christ which will prove us to be accepted. Probably none were ever further off from Christ than those who called themselves by His name, namely, the Jesuits. Little enough has Jesus to do with the Society of Jesus. The Christian church has never been more pure, or more earnest than when it has been known by an opprobrious name. There was far more power and life among the despised "Quakers," than among the respected, "Society of Friends." I liked the "Ranters" better than the more quiet "Primitive Methodists." And the detested "Anabaptists" were men of far more courage and principle than the modern "Baptists." Give me the man who can render a reproachful name illustrious. There is no shame in being disgraced. The reproach soon wears away, and if it did not, blessed are they who are reproached

for Christ's sake. But, beloved, you may wear the literal name of Christ, and you may keep on pushing yourself adrift from everybody into a state of external peculiarity if you like. But if you have not the Spirit of Christ, you are none of His for all that. You may take to yourself very precise notions of how you should act, how you should speak, what you should eat, what you should drink, what you should wear—and you may become a very strait-laced Puritan, indeed. But remember, after you have done all that, "The kingdom of God is not meat or drink." And, "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Nothing short of this will suffice, however commendable, however much admired among men. We shall fare ill at the last great day if the Spirit of God is not in us.

But the text is expressly in opposition to *"the flesh."* There is the point of its meaning. What does it mean then, to have the Spirit of Christ in opposition to being in the flesh? Observe carefully there are two states, in one or the other every man is found. There is no middle place. We are either in the flesh, or in the Spirit. Every man is born in the flesh, and if left alone he will follow the desires and devices of his fleshly nature, as every unregenerate man does. Some follow their fleshly nature coarsely, and run into vice. Others follow it in a more refined manner, and live to gain wealth, to gratify taste, or to gain the approval of their fellow men, all which is of the flesh. There is another state, and that is called being in the Spirit. Into this condition we are admitted by the new birth. When a man walks in the Spirit, he recognizes something higher than that which can be touched by the hand, seen with the eyes and heard with the ear. He has entered into a new world, and is a citizen of a spiritual realm. He has come where God is real to him, where Christ is real to him, where truth is real, where sin is hateful, where holiness is lovely. Judge my brethren, whether you know anything concerning this. Many are in the flesh. They are as yet, the mass of mankind, but there is a remnant that walks after the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit has renewed them. He who is in the flesh *is ruled by the flesh*. The animal in him is the master of the man. The mere conscious mind in him is dominant over the higher nature, the Spirit. But the man who is in the Spirit tramples down the flesh, and labors to keep it under. When the flesh for a while, prevails, he laments his fault, and weeps concerning it, for he is not the willing servant of the flesh. But the Spirit in him strives for the mastery, and he greatly delights in its sway.

The man who is in the *flesh trusts to the flesh.* He looks to his own works for Salvation. His prayers, his tears, his almsgivings—these are to save him. But the man who has the Spirit of Christ counts all his good works to be dross and dung. He trusts in the Lord through the Spirit. He trusts in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and builds his hope upon the mercy of God in his Redeemer.

The man who is in the flesh *worships in the flesh*. His eyes must be pleased with the peculiar dress of the minister, and the architectural beauty of the place of assembly, while his ears must be regaled, if not

with sound of flute, harp, sackbut, and psaltery, yet with the swell of organs. His nose, also, must be gratified with sweet incense. He worships in the flesh, looking to crosses, altars and priests, while the man who has the Spirit utterly abhors these idols, and desires not to see, but to believe, not to smell, but to think. The sound of the truth is better to the spiritual man than tinkling bells, and the noise of pipes and bellows. He needs something for his soul to think upon, something to love, something to stir his affections, something to strengthen him for goodness, and to cast down the power of evil in his nature. Being a spiritual man, he worships God in the Spirit. To him the hillside is as holy as the meeting house. He counts one place as sacred as another. Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, does he worship the Father, but he worships God in spirit and in truth. He will not yield to be judged by others in meats, drinks, new moons, and holy days. He scorns to stoop to priests, but believes himself and each believer to be a priest unto God. He makes each garment a vestment, and every meal is to him, a sacrament. To him all things are sanctified by the presence of the eternal God. He lives in the Spirit and wherever he moves, he abides in fellowship with the unseen Lord. He recognizes spiritual things where others see them not. He is swayed by spiritual motives. He seeks after spiritual objects, and while the poor creatures of the earth, like so many moles, toil to bury themselves under its surface, and heap up gold and silver, and say, "These are your gods, O Israel," this man is thankful for his food and raiment, and the comforts of life. But he feels that these are not his God, nor is anything which can be seen worthy to be the object of his pursuit. He derives his pleasure from springs above, and drinks in draughts of life, not from this poor dying world, but from the ever-living and eternal God. Blessed is the man who has come to this! We must all come to it, or we are none of Christ's. Do not think I am setting up some sublime standard. I am not. I am keeping to the level of the text. "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

III. And now I want you, for a few minutes only, to meditate upon THE EVIDENCES OF HAVING THE SPIRIT, for some will say, "Have I the Spirit?" Yes, I trust all will make the inquiry.

My hearers, you either have the Spirit or you have not. See to it! If you have the Spirit, in the first place, as it is the Spirit of Christ, *it has led you to Christ.* Have you, then, been clean delivered from all confidence in yourselves? Have you been brought to the foot of the cross, and made to see that there hangs your only salvation? Do you trust solely and entirely, in the blood and righteousness of God's crucified Son? If you are, you have the Spirit of Christ, for the Spirit that leads a man to faith in Christ is the Spirit of Christ. You could not have come to Christ if you had not been drawn, and none will draw you but the heavenly Father by His Spirit. If you are resting wholly upon Jesus, you have His Spirit.

I will ask you another question. *Do you feel in your soul a desire to honor the Lord Jesus?* Do you love to hear Him extolled? Can you say

that you hate everything which robs Him of His glory? Do you love that sermon best which most exalts Jesus? Have you ever felt that you could die to crown our Lord's most blessed head? Do you now fall at His feet and adore Him with your heart's truest love? Then you have the Spirit of Christ, for He delights to glorify Christ by taking of the things of Christ, and showing them to us.

Again, if you have the Spirit of Christ *it will make you like Christ.* Like Christ first, in relation to God, Christ lived for God. When He was but 12 years old, He said, "Know you not that I must be about My Father's business?" And all His life long He could say that the zeal of God's house had eaten Him up. His meat and His drink were to do the will of His Father who had sent Him. Beloved, is that how you feel towards God? Then you have the Spirit of Christ.

The Spirit of Christ is a Spirit of prayer. It kept the Son in constant communion with the Father. You constantly find the Lord Jesus in converse with God. If you have the spirit of sonship as Christ had, you will be much in prayer too, and you will thus prove that you have the Spirit of Christ.

Christ's worship of God was always spiritual. You never find Him worshipping otherwise than with His whole heart and soul. The traditions of men, their different washings and observances were nothing to Him. He walked with God, and dwelt in Him, and needed not childish ordinances. His was a spiritual life. Is yours so?

Our Lord Jesus Christ towards God was always true. He was a faithful witness, you never find Him flinching a word. He was full of love, but how He could thunder against false-hearted men, "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" Elijah was never more terrible against Baal than was the loving Savior against Ritualistic Phariseeism. For towards His Father glowed a holy zeal and a sacred detestation of everything that would dishonor His beloved name. Have you the Spirit of Christ in you?

The Spirit of Christ was towards men a fullness of love. He was ready to do good to all. He fed the hungry. He healed the sick. He never considered Himself, but spent His life for others, laying Himself out for them. They would have made Him a king in their momentary enthusiasm, but He needed no kingdom. It was kingdom enough for Him to help the miserable, and succor the wretched. Do you feel in your soul a love to men for God's sake? Can you forgive them when they do you wrong? Can you pray for your enemies? Can you follow His command who said, "I say unto you, that you resist not evil, but when they smite you on the one cheek, turn to them the other also"? Then I trust you have Christ's Spirit. But on the other hand, are you indignant when you are insulted? Are you pettish and ready to resent every little thing? You have not the Spirit of Christ if it is so. The Spirit of Christ is a gentle, forbearing, tender Spirit—stern, as I have told you, for God and for His truth, but tender as a child towards the infirmities, sorrows, and weaknesses of mankind. The Spirit of Christ is upright for that which is true and holy, but bend-

ing down towards that which is ready to die. Would you know the Spirit of Christ? Read His life and you will see it there. Have you such a Spirit? Do you long to be perfect like Jesus? If you have not the Spirit of Christ, you are none of His.

My time will fail me if I continue much longer, and therefore I will close this head by saying that if we have the Spirit of Christ, it will *show itself by its operations in our hearts.* We shall feel it moving within us. It will make us hate everything that is evil, false, and unholy. It will move us to repentance of all that we have done amiss towards God or man. It will make us brave and courageous for God, and for His truth. If the Spirit of God is in us, it will move us to joy in God, to hope in God, to delight in God. Fellowship with God will become necessary to us. Prayer to God will be one of our most delightful exercises, and the praise of God will be our dearest enjoyment. The indwelling Spirit within us will make us spiritual, move us in spiritual directions after spiritual things, and we shall thus be spiritual men to the praise of God. And if we are not this, we are none of Christ's.

IV. The last point is THE SAD CONSEQUENCES OF NOT HAVING THE SPIRIT. These are consequences for which nothing in this world can compensate. "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, *he is none of His."* Everything is gone if we are "none of His." Supposing it had said, "He is not a favored disciple." Well, one would have been sorry to miss the opportunity of the place nearest to the Master, but this is far worse, for it says, "He is none of His." The Lord does not acknowledge him at all. "No disciple of mine," says Christ. "No, if he has not My Spirit, he is none of mine." He is a lost sheep, but Jesus says he is "none of His." Whoever he may belong to, he does not belong to Christ. If he has not Christ's Spirit in him, he is "none of His." Whatever body he may be a member of, he is no member of Christ's body, for the Spirit dwells in all the members of that body, and he who has not that Spirit is none of His.

"None of His," the words wound my heart. They are like a dagger to my soul. "None of His!" "None of His!" Ah, if I am none of His because I have not the Spirit, whose am I? I beseech the man who has not the Spirit of Christ to look that question in the face. He who died upon the cross disowns me! He who is risen into His glory disowns me! What misery is this! When He comes in the glory of the Father, and calls His sheep to His right hand, that they may enjoy eternal blessedness in His company, He will say, "I never knew you." If you, dear hearer, are none of His, then whose are you? You are the devils! Awful thought! Terrible words to use, but it must be so. There are two proprietors of men, two rulers whom they serve. "You are of God, little children," says the apostle. But of others he says they lie in the wicked one, and are heirs of wrath. There are two classes of men—the heirs of wrath, and the heirs of God—if you are none of Christ's, you are the prisoner of condemnation. My dear hearer, what are you if you are not Christ's? You are a waif, a stray, a wreck drifted out to sea, soon to sink forever. And where are you if you are not

Christ's? You are on the way to judgment, on the road to eternal condemnation. If you are not His, you are going as fast as time can carry you away, away, away to the gloomy land where a ray of hope will never pierce the midnight darkness. Away, away, away, where despair lasts for eternity. O God, it is a dreadful thing to live a moment in an unforgiven state. "He that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed upon the Son of God." If you were set up for an instant upon the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, poised in the air upon the cross with none to hold you up, how dreadful would be your feelings as you looked beneath you, and knew that the next gust of wind would sweep you down to sure destruction! Sinner, you are now in a similar position. If you are none of His, you are now in awful peril. You stand over the mouth of hell upon a single plank, and that plank is rotten. You hang over the jaws of perdition by a slender thread, and the angel of justice is ready to cut that thread in two. "None of His! None of His!" Oh, how dreadful to live none of His, and to die none of His, and to have this for your epitaph—"NONE OF HIS!" And then to wake up on the resurrection morning, and see the King in His beauty on the throne, and to know that you are none of His! To cry to the rocks to hide you, and to the hills to cover you, for you are none of His! Then to be brought out before the great white throne resplendent in its holiness, and hear the fact announced so that all may hear, that there is a Savior but you are none of His! Ah, what will it be to see the pit open her mouth to devour you, and descending forever, to understand that you are none of His!—

"You sinners, seek His face,
Whose wrath you cannot bear.
Bow to the scepter of His grace,
And find salvation there."

If you look to Jesus by faith, the Spirit is with you as you look. There is life in a look at the crucified Redeemer. Trust Him! Trust Him! Trust Him! And may the Lord compel you now, to live as you have never lived before. May you now begin the spiritual life, for if you have not the Spirit of God, you are none of His!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 8:1-23.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—149, 451, 445.

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PAVED WITH LOVE
NO. 1134

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 28, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The midst thereof being paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem."
Song of Solomon 3:10.

THIS portion of the Song describes the royal bridegroom as traveling up from the wilderness in an eastern palanquin, attended by His bodyguard, and by those who bear torches and burn perfumes. We have a description of the sumptuous chariot-bed in which this great monarch traveled, describing it as being made of cedar, with pillars of silver, a bottom of gold, curtains of purple, and within it a patterned floor, with pavement, not of precious stones, but of priceless love. Metaphor is suddenly dropped in this last item, and the result is a complicated, but very expressive form of speech. Some regard the expression as signifying a pavement of stone, engraved with hieroglyphic emblems of love which made up the floor of this traveling chariot. But this would surely be very uncomfortable and unusual, and therefore others have explained the passage as referring to choice embroidery, and dainty carpets, woven with cost and care, with which the interior of the traveling chair was lined. Into such embroidery, sentences of love poetry may have been worked. Needlework was probably the material of which it was composed—skillful fingers would therein set forth emblems, and symbols of love. As the spouse in the 2nd chapter sings, "His banner over me was love," probably alluding to some love word upon the banner, probably tokens of love were carved or embroidered, as the case may have been, upon the interior of the chariot, so that "The midst thereof was paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem." We need not, however, tarry long over the metaphor, but endeavor to profit by its teaching.

This palanquin or traveling chariot in which the king is carried represents the covenant of grace, the plan of salvation, and in fact, the whole system by which the Lord Jesus comes down in mercy among men, and by which He bears His people along with Himself through the wilderness of this world, onward to the rest which He has prepared for them. It is, in a word, the mediatorial work of Jesus. The ark was carried through the wilderness preceded by the pillar of cloud and fire, as the symbol of the divine presence in mercy, and here we have a somewhat similar representation of the great King of grace, borne in regal splendor through the world, and bearing His elect spouse with Him. May it be ours to be made to ride like Jeshurun upon the high places of the earth in happy fellowship with Him whose goings forth was of old, even from everlasting.

I. I shall beg you to notice, first, this morning, THE GROWTH WHICH IS INDICATED HERE AS TO OUR VIEWS OF THE COVENANT OF

GRACE. The description advances step by step, each sentence mentioning an additional and far-enhanced preciousness. Thus do those who study the work of salvation prize it more and more. At the first glance, the sweet singer who speaks in this song perceived that the chariot was made of cedar, a costly wood. A closer view revealed "the silver pillars, beauteous to behold"; further observation showed "the bottom all of burnished gold." From cedar to silver and from silver to gold we have a clear advance as to precious material. On looking again, the observer remarks "the top of princely purple"; this is yet more precious as the type of imperial dignity, and the token of that effectual atonement which was worked out by the bloody stream of Calvary. The blood, which dyed that purple canopy, is much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tried with fire. And then, though one would think there could be no advance beyond the precious blood, the song proceeds yet one step further, for we find that "The midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem."

Beloved, the whole way of salvation was devised by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is all His planning, and all His own carrying out. Therefore the Song says, "King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon." Jesus is the sole author and finisher of our faith. Salvation is His from first to last. Every part of the covenant reveals His master hand. This is the glory of the whole, and this the believing eye perceives at the very first glance, and is thereby made glad. But further knowledge reveals other bright and glorious facts, and as the matter is considered, wonder and gratitude increase. Let us, then, take a brief survey of this glorious gospel chariot, that wondrous thing—Jehovah's covenant of grace. The first item is that it is made of "the wood of Lebanon." The finest wood upon the earth was that of the cedar, and the finest cedars were those which grew upon the Lebanon range. The Lebanon cedars, indeed, appear to have possessed qualities not found in the common cedar with which we are acquainted. That which was reckoned the best wood is used as the token of the super excellence of the covenant of grace. Cedar, moreover, was not only the most costly wood, and most esteemed, but it is one of the most lasting. London says that it is particularly valued for its durability. Fit type of that "Covenant ordered in all things and sure," of which not one jot or tittle shall ever fail. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the word on which we trust shall abide forever. In addition to its other excellences, cedar wood exhales a sweet perfume, so that a chariot of cedar would not only be very lasting, but very delightful to ride in, even as at this day we joy in God's salvation, and are filled with peace through believing. When we look at the covenant of salvation, at the very first glimpse of it we see that there is none like it. Many schemes have been imagined and preached up as ways of salvation, but not one of them can be likened to the method of atonement by blood, reconciliation through a substitutionary sacrifice, redemption by the incarnate God, salvation all of grace from first to last. When this is compared to a chariot, no timber less noble than the sweet-scented fir, cut from the monarch of Israel's royal forest, could worthily set it forth. Lies and vanity make

up all other plans, but this is royal truth. Other ways of salvation have been tried, but they have soon proved to be failures. The worm of human depravity has eaten into the choicest wood that was ever felled in the forests of human merit. Decay has seized upon all the goodly oaks of unaided human endeavors. Rottenness has devoured all carnal boasts, but the cedar wood of our hope in Jesus has shown no sign of crumbling to decay and it never will. There is in the atonement made by Christ, perpetuity of prevalence. It has paid for sin and will pay to the very end of time, so that whoever confides in it has a hope which will not deceive him.

I dare await the test of a long and afflicted life, or of a sudden and painful death, for the ground of my hope is undisturbed by outward circumstances. Like the cedar, it is adapted to abide all weathers. As surely as the body of the Lord saw no corruption, so surely shall my hope never turn to despair, and even if it is buried, it shall rise again. What consolation such a hope affords us! And for this reason, as perfume comes forth from cedar wood, so do fragrant comforts come pouring forth from the salvation which Jesus Christ has worked out for us. It is a pleasant, as well as a safe thing to rest in what Christ has done. Our joy is greatest when our faith in Him is most simple. The bare cedar wood is most fragrant. We derive from every part of His work some joy; every part of it smells most sweetly. He is all happiness, all consolation, all bliss to us and when our spirit casts itself in perfect simplicity upon Him, it breathes a perfumed atmosphere, delicious and reviving. If such is the first and lowest item in the description of the chariot, what will the richer portions be?

We will now look more closely at the royal chariot, and note well the four pillars which support the canopy. And as we gaze, we find that they are of' silver. Something more precious than cedar, for the salvation of Jesus grows upon us, and unto us who believe, He is more and more precious. There are some pictures so well painted that you may examine them with a magnifying glass, and instead of detecting defects you will perceive yet greater beauties. And so may you examine the work of our blessed Lord microscopically, if you choose, and the more you look, the more you will marvel, for He is so really glorious, so intrinsically precious, so infinitely to be admired. And what are these pillars, do you think, which support the canopy, and add such beauty to the chariot? What are they but divine holiness and infinite purity? Silver is constantly used in Scripture as the type of that which is precious and pure—"As silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." And O beloved, how holy the gospel is. The Lord's Word is very pure in itself and very purifying for those who receive it. Wherever the true gospel is preached, it promotes holiness, and in so doing acts according to its nature, creating its like. There is not a doctrine of the gospel which is not according to godliness. None of its blessings make provision for the flesh. None of its precepts encourage sin, and none of its promises wink at iniquity. The Spirit of the gospel is always the spirit of holiness. It wages determined war against the lusts of the flesh, and consequently the gospel is abhorred by the unclean. It lays the axe at the root of sin, and like a fire

devours all evil. As for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, is He not immaculate holiness? If you would see holiness embodied, where can you look but to the person of our well-beloved Master? Where are His imperfections? Can you find a flaw in His language or in His actions, in Himself or in the Spirit that moved Him? Is He not altogether perfect? Look, then, at the gospel, the way of salvation, and the covenant of grace, and you shall see conspicuous holiness everywhere, but especially when you come to deal with the center of the gospel, the great atoning sacrifice.

Four silver pillars hold up this crimson canopy. The blood-red propitiation covers us from the wrath of God, and the holiness of God holds up this interposing medium. He is not unrighteous to forget the blood of the atonement. Because He is a just God, He is now the Savior of those who are sheltered beneath the reconciling blood of Calvary. The Lord could not forgive sin till first the honor of His law had been vindicated, and that being done, the same honor requires that the atonement should be respected, and the believing sinner saved. When we see Christ upon the cross, we learn how God's inflexible justice, like unbending pillars of pure silver, holds up aloft the crimson shelter of vicarious death, beneath which the saints are secure. Even to save His own elect, Jehovah would not mar His integrity, nor allow His great white throne to be stained with injustice. He is no respecter of persons, and when sitting on the throne of judgment, even His own chosen, which He loves with everlasting love, must be treated with the same impartiality as His enemies. This He has effected by accepting His Son in their place, and exacting from Him those penalties which were due from them, but might be justly received at the hands of their federal head. There is no injustice in the salvation of the believer. There is not even an abatement of the claims of just retribution. All is done openly, and so as to challenge the most severe examination. Conspicuously before the eyes of all, the silver pillars of purity bear up the sacred atonement. Is not this a matter for superlative delight?

But if we look more closely, we discern what would not have been perceived at a distance. "The bottom" of the chariot bed "is of gold," the most precious metal of all. This is to indicate that the foundations of salvation are imperishable and unchangeably precious. The basis of grace is laid in the immutable purpose and unchanging decree of God, and in the everlasting, undiminished, unchangeable love of God towards His dear Son, and to those who are in Him. Blessed be God for a salvation which will not yield under pressure, or fail us in our hour of peril. It is no base metal, but gold tried in the fire. I cannot understand those who think that God loves His people one day, and hates them the next. That though He knew what they would be, and knew that they would fall into sin, yet He resolved to take them to Himself as His children for a little while and then afterwards to disinherit them. God forbid I should ever understand a doctrine so dishonoring to the Lord who changes not. My own love to my children makes me feel that they must be my children as long as *they* live, and *I* live. And surely God's children must and shall be His children while God Himself shall live, and His people shall exist. Beloved, the bottom on which we rest as saved sinners is not the shifting foundation of

our own feelings, works, prayers, or resolves. If our salvation depended upon our good behavior, we might as well build on the clouds, and pile up bubbles as our cornerstones. Yes, and if it rested upon our own unaided faith, if there were no guarantee of grace to keep that faith alive, but all rested on the exercise of faith by us, it were better never to have had a hope of salvation at all, than to have had such a wretched, unsubstantial mockery, certain to end before long in fatal disappointment. You and I have not so learned Christ. We have left the miry clay for the solid rock. God has made an eternal purpose concerning His people, and that will never be changed. Infinite love ordained their salvation, and will never reverse its decree, though day and night should cease. Infinite power guarantees the fulfillment of the divine purpose, and what can stand against omnipotence? A complete atonement has already been made, and it will never lose its efficacy, therefore those for whom it was worked out must be saved. There is, moreover, an indwelling Spirit who has come into God's people to abide with them forever, according to the covenant promise, "I will dwell in them, and I will walk in them; I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Our spiritual life does not hang on a thread, as it would do if it were in our own keeping, but it depends upon Jesus, for has He not said, "Because I live you shall live also"? Nothing can be more secure than the salvation of the soul that believes in Jesus, for it rests in God alone. Of the chariot of salvation we may say with quaint Ralph Erskine—

"Its bottom is a groundwork sure
Of pure and solid gold,
From bankrupt beggary to secure,
From falling through to uphold."

Let us view the royal canopy of the chariot—"The covering thereof is of purple." As the king and his bride traveled, they needed to be screened from the sun's baleful rays. Lo, over the head of the spouse hangs a regal covering of purple. Look up, my soul, and see what interposes between your God and you! He must smite you, for you are a sinner, but you are covered and sheltered, and are living happily. What is it that shields you? What, indeed, but the atoning blood!—

"Ah, who can view that purple covering,
And turn away unmoved, insensible?
Who can discern it, and forget that day
When impious greetings shouted forth disdain,
When, crowned with thorns, the Man of sorrows stood
In purple robes of cruel mockery?
Despised, rejected, yet a king, indeed,
Whom they shall see hereafter on His throne."

The atonement shelters us—never was a soul injured by the rays of God's justice when hidden beneath this purple, and never shall there be. There is no repose for the conscience anywhere else, but there is perfect repose here. I often hear theories about what Christ did which remind me of Dr. Duncan's description of Robertson, of Brighton: "Robertson believed that Christ did something or other, which somehow or other had some connection or other with salvation." This may suit others, but is of no sort of use to me. I feel that if Christ did not actually and literally die

as my Substitute, the just for the unjust, I am not saved, and never can be at rest in my heart again. I renounce all preaching whatever if substitution is not the leading feature of my theme, for there is nothing worth preaching when that is gone. I regard that doctrine as the fundamental truth of the gospel, which, denied, you have slain the gospel, and which, cast into the background, you have covered the gospel with a cloud. That Jesus Christ was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, that though He was just, He was treated as a sinner, and in our place suffered the wrath of God due to us, this is the kernel and vital heart of the gospel. Conscience tells every man that God must punish sin. Its voice, more or less loudly, always proclaims that sin must be punished. This is no arbitrary arrangement; it is inevitable. Sin and suffering have a natural relationship. If God is just, sin must bring evil consequences upon the man who commits it, and until conscience understands that this evil was borne by Christ, that He suffered what ought to have been suffered by the sinner, and that He was justly a substitute because He was the head and Adam of those for whom He died—until, I say, the conscience knows this, it cannot find rest. Get under the blood-red canopy, and then you are at peace, but not till then. Therefore you find that whenever God revealed Himself to His people, the most apparent thing was always the blood. Abel must bring a bleeding lamb, and Noah a slaughtered beast. When the King feasted with His chosen in Egypt, the blood adorned the lintel and the two side-posts of every house wherein He revealed His saving power. When He marched through the wilderness, one of the coverings of His tabernacle was made of rams' skins dyed red, and all within and around the holy courts, themselves, were perpetually sprinkled with blood, for almost all things were under the law purified by blood. The voice of the law was always proclaiming what the gospel proclaims, too, that, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." Our Savior's life must end in blood upon the tree, and before that closing scene, His last feast of love, His communion with His disciples had for its most conspicuous provision, the cup of red wine in which His blood was symbolized. Every time He sets forth, visibly, His communion with His people here below, the wine must be poured forth. God cannot and will not reveal Himself to man except through the medium of the perfect satisfaction by the pouring out of the life of the Substitute in the place of the sinner.

"The covering thereof is of purple." Oh, it is not for these lips to tell how precious that purple is. It is not possible, even, for this heart to know how precious is the blood of the Son of God, the vital blood which out of love to us He poured out freely for our redemption. Sit at your ease, my brothers and sisters, in the chariot of salvation, rejoicing as you look upward, and let no doubts, fears, mistrusts, nor suspicions vex you, for beneath the blood-red canopy you are secure.

There is yet one more step—we rise from the blood to the love which caused it to flow, and we read of the royal chariot—"The midst thereof was paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem." Not merely the bottom covered with it, but, as in a carriage, the whole vehicle lined with

something soft to sit upon and lean upon. So the whole covenant of grace is, within, garnished and beautified, and made delightful to the believer's soul by the sweet love of God in Christ. The covenant is God's love in its secret places; all love, unalloyed love, invisible love, nothing else but love. When one comes to know most of the covenant, and admires the wisdom, the power, the purity, the eternity of all that God has done, yet the most striking characteristic of it to the advanced Christian is the love, the mighty love of God, by which he is brought by Jesus Christ into eternal salvation. You have crowned me with Your loving-kindness. You have loved my soul out of the pit. You have loved me, and given Yourself for me. Your love has redeemed me with a price most precious. Your love has made me what I am. Your love carries on the work, and Your love will complete it, and present me to You in its own perfect image, for "The midst of it is paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem."

The point we have proved is this, that everything in the study of the gospel grows upon you. I earnestly exhort you, therefore, to meditate much in the Scriptures, to consider much the person and character of your Lord, to meditate full often upon His beauties, and upon all the work which He has done on your behalf. Do not be satisfied with a superficial survey, as many Christians are. These are not the days of contemplation as the old Puritan times were; we are too apt to be superficial. But remember that while there are nuggets of gold upon the very surface of Scripture, yet the most valuable mines of gold are far down, and you must dig into them. Pray God that you may be well taught in the things of Christ. There are some sciences in which you can master all that is worth knowing in a short time, and the further you go in the study, the more you perceive that nothing is very certain, and you soon get weary of it. But the science of Christ crucified grows upon you. You get more assured of the facts of it, and more intensely delighted in them. I exhort you, therefore, to sit constantly at the Master's feet with Mary, and I pray that each one of us may know, by following on to know the Lord, what are "the heights and depths, and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge."

II. We shall now NOTE THE POSITION FROM WHICH THE LOVE MENTIONED IN OUR TEXT IS BEST SEEN. "The midst thereof is paved with love." It is not, therefore, to be seen from the outside. The mere outsider understands nothing of the love of God to His people as displayed in the covenant of grace. I am certain that there are many of you here present who have heard the gospel for years, and yet no more know the sweetness of it than the floor I am standing upon. A man may pass the door of the London Tavern or the Mansion House for years, and yet have no notion of the banquets within, for these are indoors, and you must enter to partake of them. Savory vapors floating from the festive board may awaken a transient imagination, but no more. The cock on the dunghill turned over the diamond, and according to the fable, remarked that he cared very little for it. He would sooner have found a grain of barley. And likewise, many hear of the sweetness of true religion, but they have not the taste or the ability to perceive its sweetness. Oh, unregener-

ate hearer, you will never know how sweet the gospel is. It is impossible you should while you remain in the state you now are in. But I tell you, if you could get half a glimpse of the joy, which even the poorest Christian has, you would never rest content until you enjoyed it, too. If men have said concerning Naples, "See Naples and die," because of its beauty, I might say to you it were worthwhile dying a thousand deaths to get a glimpse of Christ. When once your faith has perceived His beauty, you will wonder how you could have been satisfied to be blinded so long. What must it be to be forgiven all your sins, and to know it? What must it be never to be afraid of death, to be able to look forward to departing from this world as a thing to be longed for, and not to be dreaded? What must it be to be able to look up and say, "God is my Father, and I feel that I am His child"? What must be the joy and bliss of having familiar communion with God so that you are called His friends, as Abraham was of old? I wish I could set your mouths watering after these things. If you had but a little taste of them, you would long for more. But until the Lord shall grant you that taste, all we can say of the love of Christ will have no charm for you. The love which lines the chariot of salvation is not to be known by those who remain outside. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant."

And so note next, that when the Christian stands apart from his Lord and judges by outward appearances, he cannot perceive as once he did, the loving-kindness of the Lord. Providence grows dark as a winter's day. The tried believer cries, "My wife has been taken from me! My property is melting away, my business fades, I am sick in body and weary in soul. I cannot see a trace of the love of God to me in all this." Brother, the description in the Song does not say that the chariot is plated with love on the outside, but it is paved with Love *within*—"in the midst of it." Oh that you had faith to believe that the heart and real core of every providence is love. The exterior of it may be as a thorn hedge, but sweet fruit ripens within. "Oh," you say, "but I have looked at the Bible lately, and as I have glanced over its once-cheering promises, they appear to smile at me no more. Some of the words grate very harshly on my ears, and almost condemn me." I do not wonder, for although I can, at this moment, see love in the very outside of Scripture, yet there are times when I cannot, when I can only feel as if every text thundered at me, and out of God's own mouth came heavy sentences against me. Beloved, it does not say, I repeat it, that the exterior part of this palanquin was adorned with self-apparent love, but that love was in the midst. If you stand examining the exterior of providence, and the mere letter of the word, and begin to judge and try your God, I should not wonder if little enough of love should be conspicuous to you. Look into the heart of God, and read what He has written there. When faith takes a step upward, and mounts to the inside of the chariot of grace, she finds that it is paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem.

Come and sit side by side with Jesus in His chariot of grace, His bed of rest. Come and recline with Him in hallowed fellowship. There is room enough for you, and strength enough to bear your weight. Come now and

be carried with Him who carried your cross. Sit down with Him, who on His hands, and on His side, bears the memorials of His dying love to you. What company you have, and what royal accommodation is provided for you! I think I sit in the chariot with the Beloved, now, and I begin to look around me. I catch a glimpse of the purple above my head, and remember the unspeakable love which bled and died for sinners. I look at the silver pillars which support the covering, and how infinite holiness stands fast, and in love to me secures my perfection. I place my foot on the golden floor of the chariot, and know that divine power is pledged by love to preserve and bear me through. I see above me, and around me, and beneath me, nothing but love—the free, unbounded love of God. Now, beloved, indulge yourselves with a glance around you for a minute. Look back to old eternity. Let your eyes peer through the mists which hide that ancient age before the ages began! What do you see there but love, "according to His eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus or ever the earth was"? Look a little closer. See the garden of Eden, and the fall—what strikes your eyes there, but love? The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. Look to the cross and at God incarnate here below. Behold Jesus living in suffering and dying in shame! Here love comes to her climax, and lays bare all her matchless charms. Look to the time of your own life. Was not love present at your birth, perfuming your first breath? Were you not nursed in love, cradled in love, and swaddled in love? Have you not, since then, even in your sinfulness, been loved with an exceedingly great and wondrous love? Did not love turn your heart of stone into flesh? Has not love dwelt in you since then, even to this day? Have not even your trials been sent in love? Blind unbelief called it severity, but look, now, as Jesus sits at your side, and say, was it not the wisest forms of love that smote you, and made you cry out in bitterness? Oh, I remember at this day nothing in the dealings of God to me but love. I sat down last night, as this text charmed my spirit, and tried to think over my whole life, if perhaps, I might light upon some unkindness of my God to me. But my solemn witness is that from the first day my life began to beat, from the first hour I knew anything of the Lord whatever, all His dealings have been love, love, love, love, love, and love alone—nothing else but love. Of my life I can and must say, "The midst thereof has been paved with love."

Look at the patterned pavement of love beneath your feet for a moment. Can't you see the Father's love—that golden mass of uncreated love, for the Father Himself, loves you. Look at Jesus' love, another diamond pavement beneath your feet. Jesus loved you to the death, with a love that many waters could not quench, nor do floods drown. Look at the love of the Spirit, too. Equally precious is the tender affection of the loving Comforter. Think how the Holy Spirit has borne with you, has striven with you, and endured your ill manners in the wilderness, and blessed you still. Look at those delightful embroideries from the divine needle—the precious promises. A thousand promises there are, but they are all love. Look down and see how all the attributes of God are engaged for you, but they are all in league with love! Look, then, at all the provi-

dences of God towards you, at all the exercises of His grace in your heart, and you will see many and strange colors of varied beauty, all blending in one wondrous pattern of deep, unsearchable love. I cannot talk this morning, my tongue fails me, but I feel the love of Jesus in my own soul, and I pray that you may feel it in yours. This one thing be assured of, that as it was in the beginning, it is now, and ever shall be, love, love, love, right on, forever and forever. The Lord who has begun to love you will never cease from doing so. The midst of the covenant of grace is paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem.

III. I want you to notice THE PECULIAR POSITION OF THE PAVEMENT OF LOVE DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT. It is "in the midst" of the chariot, and only from the midst is it to be seen. It is in the midst of it, and therefore, Jesus rides upon it, and His espoused ones ride upon it. It is a very simple thought, but it richly deserves to be beaten out a little. Jesus is represented here as the King in the chariot, and as the chariot is lined with love, we are taught that Jesus dwells in love. Where is He now? Among the thrones and principalities above, but He still abides in love. Love brought Him down from heaven to earth; Love conducted Him in all His weary journeys over the acres of Palestine. Love led Him to the garden, the death-sweat, and the cross. And equally, at this hour, does love attend Him. He loves in heaven as He loved below. Whatever He is doing, whatever He is feeling, whatever He is saying we know this one thing about Him, He dwells in love to us. He is in His chariot, and all around Him in that chariot is love.

The chariot was a royal one, and as the king rode along, He was reigning, but He was reigning in love, and it is so with Jesus. All things are in His hands, and He governs all things in love to His people. Heavenly principalities serve Him, and angels are His willing messengers. But there is no power which Jesus has which He does not wield in love to us. Has His power seemed, sometimes, to be exercised harshly? It is not so. It cannot be so. He reigns in love. Our Joseph is lord over all Egypt, and since Joseph loves His brothers, the good of all the land of Egypt is theirs. Jesus rules the entire world for His people's benefit. All things are theirs, whether things present or things to come, all are theirs. Jesus reigns in love.

Jesus rests in love. This chariot was a place for the traveler to rest in. He reclined as he was carried along. Nothing gives Jesus such rest as His love for His people. It is His solace and His joy. It is almost inconceivable by us that Jesus should derive joy from the fact that He loves us, but it is so. That text in Zephaniah which we read on Monday evening comes again to our recollection—"He will rest in His love, He will joy over you with singing." It is a joy to Christ to love His people. His own heart finds a joy in their joy, a heaven in their heaven. To see them saved is bliss to Him. Oh, how glad we ought to be of this. Jesus rests in love.

But as the traveler rested, he also proceeded on his way. The bearers carried the palanquin from place to place, and the traveler made progress, but always with the same surroundings within his curtained bed. So Jesus, in all His glorious marching, in everything He does or is to do,

still marches on in love. Read the Book of Revelation and think of the trumpets, and the falling stars, and the opened vials full of judgments, and you may well tremble. But then fall back upon the doctrine of the Scriptures, and say, "These are the goings forth of my Lord the King, but He always rides in a chariot which is paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem. So let Him come, with earthquake and with flame, if so He chooses, let Him come. Let Him even loose destroying angels to smite the earth, and let the whole world before His coming rock and reel, and all men's hopes depart like visions of the night, I will not fear, for I am sure that He cannot come except in love to me. No judgment can bear wrath to His people. No overturning can overturn their hopes. No rod of iron can shatter their bliss. This is surely a thought which should make your spirit glad.

Now notice that as Jesus rides in this chariot, so do you, O believer, and at this moment your standing is upon love. You stand up in this palanquin upon love. You are accepted in the Beloved. You are not judged according to the law, but you are judged according to grace. You are not judged at the judgment seat by what you have done, but according to His abounding mercy. Recline, this morning, in the love of God. Ah, take your rest in it. As the rich man tries to find solace in his riches, and the strong man in his strength, and the great man in his fame, so stretch yourselves and lie at ease upon this glorious bed of almighty love.

And, beloved, take care that when you labor to make progress, you make it in the power and energy of His love, do not strive after virtue and grace by the law, for you will never get them. The chariot in which you rest is also the chariot in which you are to be carried forward towards perfection. Grow in grace, but keep to the cross. Cling to the love of God in Christ Jesus, for that always keeps you safe. Sleep in it, wake in it, eat, and you drink in it. Wherever you are, love surrounds you. It is in the atmosphere you breathe. It is to be found in every place, wherever you roam. You are never out of the love which is in the midst of the chariot.

These are things not to be talked of so much as to be thought over. Carry them home, and if you have leisure this afternoon, try to mark, learn, and inwardly digest this precious truth—"The midst thereof is paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem."

IV. To close, DWELL ON THAT LOVE itself just for a moment. Remember it is special love. It is not for all men. There is some consolation in universal benevolence, but here we go deeper and rejoice in love for the daughters of Jerusalem. There is an electing, discriminating, distinguishing love which is settled upon a chosen people—a love which goes forth to none beside, but only to them. And it is this love which is the true resting place of the saint.

It is love undeserved, for what daughter of Jerusalem ever deserved that our glorious King should fall in love with her? It is a love, therefore, which is a theme for eternal wonder. Why did You love me, Redeemer? Why did You make a covenant of grace with me, and line that covenant with immutable love?

This love is everlasting and eternal. It never had a beginning; it never will have an end. Simply as I have stated the truth, it is a nut with heaven for its kernel. You were always loved, O believer, and you always shall be, come what may.

It is love unrivalled, for never was there such affection as that which Christ has for His chosen, love unexampled, to which none of us shall ever reach. We should seek to love as God has loved us, but to the infinite, the boundless degree, we shall never arrive. There is no love like the love of God in Christ. It is love which to us has become this day our brightest thought, our truest comfort, and our most potent incentive. Law rules the slaves of this world, but love rules the freemen of the world to come. The ungodly, if they do right after a fashion, do it from fear of punishment or hope of reward. But the true-born children of God find in the love of Christ their sole motive. They are obedient not because they are afraid of being lost—they know they never shall be, not because they hope to get to heaven by their good works—they already have heaven already by the works of another, guaranteed to them by the promise of God. They serve God out of pure gratitude for what they have received, rejoicing as they work in the service of one they love so well.

Beloved, may the love of God be shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit this morning, and all the days of your lives. And O that many who have never tasted of that love may be made to long for it, that they may be made alive by it, and unto God shall be the glory. Amen and Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
SONG OF SOLOMON 3; 1 John 5.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN BOOK"—421, 816, 684

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NO. 1135

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 5, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And He said also to the people, When you see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway you say, There comes a shower; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, There will be heat; and it comes to pass. You hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that you do not discern this time? Yes, and why even of yourselves judge you not what is right?" Luke 12:54-57.

THESE words were addressed by our Savior to the common people who had gathered around Him. He appealed to their common sense. They were able to foretell the weather from the signs which they saw in the heavens, and if they could do this, the signs of His coming were even more clear and manifest, so that if they would but use their eyes, they might see that He was the Messiah. That they did not do so was an instance of hypocrisy of heart—they did not see the Savior because they would not. Our Savior's coming had been very clearly foretold by the prophets. The people were generally acquainted with the prophetic writings, and there had been, consequently, a general expectation of the coming of the Messiah at the time. Above all, the scepter had departed from Judah, and they knew by this sure signal that the set time for the coming of Shiloh had arrived. Beyond this, our Savior's character and miracles attested His Messiahship, for He worked among the people such works as no other man had ever done, and taught them with a divine authority which they could not resist. Did not the blind see? Did not the deaf hear? Did not the lame walk? Were not lepers cleansed, and the dead raised? And was not the gospel preached to the poor? What other tokens could they ask? Were not these the ensigns that their great prophet, Isaiah, had left on record for their guidance? As certainly as a cloud in the western sky predicted rain and a wind from the south was the sign of heat, so assuredly there were infallible tokens, visible to all who chose to see them, that the Messiah had come. He charges them to use their common sense, and not submit themselves to be hoodwinked by their leaders. He asked, "Judge you not even of yourselves what is right?" Why bow yourselves down that scribes and Pharisees may go over you? Think and judge for yourselves like men. The Lord, here, declares the duty of private judgment, and exhorts the people to use it, urging them to yield no more a slavish obedience to the mandates of their false leaders, but to use their own wits as they would upon ordinary matters, and even of themselves judge what was right. The people needed awaken-

ing from spiritual slumber. They required to be exhorted to manliness of spirit, for they had so completely surrendered their judgments to their blind leaders, that the most conspicuous signs of the time were unperceived by them.

I believe that the passage before us might have been spoken by our Lord at the present moment with quite as much appropriateness as when He spoke it then, and therefore have I taken it for a text, hoping that, perhaps, God might bless it to this crooked and perverse generation which scorns the yoke of Christ, but willingly bows its neck to the thralldom of a loathsome priestcraft.

First, we shall *consider our own times, religiously,* on a broad scale, and then, secondly, we shall speak of *the times within the little world of ourselves,* and both to believers and unbelievers we shall have to say, "You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it that you do not discern this time? Yes, and why even of yourselves judge you not what is right?"

I. First, then, let us carefully CONSIDER THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF OUR OWN AGE.

At the outset, it must be evident to every Christian that *the times are sadly darkened with superstition.* The eastern sky is generally cloudless, and when a cloud was seen to arise from the Mediterranean, which lay to the west, the Jews, very naturally, looked for rain, and it came. Innumerable clouds have arisen in these latter days, to the surprise and alarm of all lovers of our nation. Popery, which we thought to be dead and buried, as far as England was concerned, has displayed amazing signs of vitality, and has come back to us; not as a foreign plant, but as a home-grown upas tree, nurtured upon the fattest soil of our country in the enclosure of the national church. The clouds of Sacramentarianism, priestcraft, and idolatry are hanging over our nation like a pall. The heavens are darkened by their shadow. When clouds cover the sky, we look for showers, and we may rest assured that the almost universal tendency of our countrymen towards Popery forebodes evil. Idolatry in a nation always brings down upon it the judgments of God. Look at the pages of history and see whether any once-enlightened nation has ever set up idol gods, Virgin Marys, saints, holy wafers, and followed the superstitions of Antichrist—without sooner or later being chastened of the Lord. Remember the glories of Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella! See what a nation it was in old times, and what it has now become! Priestcraft is the Delilah through whose means the Spanish Samson has been shorn of his strength.

Read the story of France and all her late trials, and see if the great bane of the land has not been superstition and the unbelief which is the recoil from it. What good can come to a nation whose peasants are the dupes of the priests, and whose statesmen are servile to the pontiff of Rome? Have the Jesuits ever laid their hands upon a throne without eventually shaking it to its foundations? Have they ever secured power among a people without demoralizing them to the uttermost? Are they

not the common enemies of mankind? Are they not a thousand times more dangerous to men than wolves or serpents? And is not their religion, whether it takes the Roman or the Anglican shape, under all its disguises, the "abomination of desolation," provoking God beyond measure wherever it comes? They bring in its train that bestial, or rather, devilish thing, the confessional, with all the shameless vice and infamous uncleanness of which it is both mother and nurse. It was but yesterday I read a little book for the young, edited by a committee of clergy of the church of England, in which children are urged to confess to the priest, meaning thereby, the parish clergyman, every immodest word they may have spoken, and every indecent act they may have committed. They are taught, thus, to repeat filthiness, and to become unblushing in vice. The young girl is told to confess to a man every sin against purity and modesty, and she is told, (and I will quote the very words), that, *"However painful it is to acknowledge a fault of this kind, it must be bravely confessed, without lessening it; it is almost always sins of impurity that weak penitents dare not tell in confession."* That is to say, young women have a natural shame about them, and the objective of the confessional is to make their faces brazen enough to speak of immoral acts in the ear of a man.

This black cloud which hovers over my country warns of great evil to her. As surely as Spain and France have been humbled, and as nation after nation has crumbled down to anarchy, or been altogether destroyed, so surely will this land sink from her greatness, and lose her rank among the nations if this deadly evil is not, by some means, stamped out. May God in His infinite mercy take up the gage of battle, and go forth and fight His foes on this soil which is wet with the blood of martyrs, and still glows with the fires of Smithfield. Oh, children of God, I pray you, discern the times before the threatening shower descends upon our country. And learn to play your parts as men of God, ordained to defend the truth. What is your duty at the present crisis? It is clearly your business to walk constantly in separation from everything which savors of the abominations of Rome. I do not see this among my fellow Christians, and therefore I am ashamed and grieved at heart. I observe among many evangelical churchmen an increased leaning to Ritualistic practices—they are even tinctured with this gall, and show it by evident tokens. I see, also, among those who claim to be furthest apart from sacerdotalism, namely, Nonconformists, many leaning in the direction we have indicated. Their buildings are growing more ornate, and are pitiful mimicries of the ecclesiastical architecture most congenial to Popery. More and more are they studying to attract, by music, chants, and sham liturgies. The meeting house is now a church, and in the church the simplicity of scriptural worship is overlaid with the inventions of human wisdom.

I hate sensuous worship quite as much in a meeting house as in a cathedral, and rather more, but I see many of my brethren eager after it, and gradually introducing it as the people will bear it. Again may it be said, "And so we went towards Rome." It is the imperative duty of every

Christian to say decisively, "I will have no union with this abomination. I declare for God, for Christ, for His truth, and to this vile Antichrist I will not yield the smallest point. I will not be a sharer of Babylon's sins, lest I be a partaker of her plagues." Happy are those who have not the mark of the beast either on their hands or on their foreheads, but keep the simple way of spiritual worship. In evil times they will feel the same quietude of conscience as Job did when he could say that he had never been enticed to adore the sun or the moon, or to kiss his hand in imitation of the worshippers of the hosts of heaven. Watchfully and earnestly should we avoid all communion with the great apostasy.

It is also high time for us all, as Christians, to work more carefully in precise obedience to the Word of God. Brethren, we would never have had the errors of Rome back among us if the Book of Common Prayer had been, from the first, conformed to the Word of God. There were temporizers abroad of old who gained a present peace for themselves by leaving to their descendants a heritage of error. We need to return to the pure Word of God. Conform the church to the Scriptures, and quicken her with God's Spirit, and she will resist the encroachments of error, but fetter her with compromises, and she will become captive to falsehood before long. Luther did grand service by his Reformation, but he stopped half-way—he left the church with her face half-washed, and in consequence her whole visage has again become foul. O for a thorough reformation! So long as words stand in the Anglican Prayer Book, which to the common reader teach baptismal regeneration, they are an invitation and an encouragement to the Popish party to return. And having returned, they are, for them, a castle and high tower.

I shall give great offense as I now go further and say, as in the sight of God, that I am persuaded that as long as infant baptism is practiced in any Christian church, Popery will have a door set wide open for its return. It is one of those nests which must come down, or the foul birds will build in it again. We must come to the law and to the testimony, and any ordinance which is not plainly taught in Scripture must be put away. As long as you give baptism to an unregenerate child, people will imagine that it must do the child good, for they will ask, "If it does not do it any good, why is it baptized?" The statement that it puts children into the covenant, or renders them members of the visible church, is only a veiled form of the fundamental error of Baptismal Regeneration. If you keep up the ordinance, you will always have men superstitiously believing that some good comes to the baby thereby, and what is this but sheer Popery? Since the child cannot understand what is done, any good which it receives must come to it after the occult manner so much in vogue with the superstitious—is it any wonder that Popish beliefs grow out of it? And not only as to infant baptism, but as to every other doctrine, ordinance, or precept—we must each seek to get back to this Book and follow closely the Word of God. The Wesleyan, the Presbyterian, the Baptist, the Independent, the Episcopalian, must each be eager to put away everything, however esteemed among them, which is founded upon denomina-

tional tradition, and not upon inspired authority. To the law and to the testimony must the church of God return if she would escape future outbreaks of the Anti-Christian evil; great errors spring from lesser errors. To favor falsehood is to injure truth. God give to His people to feel that the utmost care becomes them in obeying the Lord and walking after His commands, lest evil come of negligence.

And, dear brethren, as the voice of this evil abounds, let us abound in our testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus. The more the priests set up their idols, the more let us lift up Christ and Him crucified. The more they compass sea and land to make proselytes, the more earnestly let us plead with men that they will believe in the true Savior. Let the diligence of our enemies shame our laziness. Let their earnestness rebuke our apathy. Let us abundantly distribute the antidote while they industriously disseminate the poison. Let us pour out the light, and so scatter their darkness. This is God's message to us, and let every Christian man and woman read it in the signs of the times.

Furthermore, anyone with half an eye can see that *a parching wind of unbelief is sweeping over the churches.* Where superstition does not rule, skepticism has fixed its seat. "When you see the south wind blow, you say there will be heat"—this was a well-known weather sign among the Jews, for the south wind blew from the desert, like a blast from the mouth of a furnace. Even so, there will be a burning up of spiritual life wherever the wind of infidelity speeds its course. Alas, in how many of our pulpits are the great truths of the gospel kept back and regarded as mere platitudes, unfit for men of culture to repeat. These truths may be believed in by the preacher, but he treats them as worn-out truisms. There are many ministers nowadays, whom it would be premature to condemn, but whom it is unavoidable to suspect. They profess by their very position, to be preachers of the gospel, but their indistinct utterance upon vital points leads us to question whether they know anything of the truth in their own souls, or do really and heartily believe any one of the articles of our faith. These are the men who cry up freedom of thought, and denounce all dogmas and creeds. Knowing this to be the case, and we do know it, for we cannot look abroad without seeing it on all sides, is there not a voice to us out of this evil? When unbelief abounds in the churches, is it not time for true believers to have done with all reliance upon human wisdom? Gradually the churches have come to look upon clever preachers, intellectual gentlemen, men of thought, great thinkers and the like, as the necessity of the times, and they have idolized them.

And, now, what have these intellectual gentlemen done for their churches? To what have the "men of thought" brought their brethren? Our churches under men who preached Jesus Christ and nothing else were the bulwarks of Protestantism, and no dissenters deserted to the foe. But under the care of these wonderful thinkers, the rich among Nonconformists see their families hurrying off to the superstitions which their fathers abhorred. It has come to this, that in one of the conferences about to be held, there is a paper to be read upon the "Infrequency of

Conversions in the churches," a paper grievously needed. The Lord, grant that the words spoken on the subject may burn like flames of fire. Who could expect conversions to be worked under many of the sermons which are now preached? I once heard a sermon, most philosophic and metaphysical, which was prefaced by a prayer that God would convert sinners by it, a prayer which seemed sarcasm upon the discourse. We have had enough of intellectualism and oratorical polish, let them both be thrown out of window, as Jezebel was, with her painted cheeks, and let something better take their place—even the plain preaching of Christ crucified.

Since there is such infidelity abroad, is it not time for Christians to rise above the atmosphere of doubt, and walk in the light of God? If you merely attain to the theory of religion, you may always live in question as to every truth. But if you rise above the theory, and walk with God continually, doubts will vanish. I never doubt whether there is a sun when it shines on me and makes me warm. I can never doubt the existence of bread when I am eating it. He who feels the life of God gets beyond the reach of philosophic questioning, which is the very atmosphere of the age. Brethren, you will not question whether prayer is a reality, if every day you receive answers to your petitions. You will never doubt the atonement of Jesus Christ, or His deity, if sin is your daily grief, and Jesus your abiding companion. You will look the scoffers of the age in the face, and say to them, "Get away from me! Our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, and our hands have handled of the good Word of life."

When we have this faith, let us battle with the unbelief of others. The voice of God is to you, O believers, "Arise, and let your faith exhibit itself." When Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord?" then was the moment for Moses to cast down his rod, and let it become a serpent. And when Jannes and Jambres cast down their rods, and they became serpents too, then was the opportunity for Moses' rod to swallow up their rods. In proportion to the unbelief of the age ought to be the energy of God's saints in working wonders of faith. Do and dare for God, my brethren! Be bold for Him! Out-cry the clamor of the multitude—put it down with the strong voice which proclaims, "There is a God in Israel, and men shall hear it, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear." Men of faith, gird on your harness, and use the strength of God to oppose the strength of unbelief.

Again, is it not clear to every observer who watches this age, that *religious apathy abounds?* Like that lull which heralds the tempest, a dead calm rests over many of the churches just now. And what is the voice of the terrible sleep of death but this, "O you that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest till He awakens His church"? In your private prayers, I charge you, O men of God, make your wrestling with the Most High far more intense. While the church sleeps, be on your watchtower. Neither day nor night refrain from supplicating God to arise and bless His Zion. Meanwhile, the churches which are awake should, in their assemblies for prayer, be more persistent in their pleadings. Come

together, every one of you, in the time appointed for prayer, and cry mightily unto God, for who knows, He might turn and leave a blessing behind? Now, beyond all times gone by, there is solemn need for supplication; see to it, my brethren that you abound in it.

These times of lethargy require something of us besides prayer, namely, personal activity. I would charge each Christian to be doing everything that he can for his Lord, for his church, and for perishing sinners. Let each man do his own work in God's sight and in God's strength, each one taking care that the church does not suffer through any neglect on his part. Personal consecration is the demand of the age. These days of lethargy are times when living saints should feel intensely for sinners, when they should feel anguish and an agony for them. In proportion as others grow callous, we must become sensitive. If ever we are to see better times, they must come through the intense earnestness of each separate believer crying out in pain for the souls of men, as one that travails in birth, till men are saved from everlasting burning. May each Christian here feel this sacred anguish, and in addition may there be more intense and vigorous religious life in all. If we want to awaken others, we must be awake ourselves. If we would urge the church forward, we must quicken our pace. If we would stimulate a laggard church, we must throw our whole soul into the cause of God. Personal consecration deepened daily, is the nearest way to promote the quickening of the entire church of God to a sense of her high calling. May the Holy Spirit invigorate us to the full force of grace that we may be the means of awakening the whole church!

Once again, there is another sad sign of the times which the watchman must sorrowfully report. *There is an evident withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from this land.* The spots where God is blessing the word are few and far between; a man may count them on his hand. Where is the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit as in days gone by? Our fathers were known to tell us of the days of Whitefield and Wesley, when the gospel spread as fire running among the stubble, for men's minds seemed prepared to obey the impulses of God's Spirit. We have seen something of these visitations, and in this place they have been almost continuous. But take the bulk of the churches all around, and where is the Spirit of God at this time? Where are the converts that fly as a cloud? The earth has her harvest, but where is the harvest of the church? Where are revivals now? The Spirit is grieved, and is gone from the church. And, brethren, why? Have Christian men and women become worldly? Is it true that you can scarcely tell a Christian from a worldling nowadays? O for more holiness, then. This is the demand which the times make upon us. You men of God be holy, yes, be perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Has unbelief restrained the dew and rain of the Spirit? Is it true that He cannot do many mighty works among us because of our unbelief? O for more faith, then. Put up the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith," and rest not day or night, till the prayer is heard. Or, my brethren are we in this evil case because the gospel has been veiled with wisdom of words? Is it not a fact that too often the gospel has been preached with

high-sounding elocution, and not with simplicity of speech? The poor have left many of our places of worship because they cannot understand the speaker's cumbrous sentences. Many have forgotten that the power of God does not lie in elegance of diction. Is that the cause of the Spirit's withdrawing? If so, let gospel simplicity be cultivated so that the common people may again hear our preachers gladly. Or, is it that Jesus Christ and His atoning blood have been kept in the background? In many pulpits doctrine is preached, but not the cross. Precepts are preached, but not the blood. Philosophy is preached, but not the crucified Savior. If it is so, in God's name let us come back to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And if we do so, the Spirit of God is sure to be present, for never is Christ preached aright without the Spirit of God, more or less attending to set His seal to the testimony. He will always honor those who honor the Son of God.

Beloved, we pause for one moment here to add, with much gratitude, but far more of jealous trembling, that this little spot does not always wear the same signs as to spiritual weather as the great church outside, for we have been much favored, and just now the tokens with us are those of a more than ordinarily copious shower of grace. Many of the spiritual have told me that of late they have felt God's presence among us in a special degree, and if it is so, the voice of God to us, which I trust we shall hear, is, "Servants of God, continue in prayer! Watch for the blessing! Cleanse yourselves from the sins which defile you! Be up and doing in order to win it! Prove the Lord by all holy actions and enterprises, according to His mind, and see if He will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing such that you shall not have room enough to receive it.

II. Now, I have to use the text in reference to THE TIMES WITHIN US. There is a little world within our bosom which has its winds and its clouds, and if we are wise, we shall watch.

First, I shall speak to *believers*. Believers, there are times with you when the "cloud rises out of the west, and straightway you say, there comes a shower." Times of refreshing—you have had them—look back upon them, they are choice memories. The Holy Spirit bedewed your souls, and bestowed on you the excellence of Carmel and Sharon—

"What peaceful hours you then enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still."

Perhaps you have lost them, then, sigh for their speedy return. Perhaps you are enjoying them now, be very grateful if you are. Brethren you need such visitations. How can the vineyard of the Lord flourish and bring forth fruit to Him if it is not watered from on high? Sometimes you need refreshing so grievously that you are painfully conscious of the need. Your praises languish, and your prayers almost expire. You need to be visited from on high, and you feel it. Beloved, since these refreshing are so precious and so much needed, you should eagerly watch for them. You should go up to the top of Carmel, like Elijah's servant, and with anxious eyes look towards the sea. And whenever you have to say, "There

is nothing," you should go back to your knees, but you should rise, yet again, with expectancy, even to seven times, and still watch until the cloud appears. You must have the Spirit of God, or how can you live? Much more, how can you bring forth fruit unto perfection? Watch for these showers, then, and when they come, use them. Open your heart as the earth opens her furrows after a long drought, when there are great gaping cracks in the soil ready to drink in the shower. Let your heart be receptive of the divine influence. Wait upon the Lord, and when the Lord comes to bless you, be like Gideon's fleece, ready to imbibe and retain the dew till you are full of it. Alas, I fear that many professors are dead to the visitations of the Spirit of God. They have no changes; their Christian profession knows neither drought nor rain. Like the statues in St. Paul's Cathedral, unaffected by heat or cold, they stand all the year round in rigid propriety. They have a dead religion, and having a dead religion, they are not at all conscious of any spiritual power or weakness. No droughts desolate them, and no falling showers cheer them, they are as unaffected by heavenly influences as the deep caverns of Adullam. Brethren, above all things beware of a religion altogether destitute of the changes, feelings, sorrows and joys which are inevitably connected with life. If you have passed into a cast-iron state, may the Lord be pleased to break your profession to shivers, for the heart of flesh, not the heart of iron, is the result of grace. I fear that some professors are not grieved at the absence of the Holy Spirit from themselves or others. If God does not bless the ministry upon which they attend, it does not concern them one half as much as a rise in the price of meat. And if they never experience spiritual joy, they never expected it, and are not so much troubled as they would be if they lost a shilling. As to godly sorrow, they avoid it; they call it unbelief and improper anxiety. Whether blessed or unblessed, they remain stupidly content, drugged into indifference. When God places some professors in the center of blessing, they make no use of it. They are not sensible of the Spirit's approach, and set no store by His operations. If they are not dead, they are in such a swoon that only God can discern the difference between them and those who are "dead in trespasses and sins." Beloved, may we never fall into that state—God save us from it! We ought to be sensitive to the approach or removal of the Spirit of God, walking in His power, and dwelling under His shadow, and never satisfied unless we daily feel the going forth of His strength.

Believers, we also have to speak to you about spiritual drought, for you have such seasons. "You see the south wind blow, and you say, there will be heat and it comes to pass." You have your times of drought—at least I have mine. They may be sent in chastisement. We do not value the blessing of the Spirit enough, and so it is withdrawn. Sometimes they may be intended to try our faith, to see whether we can strike our roots deep down into rivers of waters which never dry, and tap the eternal springs which lie beneath, and yield not to the summer's drought. Perhaps our times of drought are sent to drive us to our God, for when the means of grace fail us, and even the Word no longer com-

forts us, we may fly to the Lord, and drink at the wellhead. Perhaps, however, this drought has been occasioned by us. Worldliness is a south wind which soon brings a parching condition upon the spirits of men. If Christian people live, and act as worldly people do, go to worldly amusements, and follow worldly maxims, there is no wonder if they become as parched up as the Eastern land when the hot wind has swept over it. There is a tendency, even in our necessary associations with ungodly men, to wither our spiritual verdure. And unless we resort to God, in who are all our fresh springs, we shall soon find a parching heat burning up our religion. And, ah, brethren, if worldliness does not do it, there is the wind of carnal security which will soon bring barrenness into the soul. Begin to think that you are perfect, and the dew of heaven will forsake you. Fancy that matters are so right with you that you have no need to watch, no call to abound in prayer, no need to walk humbly with God, and your Lord will surely punish you for this by bidding the clouds rain no more upon you. And if you become proud, and haughty, and domineering over your brethren, and talk loftily concerning God's trembling ones, then again, will the wind from the south turn your garden into a wilderness, and make your fruits perish. Or if you neglect the means of grace, and forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, you will soon be dry as the desert sand. Keep away from the communion table, neglect secret prayer, forget reading the Word of God, and you will find your Lebanon and Bashan will languish and all your flowing brooks will be dried up. Then the lilies of fellowship will droop, and the roses of joy will pine away and die for lack of heavenly moisture. Yes, your fat pastures shall be a wilderness, and your plenteous harvests shall turn to desolation. May God save us from this! My brethren, if any of the signs of the times in the little world within you betoken such a drought, cry mightily to God, and give Him no rest till once again He bids the showers of His mercy gently distil upon your soul, that you may bring forth fruit to His name.

My last and most solemn work is now to come; I have to speak to sinners. Ungodly men are fools before God, but they are very often the reverse of fools in common life. They know what weather there will be; they can read the signs of the skies. Now I ask them to use the wit they have, and of themselves, judge that which is right. If you lived in Palestine, when you saw a cloud, you would expect a shower. When you see sin, do you not expect punishment? Can the righteous God permit His laws to be violated and forever sit still? How, then, can He rule the world? Does it stand to reason that the Judge of all the earth will eventually deal out the same measure to the righteous and to the wicked? As you are reasonable men, I beseech you answer that question.

God has not punished you yet He has spared you though you are still opposed to Him and His holiness. What does this cloud of the long-suffering of God mean? I will tell you. It bears drops of gentle mercy in its bosom. The long-suffering of God is Salvation. It leads you to repentance. If the Lord had been anxious to destroy you, would He have spared you

so long? Does it not look as if He had designs of grace toward you? You have been rescued from shipwreck, spared from fever, preserved in battle or accident, and why? Listen to the oath of God, "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, but had rather that he should turn unto Me and live." Let the very fact of God's long-suffering be to you an inducement to seek His mercy, for where there is such a cloud of long-suffering you may expect a rain of grace.

The preaching of the gospel to you today, does it not argue showers of mercies waiting for you? Why does the Lord commission ministers without number to proclaim His mercy to sinners, if He does not wish to save them? The very fact that you are in the house of prayer and not in hell, that you are listening to a gospel warning, and not listening to the blast of the judgment trumpet, seems to me like a hopeful cloud betokening a gracious rain. Come to Jesus, sinner. By the love that has spared you, I entreat you, come to Jesus. We urge you to come to Him by the love which sent the Savior, and which now declares to you that if you believe in Him you shall live. God grant that you may read these blessed signs of the times, and hope in God because of them.

Perhaps at this moment you feel some quickening of your conscience, sinner! You say, "I wish I were saved! Oh, I wish that I knew where I might find the Lord!" Take these desires as marks of favor to you. Yield to the mysterious impulse! Quench not the Spirit of God! Bow down, now, while there is some life in you, before evil days of hardness come, and kiss the Son lest He be angry! Trust your soul in Jesus' hands, according to the gospel command, and you shall live.

Listen to me. Do you say, "I will put it off till a more convenient season"? That is the parching wind from the south. Do you not know what it will work upon you? It will dry up all the waters of feeling; it will parch in you all plants of hope. Your soul is hopeful, now, and like the field in spring when the young grass is coming up. But if you delay, this wind of sluggishness will blast all expectation of your salvation, and leave you without hope. Ah, how many have I seen in this condition, how I have tried to speak with them, but have failed, for they have told me, "I was hopeful once; I was impressible once, but now the harvest is passed, and the summer is ended, and I am not saved. I cannot feel, I cannot repent, I cannot desire, I am perfectly dead—sunburnt, parched, and dried up." One has been obliged to fear that they spoke the truth, and to turn away from their death-beds with this feeling—"You did call them, O God, and they refused. You did stretch out Your hands, and they would not regard them. And now, not even a sense of fear or terror is left to them."

Have any of you been abroad in the fields during the past week? If so, you must have marked the waning year. The leaves are fading all around us, clothing the departing year with a wonderful beauty. As they fade away one by one, they preach to us and say, "You, too, O men, will soon fall to earth and wither." Have you heard the sermons of the falling leaves? You say to yourselves, "winter will soon be here." You begin to lay up your stocks of fuel to meet the coming cold, and do you not see those

gray hairs upon your head, are they not wintry tokens too? Do you not note those decaying teeth, those trembling limbs, and those loosened sinews, that furrowed brow? Do not these say that your winter is hastening on? Have you made no provision for eternity? Will you be driven forever away, away, away, where there shall be no hope? Have you lain by no stores of comfort for another world? O fools and slow of heart! Let even the birds of the air rebuke you. The other day I saw the swallows gathering, holding assemblies, as though they were inquiring and answering questions. And then, when the time was come, away they flew across the sea to sunnier climes. They did not wait here till all their food was gone and they must famish. No, they took to themselves wings and followed the sun. Has all the wisdom entered into birds, and have men none? "The stork in the heaven knows her appointed times, and the turtle and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people know not the judgment of the Lord." You will wait in this world and linger among its dying joys till you die and perish forever. Oh, that you would take the wings of faith and fly where the Sun of Righteousness points the way. There, where the cross is the guiding constellation, there steer your course and you will reach the land of everlasting summer, where fading flowers and withering leaves are never known. Believe in Jesus, sinner, set your hopes on Him, or if not, I must say to you as Christ did to the people, "When you see the south wind blow, you say, There will be heat; and it comes to pass. You hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth; but how is it that you do not discern this time? Yes, and why even of yourselves judge you not what is right?"

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
LUKE 12:13-21; 30-59.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84 (SONG II.), 459, 464

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"FOREVER WITH THE LORD"
NO. 1136

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 12, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"To be with Christ, which is far better."
Philippians 1:23.

THE apostle was confined in the guardroom of the Praetorian. It is very probable that he had a soldier chained to his right hand, and another to his left and it is very possible that this position suggested to him the expression, "I am in a strait betwixt two." He was literally held by two forces, and he was mentally in the same condition, exercised with two strong desires, influenced by two master passions, and he did not know to which he should yield. He says, "Between the two I am in perplexity," or, as some render it, "I am straitened by the pressure of the two things." Picture yourself sitting in a gloomy dungeon, a captive in the hands of the cruel tyrant, Nero, and under the supervision of the infamous prefect, Tigellinus, the most detestable of all Nero's satellites. Conceive yourself as expecting soon to be taken out to death—perhaps to such a horrible death as the refined cruelty of the monster had often devised, as for instance, to be smeared over with bituminous matter, and burned in the despot's garden to adorn a holiday. What would be your feelings? If you were not a Christian, I would expect you to tremble with the fear of death, and even if you were a believer, I would not marvel if the flesh shrunk from the prospect. Paul was an utter stranger to any feeling of the kind. He had not the slightest dread of martyrdom. He calls his expected death a departure, a loosening of the cable which holds his ship to the shore, and a putting forth upon the main ocean. So far from being afraid to die, he stands fully prepared. He waits patiently, and even anticipates joyfully the hour when his change shall come. On the other hand, I can readily imagine that amidst the miseries of a wretched prison, subject to frequent insults from rude soldiers, you might be seized with a desire to escape from life. Good men have felt the power of that feeling. Elijah said, "Let me die: I am no better than my fathers." Job sighed to be hidden in the grave, and oftentimes under far less afflictions than those which vexed the apostle, good men have said, "Would God this life were at an end, and these miseries over; I am weary, I am weary; when will death release me?" I see nothing of that feeling in the apostle. He is not restive under the chains. There is not a trace of impatience about him. He admits, and joyfully admits, that to be with Christ is far better. But upon consideration, he sees reasons for his remaining here, and therefore he cheerfully submits to whatever may be the Lord's will. He does not choose. His mind is so wrapped up with God, and free from

self, that he cannot choose. What a blessed state of heart to be in! One might be willing to wear Paul's chains on the wrist to enjoy Paul's liberty of mind. He is a free man, whom the Lord makes free, and such a man, Nero, cannot enslave. He may confine Paul in the military prison, but his soul walks at liberty through the earth, yes, and climbs among the stars.

Paul, instead of being either weary of life or afraid of death, sits down and coolly considers his own case as calmly, indeed, as if it had been the case of someone else. Do you observe how he weighs it? He says to depart and to be with Christ is, in itself considered, far better, he therefore desires it. But looking round upon the numerous churches which he had formed, which in their feebleness and exposure to many perils, needed his care, he says, on the other hand, "To abide in the flesh is more necessary for you." He holds the balance with unquivering hands, and the scales quietly vibrate in equilibrium—one rises, and then the other, gently swaying his heart by turns. He is in a strait, a blessed strait betwixt two, and he does not say that he knew not which of two things to avoid, or which to deprecate, but his mind was in such a condition that either to live or to die seemed equally desirable, and he says, "What I shall *choose* I know not." It is a poor choice, to choose to live in a dungeon, and an equally poor business, as men judge it, to choose to die, but the apostle regards both of them as choice things, so choice that he does not know which to select. He deliberates as coolly and calmly as if he were not at all concerned about it. And indeed, it is fair to say he was not at all concerned about it. He was moved by a higher concern than any which had to do with him, for his main objective was the glory of God. He desired the glory of God when he wished to be with Christ. He desired the same when he was willing to remain with Christ's people and to labor on.

His mind, as we have seen, hung in equilibrium between two things, but he is clear enough upon one matter, namely, that considering his own interests, it would greatly increase his happiness to depart and to be with Christ. He had said the same before, when he declared that, "To die is gain." He had no doubt that to be loosed from the body, and allowed to fly away to Jesus would be a great blessing to him. Of that assurance we will now speak.

I. The first thing to which I shall call your attention is THE APOSTLE'S CERTAINTY CONCERNING THE DISEMBODIED STATE—"Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." Now, the apostle was an eminently conscientious man. At the time when he was a Jewish teacher, whatever else he might not be, he was very conscientious—he verily thought that he did God service in persecuting the Christians. And throughout the whole of his subsequent career, in every incident of his history we mark him as pre-eminently a man guided by conscience. If he believed a thing to be right, he attended to it. And if anything struck him as being wrong, he could not be persuaded to countenance it. He would not do or say that which he did not fully believe to be right and true. It is a grand thing to meet with a witness of this order, for his testimony can

be relied upon. What such a man affirms we may be quite certain is correct, so far as he knows.

And also, the apostle was eminently cool. He was a man of well-balanced reason. I should think that logic greatly preponderated among his faculties. John has a warm and glowing heart, and one does not wonder that he is rather a warm lover of Jesus than a systematic unfolder of doctrine. Peter is impulsive, and when he writes, he writes with force, but it is not the force of reasoning. Paul is calm, collected; you never find him excited beyond the bounds of reason. He is as orderly, correct and argumentative as a Grecian sage. He is enthusiastic to a white heat, but regardless, he still holds himself well in hand. The steeds of his imagination can outstrip the wind, but he always holds the reins with a strong hand, and knows how to turn them, or to make them stand still at his pleasure. It is a great thing to receive the testimony of a man who is both conscientious to tell what he believes to be true, and calm and logical to form a clear judgment as to what is really fact.

Now this man, Paul, was convinced that there is a future state for believers. He was quite sure about it, and he believed it to be a future conscious state which commenced the moment one died, and was beyond measure full of blessedness. He did not believe in purgatorial fires through which believers' souls must pass. Much less did he believe the modern and detestable heresy which some have endorsed that, like the body, the soul of the saint dies until the resurrection. But he was known to speak of being "absent from the body, and present with the Lord," and here he speaks about departing not to sleep or to lie in the cold shade of oblivion till the trumpet should awaken him, but to depart, and immediately to be with Christ, which is far better. What had made this very conscientious and very collected man come to this conclusion? I suppose he would have replied, first, that he had been converted by a sight of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the road to Damascus, while desperately set against the religion of Jesus, the Lord Himself had appeared to him, so that he had seen Jesus with his own eyes, and had heard Him speak. About that sight and sound he had no question. He was sure that he had seen the Lord Jesus and heard His voice. He was so certain of this that he was led to give up his position in society, which was a very elevated one, to lose his reputation, which he greatly valued; to be rejected by his countrymen whom he loved with more than ordinary patriotism, and to run continual risk of death for the sake of the truth to which he was a witness. He was content to be made the offscouring of all things for the love of that once-despised Savior who, out of the windows of heaven, had looked down upon Him in mercy. Now, he was quite sure that Jesus Christ came from somewhere, and went back to some place or other. He felt sure that there must be a place where the man, Jesus Christ, dwelt and he felt quite certain that wherever that might be it would be a place of happiness and glory. Recollecting the prayer of the Lord Jesus, which John had recorded, "Father, I will that they, also, whom You have given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory," he was quite

certain that as soon as saints died, they would be where their glorious Lord Jesus was, and would share His honors.

Remember, also, that this judicious and truthful witness tells us that he had, on other occasions, distinct evidence of the disembodied state. He informs us that he was caught up into the third heaven, and there heard things which it was not lawful for a man to utter. He observes that he does not understand how he went there, but of the fact, he is quite sure. His body was here on earth still alive, and yet his spirit was caught away into heaven. The question with him was whether he was in the body or out of the body, and I dare say his metaphysical mind often tried to untie that knot. His soul must have remained in the body to keep the body alive, and if so, how could it go up to heaven? And yet he was quite clear that he had entered into heaven. At last the apostle came to the conclusion that whether in the body, or out of the body, he could not tell, but God knew. This, however, he was sure of, that he had been caught up into paradise, or the third heaven, and therefore there was a paradise. He had heard words which it was not possible for him to utter, therefore there was a place where glorious words were to be heard, and glorious words to be said. And he was quite sure, not merely as a matter of belief, but as a matter of observation, that there was a place into which disembodied spirits go, where they are with Jesus, their Lord, which is far better. It is clear that it would not be far better for a saint to die and sleep till the resurrection, than it would be to work on here. It would be evidently, by far, a better thing for saints to continue in life till Christ came, than to lie dormant in oblivion. Yet he says it is far better for them to depart, and the ground of his judgment lies in the fact that there is a place of real happiness, of intense joy, where it is far better for the disembodied spirit to be than for it to remain here in the body. About this Paul expressed no sort of doubt. There was such a state. It was a state of great joy so that, even to him who was one of the greatest apostles, the most useful of the saints, and the most honored with his Master's blessing—even to him to depart and to be with Christ would be far better.

I also want you to notice that he does not express any sort of doubt about his own entrance into a state of happiness as soon as he should depart. He does not say, as I am afraid many here would have done, "It would certainly be far better for me to die if I were sure I would be with Christ." Oh, no. He had risen above such hesitation. Dear brethren, it is a wretched state to be in, to be saying, "It would be sweet for me to depart, if, indeed, these glories were for me." He had got beyond all doubt as to whether eternal bliss would be his. He was sure of that, and why are we not sure? Why do we hesitate where he spoke so confidently? Had Paul something to ground his confidence upon which we have not? Do you suppose that Paul reckoned he would be saved because of his abundant labors, his earnest ministry, and his great successes? Far from it! Don't you know that he, himself, said, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"? As for anything that he had ever done, he declared that he trusted to be found in Christ, not having

his own righteousness, which was of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith. Now, where Paul built, we build, if we build right! Our hope is founded upon the righteousness of Christ, upon the grace of God, upon the promise of our heavenly Father. Well, I dare to say it, Paul, the chief of the apostles, had not a solitary grain of advantage over any one of us as to the basis and essence of his hope. Mercy, grace, atoning blood, the precious promise—these, alone, he built on, for other foundation can no man lay. If Paul was sure of eternal bliss, I should be sure of it, too. No, I am! Are you, beloved? Are you equally as sure of being with Christ as Paul was? You should be, for you have the same reason for certainty as the apostle had, if, indeed, you believe in the Lord Jesus. God is not a God of perhapses, and ifs, and buts, He is a God of shalls and wills, of faithful truth, and everlasting verities. "He that believes on Him is not condemned." "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." "Who shall lay anything to the charge of"—whom?—Paul, the apostle? No, but "God's elect!" Of all of the elect, of any one of them whom you shall please to select, however humble, however obscure—they are all safe in Jesus. He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, and we may, each one of us cry, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day." So much, then, concerning the apostle's certainty as to the disembodied state, its happiness, and his own possession of it before long.

II. It is very interesting to notice THE APOSTLE'S IDEA OF THAT STATE. He says, "To be with Christ." It is a one-sided idea, and it is almost a one-worded description of it: "To be with Christ." I have no doubt Paul had as enlarged ideas as to what the state of disembodied spirits would be as the most intelligent and best-read Christian that ever lived. I have no doubt he would have said, "Yes, there is fellowship among the saints. We shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. It will certainly be as true in heaven as it is on earth that we have fellowship one with another." I have no doubt he believed that heaven was a place of a far clearer knowledge than any we possess below. He said so once—"Here I know in part, but there shall I know even as I am known." Some Christians have entertained the idea that they shall gaze upon the various works of God in distant parts of His universe, and enjoy infinite happiness in beholding the manifold wisdom of God—very possible, and if it will conduce to their happiness, very probable. Perhaps Paul believed all that, but we do not know whether he did or not. Here it is plain that he gives us only one idea. He was a man of great mind, and much information, but here he gives us only one idea—for my part, one that perfectly satisfies me, and I think one which charms and fills to overflowing the heart of every believer. He describes the disembodied state as "to be with Christ." A very exclusive idea! No, a very inclusive idea—for it takes in all the heaven which the largest mind can conceive.

It does seem to omit a great many things, but I dare say Paul felt that they were such trifles that it did not matter about forgetting them.

Being with Christ is so great a thing that he mentioned only it. I think he did this first, because his love was so concentrated upon Christ that he could think of nothing else in connection with going away to heaven. There is a wife here, perhaps, and her husband has accepted an appointment in India. He has been gone a long time, and the years of his forced absence have been weary to her. She has had loving messages from him, and kind letters, but often she has sighed, and her heart has looked out of the windows towards the east, yearning for his return. But now she has received a letter entreating her to go to her husband, and without hesitation she has resolved to go. Now, if you ask her what she is going to India for, the reply will be, "I am going to my husband." But she has a brother there. Yes, she will see him, but she does not tell you that—her great thought is that she is going to her husband. She has many old friends and companions there, but she is not drawn to the far-off land by desire for their company—she crosses the sea for the sake of her beloved. But her husband has a handsome estate there, and he is wealthy, and has a well-furnished house and many servants. Yes, but she never says, "I am going to see my husband's home," or anything of that kind. She is going to her husband. That is the all-absorbing objective. There may be other inducements to make the voyage, but to be with her beloved is the master reason of her journey. She is going to the man she loves with all her soul, and she is longing for the country, whatever that country may be, because he is there. It is so with the Christian, only enhanced in a tenfold degree. He does not say, "I am going to the songs of angels, and to the everlasting *chorales* of the sanctified," but, "I am going to be with Jesus." It would argue unchastity to Christ if that were not the first and highest thought. To come back to the figure, and it is one which Christ, Himself, would approve of, for He continually uses the metaphor of marriage in relation to Himself and the soul—if that woman did regard as the first thing in that journey out to the East, the sight of some other person, or the mere enjoyment of wealth and possessions, it would argue that she had little love to her husband, that she was not such a wife as she ought to be. And if it could be so that the Christian should have some higher thought than being with Christ, or some other desire worth mentioning in the same day with it, it would look as if he had not presented himself as a chaste virgin to Christ, to be His and His alone. I see, therefore, why Paul calls the disembodied state a being with Christ, because his love was all with his Lord.

And, no doubt, there was this further reason among others—he was persuaded that heaven could not be heaven if Christ was not there. Oh, to think of heaven without Christ! It is the same thing as thinking of hell—heaven without Christ? It is day without the sun, existing without life; feasting without food; seeing without light. It involves a contradiction in terms: heaven without Christ! Absurd! It is the sea without water, the earth without its fields, the heavens without their stars. There cannot be

heaven without Christ. He is the sum total of bliss, He is the fountain from which heaven flows, the element of which heaven is composed. Christ is heaven, and heaven is Christ. You can change the words, and make no difference in the sense. To be where Jesus is, is the highest imaginable bliss, and bliss away from Jesus is inconceivable to the child of God. If you were invited to a marriage feast, and you were to be the bride, and yet the bridegroom were not there—do not tell me about feasting. In vain they ring the bells till the church tower rocks and reels, in vain the dishes smoke and the red wine sparkles, in vain the guests shout and make merry. If the bride looks around her and sees no bridegroom, the dainties mock her sorrow, and the merriment insults her misery—such would a Christless heaven be to the saints. If you could gather together all conceivable joys, and Christ was absent, there would be no heaven to His beloved ones. Therefore it is that heaven is to be where Christ is—

"To dwell with Christ, to feel His love,
Is the full heaven enjoyed above!
And the sweet expectation now,
Is the young dawn of heaven below."

And, beloved, just to be with Christ is heaven—that bare thing! Excuse my using such words; I only want to make the sense stronger. That bare thing—just to be with Christ is all the heaven a believer needs. The angels may be there or not, as they will, and the golden crowns and harps present or absent as may be, but if I am to be where Jesus is, I will find angels in His eyes, and crowns in every lock of His hair. To me the golden streets shall be my fellowship with Him, and the music of the harpers shall be the sound of His voice. Only to be near Him, to be with Him—this is all we need. The apostle does not say, "To be in heaven, which is far better." No, but, "to be with Christ, which is far better," and he adds no description—he leaves the thoughts just as they are, in all their majestic simplicity. "To be with Christ, which is far better."

But what is it to be with Christ, beloved? In some sense we are with Christ now, for He comes to us. We are no strangers to Him. Even while we are in this body we have communion with Jesus, and yet it must be true that a higher fellowship is to come, for the apostle says that while we are present in the body, we are absent from the Lord. There is a sense in which, so long as we are here, we are absent from the Lord. One great saint used to say upon his birthday, that he had been so many years in banishment from the Lord. To abide in this lowland country, so far from the ivory palaces, is banishment at the very best. All that we can see of Christ here is through a glass darkly. Face to face is true nearness to Him, and that we have not reached as of yet.

What will it be, then, to be with Christ? Excuse me if I say it will be, first of all, exactly what it says, namely, to be with Him. I must repeat that word—it is heaven only to be with Him. It is not merely what comes out of being with Him, His company is heaven. Why, even to have seen Jesus in His flesh was a privilege—

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,

How He took little children like lambs to His fold
I should like to have been with Him then.
I wish that His hands had been placed on my head,
That His arms had been thrown around me,
And that I might have seen His kind look when He said,
'Let the little ones come unto Me.'"

I think I should have found a little heaven in gazing on that blessed form. But our text speaks of a different sort of being with Him, for there were people near Him here in body, which were a long way off from Him in spirit. The text speaks of being with Him in the spirit when the soul shall have shaken itself loose of the flesh and blood—and left all its slough behind it, and gone right away to bask in the glory of Jesus, to participate in the nature of Jesus and, best of all, to abide near His person, with the God-man Mediator, who is Lord of all.

Still, there will flow out of that nearness the following things among many others: we shall enjoy, first of all, a clearer vision of Him. Oh, we have not seen Him yet! Our views of Him are too dim to be worth calling sights. The eyes of faith have looked through a telescope and seen Him at a distance, and it has been a ravishing vision, but when the eyes of the soul shall really see Him—Him, and not another, Him for ourselves, and not another for us, oh, the sight! Is not the thought of it a burning coal of joy? The sight of His very flesh will charm us, His wounds, still fresh, the dear memorials of His passion still apparent. The perception of His soul will also delight us, for our soul will commune with His soul, and this is the soul of communion. The sight of His Godhead, so far as created spirit can see it, will also ravish us with joy.

And then we shall have a brighter knowledge of Him. Here we know in part—we know the names of His offices, we know what He has worked, we know what He is working for us. But there those offices will shine in their splendor, and we shall see all that He did for us in its real weight and value. We shall comprehend, then, the height and depth, and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, as we do not know it at this hour.

And with that will be a more intimate communion. Our soul will lean her head on Jesus' bosom; our heart will get into His heart and hide herself in His wounds. What must it be to speak to Him, as our soul will speak to Him, as our spirit nature will commune with His inmost nature, His spirit speaking to our spirits without a veil between! We shall not see Him looking down from the windows, but we shall rest in His arms, in a far more intimate communion than any we can enjoy this side the grave. Today I see Him through the grating of my prison windows, and my heart is ready to leap out of my body. What will it be when His left hand shall be under my head, and His right hand shall embrace me!

And then, beloved, when we shall be with Him it will be unbroken fellowship. There will be no sin to blind our eyes to His charms, or to entice us away from His love. Blessed be God, there will be no Monday mornings to call us back to the world, but our sacred Sabbath will last on forever. Doubts, backslidings and spiritual chills will then be gone forever.

No more shall we cry, "Have you seen Him whom my soul loves?" But we shall hold Him, and never let Him go. There will be no need, even, for the spirit to fall asleep, and so suspend its joy. It will find its true rest in constant communion with Jesus. It is possible to live in fellowship with Jesus here always, possible, but, oh, how few ever reach it! But there we shall all have reached it, the very lowest among us, and we shall be with the Lord forever.

And then we shall have a sight of His glory, and though I put this after a sight of Himself, yet, remember, our Lord thinks much of it. He prayed, "Father, I will that they, also, whom You have given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." We have seen something of His shame, and have been partakers in the reproach that is poured upon His gospel, but we shall see Him then, with silver sandals on the feet that once were mired by the clay of earth, and a crown of gold upon the once thorn-pierced brow. We shall see Him when His hands shall gleam as with gold rings set with beryl, and look no more like a malefactor's hand nailed to the cruel wood. Then shall we say—

"His body like bright ivory
With sapphires overlaid,
His limbs like marble pillars
In golden sockets stayed."

Then, looking on His face we shall understand Solomon's Song, when he said, "His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars; His voice is most sweet, yes, He is altogether lovely." One would wish to leap right away out of this body to behold Him in His glory.

And then, beloved, we shall share in the glory too, for His joy will be our joy, His honor will be our honor. Our spirits which wrestled hard here below, and had to strive against a thousand outward enemies, and inward doubts and fears, will then be all light, joy, gladness, full of the life of God, and beaming with ecstatic bliss. The Lord grant us to know this in due season, and so we shall, if indeed, we are believers in Jesus. So you see Paul's one idea was that he should be with Jesus. That was all; he cared little for anything else.

III. Very briefly, let us consider THE APOSTLE'S ESTIMATE OF THIS DISEMBODIED STATE. He says, "To be with Christ, *which is far better."* Now, the Greek has a triple comparative. We could not say, "Far more better," in our language, but that would be a fair translation. We will therefore read, "It is far rather preferable," or it is much better to be with Christ away from the body, than it would be to abide here. Now, you must remember that Paul does not claim that the disembodied state is the highest condition of a believer, or the ultimate crown of his hopes. It is a state of perfection so far as it goes—the spirit is perfect, but the entire manhood is not perfect while the body is left to mold in the tomb. One half of the saint is left behind in the grave. Corruption, earth and worms have seized upon it, and the grand concluding day of our manifestation can only come when the redemption of the body is fully achieved. The fullness of our glory is the resurrection, for then the body will be

united to our spirit, and perfected with it. At present the saints who are with Jesus are without their bodies, and are pure spirits. Their humanity is in that respect maimed. Only half their manhood is with Jesus. Yet even for that half of their manhood to be with Christ, is far better than for the whole of their being to be here in the best possible condition.

Now, the apostle does not say that to be with Christ is far better than to be here and to be rich, young, healthy, strong, famous, great, or learned. Paul never thinks of putting those petty things into contrast with being with Christ. He had got above all that. There he was sitting chained in the dungeon, the poorest man in the emperor's dominions, and often, I have no doubt—for he was getting on to be, "such an one as Paul the aged," and wrote particularly about an old cloak he had left at Troas—often he felt rheumatic pains shooting through him. And he did not find this life to have many attractions of wealth or ease, though he might have had them if he had chosen them as his portion. He had given them all up and counted them as insignificant trifles, not to be mentioned at all, for Jesus' sake. He is not speaking of the low joys of this world—he is far above such considerations. He means that to be with Christ is infinitely superior to all the joys of Christians. Anything that the most of Christians know about Christ, and heavenly joys and heavenly things, is very poor compared with being with Christ. But he meant more than that. He meant that the highest joys which the best taught believer can here possess are inferior to being with Christ. For, let me say, Paul was no obscure believer. He was a leader among the followers of Christ. Could he not say, "Thanks be unto God, who always makes us to triumph in every place"? He knew the graces of the Holy Spirit, he had them abundantly. He was head and shoulders above the most brilliant Christian here. He had the highest experience of any man out of heaven, and it was that which he contrasted with being with Christ. And he said that the most that we could get here of heavenly things was not to be compared with being with Christ. That was far, far, far better, and truly, brethren, so it is. Thanks be to God for all the mercies of the pilgrimage, for all the dropping manna, and the following stream, but oh, the wilderness with all its manna is nothing compared with the land that flows with milk and honey. Let the road be paved with mercy, it is not as sweet as the Father's house of the many mansions to which it leads.

It is true that in the battle our head is covered, the wings of angels often protect us, and the Spirit of God nerves our arm to use the sword. But who shall say that the victory is not better than the battle? The warrior who has won the most of victory will tell you that the best day will be when the sword rattles back into the scabbard, and the victory is won forever. Oh, the wooing of Christ and the soul, this is very sweet. The rapturous joys we have had in the love-making between Christ and us, we would not exchange with emperors and kings, even if they offered us their crowns. But the marriage day will be better by far, the glorious consummation of our soul's highest desire, when we shall be with our Well-

Beloved where He is. Far better, said the apostle, and he meant it; far better it is.

He did not say—and I want you to notice this again—though he might have said it, "We shall be better in condition; no poverty there, no sickness there." He did not say, "We shall be better in character." He might have said it, for there will be no sin, no depravity, no infirmity, no temptation there. He did not say, "We shall be better in employment," though surely it will be better to wait on the Master, close at His hand, than to be here among sinners, and often among cold-hearted saints. He did not say, "We shall have better society there." Though, truth to tell, it will be better to be with the perfect than with the imperfect. Neither did he say we should see fairer sights there, though we shall see the city that has foundations of jasper, whose light is the light of the Lamb's own presence. But he did say, "To be with Christ." He summed it up there. The bare being with Christ would be far better. And so it will be. Our spirit longs for it.

Yet mark you, for all that, he said he felt a pull the other way. He had a twitch towards staying on earth, as well as a pull towards going to heaven, for he said, "To abide in the flesh is more necessary for you." How I love Paul for thinking of the churches here when he had heaven before him. Anthony Farindon says it is like a poor beggar woman outside the door, and she carries a squalling child, and someone says, "You may come in and feast, but you must leave the baby outside." She is very hungry, and she needs the feast, but she does not want to leave the baby, and so she is in a strait betwixt two. Or, he says again, it is like a wife who has children at home, five or six little ones, and her husband is on a journey. And suddenly there comes a letter which says that he needs her, and she must go to him, but she may do as she thinks best. She desires to go to her husband, but who will take care of the last little baby, and who is to see to all the rest? And so she is in a strait betwixt two; she loves him, and she loves them. So stood the apostle, and oh, it is blessed to think of a man having such a love for Christ that for Christ's sake he loves poor souls well enough to be willing to stay out of heaven for a while! "Oh," he says, "it is all gain for me to go to heaven; for me to die is far better. Yet there are some poor sinners who need to be called, some poor trembling saints to be comforted, and I do not know which the best is." And the apostle stands puzzled; he does not know which it shall be. There we leave him. May we get into the same blessed predicament ourselves!

The last word shall be this. Concerning our beloved friends gone from us, we do not sorrow as those who are without hope. What is more, we do not sorrow at all. If we chance to sorrow, it is for ourselves, that we have lost their present company, but as for them, it is far better with them. And if the lifting of our little finger could bring them back again, dear as they are to us, we would not be so cruel as to subject them, again, to the troubles of this stormy sea of life. They are safe; we will go to them. We would not have them return to us.

Then, with regard to ourselves, if we have believed in Jesus we are on our journey home, and all fear of death is now annihilated. You notice the apostle does not say anything at all about death. He did not think it worth mentioning; in fact, there is no such thing to a Christian. I have heard of people being afraid of the pains of death. There are no pains of death—the pain is in life. Death is the end of pain. It is all over. Put the saddle on the right horse. Do not blame death for what he does not do. It is life that brings pain. Death to the believer ends all evil. Death is the gate of endless joy, and shall we dread to enter there? No, blessed be God, we will not.

And this points us to the fountain of bliss while we are here, for if heaven is to be with Christ, then the nearer we get to Christ, here, the more we shall participate in that which makes the joy of heaven. If we want to taste heaven's blessed dainties while here below, let us walk in unbroken fellowship with Him—so we shall get two heavens, a little heaven below, and a boundless heaven above when our turn shall come to go home. Oh, I wish you were all on the way to being with Christ. If you do not go to be with Christ, where can you go? Answer that question, and go to Jesus now by humble faith, that afterwards He may say, "Come, you did come on earth, now come again, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PHILIPPIANS 1.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—872, 847, 879, 846

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TO SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND OTHER SOUL-WINNERS
NO. 1137

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 19, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one converts him, let him know, that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."
James 5:19, 20.

JAMES is pre-eminently practical. If he were, indeed, the James who was called, "The Just," I can understand how he earned the title, for that distinguishing trait in his character shows itself in his epistle, and if he were "the Lord's brother," he did well to show so close a resemblance to his great relative and Master who commenced His ministry with the practical Sermon on the Mount. We ought to be very grateful that in the Holy Scriptures we have food for all classes of believers, and employment for all the faculties of the saints. It was right that the contemplative should be furnished with abundant subjects for thought—Paul has supplied them—he has given to us sound doctrine, arranged in the symmetry of exact order. He has given us deep thoughts and profound teachings. He has opened up the deep things of God. No man who is inclined to reflection and thoughtfulness will be without food as long as the epistles of Paul are extant, for he feeds the soul with sacred manna. For those whose predominating affections and imagination incline them to more mystic themes, John has written sentences aglow with devotion, and blazing with love. We have his simple but sublime epistles, epistles which, when you glance at them, seem in their wording to be fit for children, but when examined, their sense is seen to be too sublime to be fully grasped by the most advanced of men. You have from that same eagled-eyed and eagle-winged apostle, the wondrous visions of the Revelation where awe, devotion, and imagination may enlarge their flight, and find scope for the fullest exercise. There will always be, however, a class of persons who are more practical than contemplative, more active than imaginative. And it was wise that there should be a James, whose main point should be to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance, and help them to persevere in the practical graces of the Holy Spirit. The text before me is perhaps the most practical utterance of the whole epistle. The whole epistle burns, but this ascends in flames to heaven. It is the culmination as it is the conclusion of the letter. There is not a word to spare in it. It is like a naked sword, stripped of its jeweled scabbard, and presented to us with nothing to note but its keen edge. I wish I could preach after the fashion of the text, but if I cannot, I will at least pray

that you may act after the fashion of it. Downright living for the Lord Jesus is sadly needed in many quarters. Christian garnishing we have enough of, but solid, everyday, actual work for God is what we need. If our lives, however unornamented they may be by leaves of literary or polite attainments, shall, nevertheless, bring forth fruit unto God in the form of souls converted by our efforts, it will be well. They will then stand forth before the Lord with the beauty of the olive trees, which consist in its fruitfulness.

I call your attention very earnestly to three matters. First, here is *a special case dealt with,* "If any of you do err from the truth, and one converts him." While speaking of that special case, the apostle declares *a general fact,* "He who converts the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." When I have spoken of these two points, I mean, thirdly, to make *a particular application* of the text, not at all intended by the apostle, but I believe abundantly justified—an application of the text to increased effort for the conversion of children!

I. First, then, here is A SPECIAL CASE DEALT WITH. Read the verse, and you will see that it was that of a backslider from the visible church of God. The words, "If any of you," must refer to a professed Christian. The erring one had been named by the name of Jesus, and for a while had followed the truth. But in an evil hour he had been betrayed into doctrinal error, and had erred from the truth. It was not merely that he fell into a mistake upon some lesser matter which might be compared to the fringe of the gospel, but he erred in some vital doctrine—he departed from the faith in its fundamentals. There are some truths which must be believed, they are essential to salvation, and if not heartily accepted, the soul will be ruined. This man had professed orthodoxy, but he turned aside from the truth on an essential point. Now, in those days the saints did not say, as the sham saints do now, "We must be largely charitable, and leave this brother to his own opinion. He sees the truth from a different standpoint, and has a rather different way of putting it, but his opinions are as good as our own, and we must not say that he is in error." That is at present the fashionable way of trifling with divine truth, and making things pleasant all round. Thus the gospel is debased, and another gospel propagated. I should like to ask modern broad churchmen whether there is any doctrine of any sort for which it would be worth a man's while to burn or to lie in prison. I do not believe they could give me an answer, for if their latitudinarianism is correct, the martyrs were fools of the first magnitude.

From what I see of their writings and their teachings, it appears to me that the modern thinkers treat the whole compass of revealed truth with entire indifference. And though perhaps they may feel sorry that wilder spirits should go too far in free thinking, and though they had rather they would be more moderate, yet upon the whole, so large is their liberality, that they are not sure enough of anything to be able to condemn the reverse of it as a deadly error. To them black and white are terms which may be applied to the same color, as you view it from different

standpoints. Yes and no are equally true in their esteem. Their theology shifts like the Goodwin Sands, and they regard all firmness as so much bigotry. Errors and truths are equally comprehensible within the circle of their charity. It was not in this way that the apostles regarded error. They did not prescribe large-hearted charity towards lies, or hold up the errorist as a man of deep thought whose views were "refreshingly original." Far less did they utter some wicked nonsense about the probability of there living more faith in honest doubt, than in half the creeds; they did not believe in justification by doubting, as our neologians do. They set about the conversion of the erring brother. They treated him as a person who needed conversion, and viewed him as a man who, if he were not converted, would suffer the death of his soul, and be covered with a multitude of sins. They were not such easy-going people as our cultured friends of the school of "modern thought," who have learned, at last, that the deity of Christ may be denied, the work of the Holy Spirit ignored, the inspiration of Scripture rejected, the atonement disbelieved, and regeneration dispensed with. They say the man who does all this may be as good a Christian as the most devout believer! O God, deliver us from this deceitful infidelity which, while it does damage to the erring man, and often prevents his being reclaimed, does yet more mischief to our own hearts by teaching us that truth is unimportant, falsehood a trifle, and so destroys our allegiance to the God of truth, and makes us traitors, instead of loyal subjects, to the King of kings.

It appears from our text that this man, having erred from the truth, followed the natural logical consequence of doctrinal error, and erred in his life as well, for the 20th verse, which must, of course, be read in connection with the 19th, speaks of him as a "sinner converted from the error of his way." His way went wrong after his thought had gone wrong. You cannot deviate from truth without being wrong in some measure, at any rate, deviating from practical righteousness. This man had erred from right acting because he had erred from right believing. Suppose a man shall imbibe a doctrine which leads him to think little of Christ? He will soon have little faith in Him, and become little obedient to Him, and so will wander into self-righteousness or licentiousness. Let him think lightly of the punishment of sin, and it is natural that he will commit sin with less compunction, and burst through all restraints. Let him deny the need of the atonement, and the same result will follow if he acts out his belief. Every error has its own outgrowth, as all decay has its appropriate fungus. It is in vain for us to imagine that holiness will be as readily produced from erroneous as from truthful doctrine. Do men gather grapes off thorns, or figs off thistles? The facts of history prove the contrary. When the truth is dominant, morality and holiness are abundant. But when error comes to the front, godly living retreats in shame.

The point aimed at with regard to this sinner in thought and deed was his conversion—the turning of him around, the bringing him to right thinking, and to right acting. Alas, many professed Christians do not look upon backsliders in this light; neither do they regard them as hopeful subjects for conversion! I have known a person who has erred, hunt-

ed down like a wolf. He was wrong to some degree, but that wrong has been aggravated and dwelt upon till the man has been worried into defiance. The fault has been exaggerated into a double wrong by ferocious attacks upon it. The manhood of the man has taken sides with his error because he has been so severely handled. The man has been compelled, sinfully, I admit, to take up an extreme position, and to go further into mischief, because he could not stand to be denounced instead of being reasoned with. And when a man has been blameworthy in his life, it will often happen that his fault will be blazed abroad, retailed from mouth to mouth, and magnified until the poor erring one has felt degraded, and having lost all self-respect, has given way to far more dreadful sins. The objective of some professors seems to be to amputate the limb rather than to heal it. Justice has reigned instead of mercy. Away with him! He is too foul to be washed, too diseased to be restored. This is not according to the mind of Christ, nor after the model of apostolic churches. In the days of James, if any erred from the truth and from holiness, there were brethren found who sought their recovery, and whose joy it was, thus, to save a soul from death, and to hide a multitude of sins. There is something very significant in that expression, "Brethren, if any *of you* do err from the truth." It is akin to that other word, "Considering yourself, also, lest you also be tempted," and that other exhortation, "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." He who has erred was one of you, one who sat with you at the communion table, one with whom you took sweet counsel. He has been deceived, and by the subtlety of Satan he has been decoyed; but do not judge him harshly. Above all do not leave him to perish unpitied! If he ever was a saved man, he is still your brother, and it should be your business to bring back the prodigal, and so to make glad your Father's heart. "Still, for all his slips," he is one of God's children. Follow him, and do not rest till you lead him home again.

And if he is not a child of God, if his professed conversion was a mistake, or a pretense, if he only made a profession, but had not the possession of vital godliness, yet still follow him with sacred persistency of love, remembering how terrible will be his doom for daring to play the hypocrite and profane holy things with his unhallowed hands. Weep over him if you feel compelled to suspect that he has been a willful deceiver, for there is sevenfold cause for weeping. If you cannot resist the feeling that he never was sincere, but crept into the church under cover of a false profession, I say, sorrow over him the more, for his doom must be the more terrible, and therefore, the greater should be your commiseration for him. Still seek his conversion.

The text gives us clear indications as to the persons who are to aim at the conversion of erring brethren. It says, "If any of you do err from the truth, and *one* converts him." One what? One minister*?* No, anyone among the brethren! If the minister shall be the means of the restoration of a backslider, he is a happy man, and a good deed has been done. But there is nothing said here concerning preachers or pastors, not even a hint is given—it is left open to any member of the church. And the plain inference, I think, is this—that every church member seeing his brother

err from the truth, or else in practice, should set himself, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to this business of converting this special sinner from the error of his ways. Look after strangers by all means, but neglect not your brethren. It is the business, not of certain officers appointed by the vote of the church, but of every member of the body of Jesus Christ to seek the good of all the other members. Still, there are certain members upon whom in any one case this may be more imperative. For instance, in the case of a young believer, his father and his mother, if they are believers, are called upon by a sevenfold obligation to seek the conversion of their backsliding child. In the case of a husband, none should be as earnest for his restoration as his wife, and the same rule holds good with regard to the wife. So, also, if the connection is that of friendship, he with whom you have had the best acquaintance should lie nearest to your heart, and when you perceive that he has gone aside, you should, above all others, act the shepherd towards him with kindly zeal. You are bound to do this to all your fellow Christians, but doubly bound to do it to those over whom you possess an influence, which has been gained by former intimacy, by relationship, or by any other means. I beseech you therefore, watch over one another in the Lord, and when you see a brother overtaken in a fault, "you which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness." You see your duty—do not neglect it.

Brethren, it ought to cheer us to know that the attempt to convert a man who has erred from the truth is a hopeful one. It is one in which success may be looked for, and when the success comes it will be of the most joyful character. Verily it is a great joy to capture the wild, wandering sinner, but the joy of joys is to find the lost sheep which was once really in the fold, and has sadly gone astray. It is a great thing to transmute a piece of brass into silver, but to the poor woman it was joy enough to find the piece of silver which was already silver, and had the king's stamp on it, though for a while it was lost. To bring in a stranger and an alien and to adopt him as a son suggests a festival. But the most joyous feasting and the loudest music are for the son who was always a son, but had played the prodigal, and yet after being lost was found, and after being dead was made alive again. I say, ring the bells twice for the reclaimed backslider. Ring them till the steeple rocks and reels. Rejoice doubly over that which had gone astray, and was ready to perish, but has now been restored. John was glad when he found poor backsliding, but weeping Peter, who had denied his Master. He cheered and comforted him, and consorted with him till the Lord, Himself, had said, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?" It may not appear so brilliant a thing to bring back a backslider, as to reclaim a harlot or a drunk, but in the sight of God it is no small miracle of grace, and to the instrument that has performed it, it shall yield no small comfort. Seek, then, my brethren, those who were of us but have gone from us. Seek those who still linger in the congregation but have disgraced the church, and are put away from us, and rightly so, because we cannot countenance their uncleanness. Seek them with prayers, tears, and entreaties, if perhaps God may grant them repentance that they may be saved.

Here I would say to any backsliders who are present, let this text cheer you if you have a desire to return to God. Return, you backsliding children, for the Lord has bid His people seek you. If He had not cared for you, He would not have spoken of our search after you. But having put it so, and made it the duty of all His people to seek those who err from the faith, there is an open door before you. And there are hundreds who sit waiting like porters at the gate to welcome you. Come back to the God whom you have forsaken. Or if you never did know Him, O that this day His Spirit may break your hearts and lead you to true repentance that you may in real truth be saved! God bless you, poor backsliders! If He does not save you, a multitude of sins will be upon you, and you must eternally die. God have mercy upon you, for Christ's sake.

II. We have opened up the special case, and we have now to dwell upon a GENERAL FACT. This general fact is important, and we are bound to give it special attention, since it is prefaced with the words, "Let him know." If any one of you has been the means of bringing back a backslider, it is said, "Let him know." That is, let him think of it, be sure of it, be comforted by it, be inspirited by it. "Let him know" it, and never doubt it. Do not merely hear it this morning, beloved fellow laborer, but let it sink deep into your heart. When an apostle inspired of the Holy Spirit, says, "Let him know," I evoke you, do not let any indolence of spirit forbid your ascertaining the full weight of the truth. What is it that you are to know? To know that he who converts a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death. This is something worth knowing, is it not? To save a soul from death is no small matter. Why, we have men among us whom we honor every time we cast our eyes upon them, for they have saved many precious lives. They have manned the lifeboat, or they have plunged into the river to rescue the drowning. They have been ready to risk their own lives amid burning timbers, that they might snatch the perishing from the devouring flames. True heroes these, far worthier of renown than your bloodstained men of war. God bless the brave hearts! May England never lack a body of worthy men to make her shores illustrious for humanity. When we see a fellow creature exposed to danger, our pulse beats quickly, and we are agitated with desire to save him. Is it not so? But the saving of a soul from death is a far greater matter. Let us think what that death is! It is not non-existence. I do not know that I would lift a finger to save my fellow creature from mere non-existence. I see no great hurt in annihilation, certainly nothing that would alarm me as a punishment for sin. Just as I see no great joy in mere eternal existence if that is all that is meant by eternal life, so I discern no terror in ceasing to be. I would as soon not be as be, as far as mere colorless being, or not being is concerned. But eternal life in Scripture means a very different thing to eternal existence. It means existing with all the faculties developed in fullness of joy, existing not as the dried herb in the hay, but as the flower in all its beauty. To die, in Scripture, and, indeed, in common language, is not to cease to exist. Very wide is the difference between the two words, to die and to be annihilated. To die as to the first death is the separation of the body from the soul. It is the resolution of

our nature into its component elements. To die the second death is to separate the man, soul and body, from his God, who is the life and joy of our manhood. This is eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power. This is to have the palace of manhood destroyed, and turned into a desolate ruin for the howling dragon of remorse, and the hooting owl of despair forever. The descriptions which Holy Scripture gives of the second death are terrible to the last degree. It speaks of a "worm that never dies," a "fire that never can be quenched," of "the terror of the Lord" and "tearing in pieces," of the "smoke of their torment which goes up forever and ever," and of "the pit which has no bottom." I am not about to bring all these terrible things together, but there are words in Scripture which, if pondered, might make the flesh creep, and the hair stand on end at the very thought of the judgment to come. Our joy is that if any of us are made in God's hands, the means of converting a man from the error of his ways, we shall have saved a soul from this eternal death. That dreadful hell the saved one will not know, that wrath he will not feel, that being banished from the presence of God will never happen to him. Is there not a joy worth worlds in all this? Remember the addition to the picture. If you have saved a soul from death, you have introduced it into eternal life. By God's good grace there will be another chorister among the white-robed host to sing Jehovah's praise. Another hand to eternally smite the harp strings of adoring gratitude, another sinner saved to reward the Redeemer for His passion. Oh, the happiness of having saved a soul from death!

And it is added, that in such case you will have "covered a multitude of sins." We understand this to mean that the result of the conversion of any sinner will be the covering up of all his sins by the atoning blood of Jesus. How many those sins are, in any case, none of us can tell, but if any man is converted from the error of his ways, the whole mass of his sins will be drowned in the red sea of Jesus' blood, and washed away forever. Now remember, your Savior came to this world with two objectives. He came to destroy death, and to put away sin. If you convert a sinner from the error of his ways, you are made like He in both these works. After your manner, in the power of the Spirit of God, you overcome death by snatching a soul from the second death, and you also put away sin from the sight of God by hiding a multitude of sins beneath the propitiation of the Lord Jesus.

Observe here that the apostle offers no other inducement for soul-winners; he does not say if you convert a sinner from the error of his ways, you will have honor. True philanthropy scorns such a motive. He does not say if you convert a sinner from the error of his ways, you will have the respect of the church, and the love of the individual. Such will be the case, but we are moved by far nobler motives. The joy of doing good is found in the good itself; the reward of a deed of love is found in its own result. If we have saved a soul from death, and hidden a multitude of sins, that is payment enough, though no ear should ever hear of the deed, and no pen should ever record it. Let it be forgotten that we were the instrument, if good is but effected. It shall give us joy even if we

are not appreciated and are left in the cold shade of forgetfulness. Yes, if others wear the honors of the good deed which the Lord has worked by us, we will not murmur, it shall be joy enough to know that a soul has been saved from death and a multitude of sins have been covered.

And, dear brethren let us remember that the saving of souls from death honors Jesus, for there are no saving souls except through His blood. As for you and for me, what can we do in saving a soul from death? By us nothing, any more than that pen which lies upon the table could write "Pilgrim's Progress." Yet let a Bunyan grasp the pen, and the matchless work is written. So you and I can do nothing to convert souls, till God's eternal Spirit takes us in hand. But then He can do wonders by us, and get Himself glory by us and it shall be joy enough for us to know that Jesus is honored and the Spirit magnified. Nobody talks of Homer's pen; no one has encased it in gold, or published its illustrious achievements. Nor do we wish for honor among men. It will be enough for us to have been the pen in the Savior's hand with which He has written the covenant of His grace upon the fleshy tablets of human hearts. These are golden wages for a man who really loves his Master. Jesus is glorified, sinners are saved.

Now, I want you to particularly notice that all that is said by the apostle here is about the conversion of one person. "If any of you do err from the truth, and one converts *him,* let him know that he who converts *the sinner* from the error of his ways shall save *a soul* from death." Have you ever wished you were a Whitefield? Have you ever felt, young man, in your inmost soul, great aspirations to be another McCheyne, or Brainerd, or Moffat? Cultivate the aspiration, but at the same time be happy to bring one sinner to Jesus Christ, for he who converts one is bid to know that no mean thing is done. He has saved a soul from death, and covered a multitude of sins.

And it does not say anything about the person who is the means of this work. It is not said, "If a minister shall convert a man, or if some noted eloquent divine shall have worked it." If this deed shall be performed by the least babe in our Israel, if a little child shall tell the tale of Jesus to its father, if a servant girl shall drop a tract where some one poor soul shall find it, and receive Salvation, if the most humble preacher at the street corner shall have spoken to the thief or to the harlot, and such shall be saved, let him know that he that turns any sinner from the error of his ways, whoever he may be, has saved a soul from death, and covered a multitude of sins.

Now, what comes out of this but these suggestions? Let us long to be used in the conversion of sinners. James does not speak concerning the Holy Spirit in this passage, nor of Jesus Christ, for he was writing to those who would not fail to remember the important truths which concern both the Spirit and the Son of God. But yet it may be right to remind you here, that we cannot do spiritual good to our fellow creatures apart from the Spirit of God. Neither can we be blessed to them if we do not preach to them, "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." God must use us, but oh, let us long to be used. Pray to be used and cry to be used. Dear

brothers and sisters let us purge ourselves of everything that would prevent our being employed by the Lord. If there is anything we are doing, or undoing, any evil we are harboring, or any grace we are neglecting, which may make us unfit to be used of God, let us pray the Lord to cleanse, mend, and scour us till we are vessels fit for the Master's use. Then let us be on the watch for opportunities of usefulness. Let us go about the world with our ears and our eyes open, ready to take advantage of every occasion for doing good. Let us not be content till we are useful and make this the main design and ambition of our lives. Somehow or other we must, and will, bring souls to Jesus Christ. As Rachel cried, "Give me children, or I die," so may none of you be content to be barren in the household of God. Cry and sigh until you have snatched some brand from the burning, and have brought at least one to Jesus Christ, that so you also, may have saved a soul from death, and covered a multitude of sins.

III. And, now, a few minutes, only, to the point which is not in the text. I want to make A PARTICULAR APPLICATION of this whole subject to the conversion of children. Beloved friends, I hope you do not altogether forget the Sunday school, and yet I am afraid a great many Christians are scarcely aware that there are such things as Sunday schools at all. They know it by hearsay, but not by observation. Probably in the course of 20 years they have never visited the school, or concerned themselves about it. They would be gratified to hear of any success accomplished, but though they may not have heard anything about the matter, one way or the other, they are well content. In most churches you will find a band of young and ardent spirits giving themselves to Sunday school work. But there are numbers of others who might greatly strengthen the school who never attempt anything of the sort. In this they might be excused if they had other work to do, but, unfortunately, they have no godly occupation but are mere killers of time, while this work which lies ready to hand, and is accessible and demands their assistance, is entirely neglected. I will not say there are any such sluggards here, but I am not able to believe that we are quite free from them, and therefore I will ask conscience to do its work with the guilty parties.

Children need to be saved. Children may be saved. Children are to be saved by instrumentality. Children may be saved while they are children. He who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," never intended that His church should say, "We will look after the children by-and-by, when they have grown up to be young men and women." He intended that it should be a subject of prayer and earnest endeavor that children, as children, should be converted to God. The conversion of a child involves the same work of divine grace, and results in the same blessed consequences as the conversion of an adult. There is the saving of the soul from death, in the child's case, and the hiding of a multitude of sins, but there is this additional matter for joy, that a great preventive work is done when the young are converted. Conversion saves a child from a multitude of sins. If God's eternal mercy shall bless your teaching to a little prattler, how

happy that boy's life will be compared with what it might have been if it had grown up in folly, sin, shame, and had only been converted after many years! It is the highest wisdom, and the truest prudence to pray for our children that while they are yet young their hearts may be given to the Savior—

"It will save them from a thousand snares,
To mind religion young!
Grace will preserve their following years,
And make their virtues strong!"

To reclaim the prodigal is well, but to save him from ever being a prodigal is better. To bring back the thief and the drunk is a praiseworthy action, but so to act that the boy or girl shall never become a thief or a drunk is far better. Therefore Sunday school instruction stands very high in the list of philanthropic enterprises, and Christians ought to be most earnest in it. He, who converts a child from the error of his way, prevents as well as covers a multitude of sins.

And, moreover, it gives the church the hope of being furnished with the best of men and women. The church's Samuels and Solomons are made wise in their youth. Davids and Josiahs were tender of heart when they were tender in years. Read the lives of the most eminent ministers, and you shall usually find that their Christian history began early. Though it is not absolutely necessary, yet it is highly propitious to the growth of a well-developed Christian character that its foundation should be laid on the bottom of youthful piety. I do not expect to see the churches of Jesus Christ ordinarily built up by those who have, through life, lived in sin, but by the bringing up in their midst, in the fear and admonition of the Lord, young men and women who become pillars in the house of our God. If we want strong Christians, we must look to those who were Christians in their youth. Trees must be planted in the courts of the Lord while yet young if they are to flourish well and long.

And, brethren, I feel that the work of teaching the young has at this time, an importance superior to any which it ever had before, for at this time there are abroad those who are creeping into our houses and deluding men and women with their false doctrine. Let the Sunday schools of England teach the children well. Let them not merely occupy their time with pious phrases, but let them teach them the whole gospel, and the doctrines of grace intelligently. And let them pray over the children, and never be satisfied unless the children are turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and added to the church, and then I shall not be afraid of Popery. Popish priests said of old that they could have won England back again, to Rome, if it had not been for the catechizing of the children. We have laid aside catechisms, I think with too little reason, but at any rate, if we do not use godly catechisms, we must bring back decided, plain, simple teaching, and there must be pleading and praying for the conversion of the children, the immediate conversion of children unto the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God waits to help us in this effort. He is with us if we are with Him. He is ready to bless the most humble teacher, and even the infant classes shall not be without a benediction. He can give us words and thoughts suitable to our little auditory. He can so bless us

that we shall know how to speak a word in season to the youthful ear. And oh, if it is not so, if teachers are not found, or being found, are unfaithful, we shall see the children that have been in our schools go back into the world like their parents, hating religion because of the tedium of the hours spent in Sunday school and we shall produce a race of infidels, or a generation of superstitious persons. The golden opportunity will be lost and most solemn responsibility will rest upon us. I pray the church of God to think much of the Sunday school. I beseech all lovers of the nation to pray for Sunday schools. I entreat all who love Jesus Christ, and would see His kingdom come, to be very tender towards all youthful people, and to pray that their hearts may be won to Jesus.

I have not spoken, this morning, as I should like to speak, but the theme lies very near my heart. It is one which ought to press heavily upon all our consciences, but I must leave it. God must lead your thoughts into it. I leave it, but not till I have asked these questions: What have you been doing for the conversion of children, each one of you? What have you done for the conversion of your own children? Are you quite clear upon that matter? Do you ever put your arms around your boy's neck, and pray for him and with him? Father, you will find that such an act will exercise great influence over your lad. Mother, do you ever talk to your little daughter about Christ and Him crucified? Under God's hands you may be a spiritual as well as a natural mother to that well-beloved child of yours. What are you doing, you who are guardians and teachers of youth? Are you clear about their souls? You weekday schoolmasters, as well as you who labor on Sunday, are you doing all you should that your boys and girls may be brought, early, to confess the Lord? I leave it with each of you. You shall receive a great reward if, when you enter heaven, as I trust you will, you shall find many dear children there to welcome you into eternal happiness. It will add another heaven to your own heaven, to meet with heavenly beings who shall salute you as their teacher who brought them to Jesus. I would not wish to go to heaven alone—would you? I would not wish to have a crown in heaven without a star in it because no soul was ever saved by my means—would you? There they go, the sacred flock of blood-bought sheep, the great Shepherd leads them. Many of them are followed by twins, and others have, each one, their lamb. Would you like to be a barren sheep of the great Shepherd's flock? The scene changes, listen to the tramp of a great host. I hear their war music. My ears are filled with their songs of victory. The warriors are coming home, and each one is bringing his trophy on his shoulder, to the honor of the great Captain. They stream through the gate of pearl. They march in triumph to the celestial Capitol, along the golden streets, and each soldier bears with him his own portion of the spoil. Will you be there? And being there, will you march without a trophy, and add nothing to the pomp of the triumph? Will you bear nothing that you have won in battle, nothing which you have ever taken for Jesus with your sword and with your bow?

Again, another scene is before me: I hear them shout the "harvest home" and see the reapers bearing, everyone, his sheaf. Some of them

are bowed down with the heaps of sheaves which load the happy shoulders. These went forth weeping, but they have come again rejoicing, bringing the sheaves with them. Yonder comes one who bears but a little handful, but it is rich grain. He had but a tiny plot and a little seed corn entrusted to him and it has multiplied well according to the rule of proportion. Will you be there without as much as a solitary sheaf? Never having plowed nor sown, and therefore never having reaped? If so, every shout of every reaper might well strike a fresh pang into your heart as you remember that you did not sow and therefore could not reap. If you do not love my Master, do not profess to do so. If He never bought you with His blood, do not lie to Him, and come to His table, and say that you are His servant. But if His dear wounds bought you, give yourself to Him, and if you love Him feed His sheep and feed His lambs. He stands here unseen by my sight, but recognized by my faith! He exhibits to you the marks of the wounds upon His hands and His feet, and He says to you, "Peace be unto you! As My Father has sent Me, even so I send you. Go you into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, and know this, that he that converts a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Good Master, help us to serve you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—James 5.

HYMN FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—98, 1004, 473

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MORNING AND EVENING SONGS
NO. 1138

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"To show forth Your loving-kindness in the morning,
and Your faithfulness every night."
Psalm 92:2.

IT is a notion of the Rabbis that this Psalm was sung by Adam in Paradise. There are no reasons why we should believe it was so, and there are a great many why we should be sure it was not. For it is not possible that Adam could have sung concerning brutish men and fools, and the wicked springing as grass, while as yet he was the only man, and himself unfallen. Still, at least the first part of the Psalm might have fallen as suitably from the lips of Adam as from our tongues, and if Milton could put into Adam's mouth the language—

"These are Your glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty; Yours this universal frame.
Thus wondrous fair, Yourself how wondrous then!"

He might with equal fitness have made him say, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Your name, O Most High, to show forth Your loving-kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night. For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work. I will triumph in the works of Your hands." The Jews have, for a long while, used this Psalm in the synagogue worship on their Sabbath, and very suitable it is for the Sabbath. Not so much in appearance, for there is little or no allusion to any Sabbatic rest in it, but because on that day, above all others, our thoughts should be lifted up from all earthly things to God Himself. The Psalm tunes the mind to adoration, and so prepares it for Sunday worship. It supplies us with a noble subject for meditation—the Lord, the Lord alone, lifting us up even above His works into a contemplation of Himself and His mercies toward us. Oh, that always on Sunday, when we come together, we might assemble in the spirit of praise, feeling that it is good to give thanks unto the name of the Most High, and would God that always when we were assembled, we could say, "You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work: I will triumph in the works of Your hands."

There is no doubt that in this second verse there is an allusion to the offering of the morning, and the evening lambs. For, in addition to the great Paschal celebration, once a year, and the other feasts and fasts, each of which brought Christ prominently before the mind of those Jews who were instructed by the Spirit of God, a lamb was offered every morning, and every evening, as if to remind them that they needed daily cleansing for daily sin. For then there was always a remembrance of sin, seeing that the one great sacrifice which puts away sin forever had not

yet been offered. Though now, in these our days, we need no morning or evening lamb. The very idea of a repetition or a rehearsal of the sacrifice of Christ is to us, most horribly profane and blasphemous. Yet we should remember continually the one sacrifice, and never wake in the morning without beholding "The Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world," nor fall to sleep at night without turning our eyes anew to Him who, on the bloody tree was made sin for us.

Our text, however, is meant to speak to us concerning praise. Praise should be the continual exercise of believers. It is the joyful work of heaven; it should be the continual joy of earth. And we are taught by the text, I think, that while praise should be given only to the One who is in heaven, and we should adore perpetually our Triune God, yet there should be variety in our unity. We bless the Lord, and the Lord alone. We have no music but for Him, but we do not always praise Him after the same fashion. As there were different instruments of music—the ten-stringed instrument or decachord, the psaltery, the harp—so, too, there are different subjects, a subject for the morning and a subject for the evening—loving-kindness to be shown forth at one time, and faithfulness to be sung at another. I wish that men studied more the praise they profess to present unto God. I sometimes find, even in our own public song, simple as it is, that there evidently is a lack of thought among us, for time is not maintained with the precision which would grow out of thoughtfulness. There is a tendency to sing more slowly, as if devotion were wearying, if not wearisome. And too frequently I fear the singing gets to be mechanical, as if the tune mastered you, and you did not govern the tune by making those inflections and modulations of voice which the sense would suggest if you sang with all your hearts and with all your understandings. The very posture of some people indicates that they are going through the hymn, but the hymn is not going through their hearts, nor ascending to God on the wings of soaring gratitude. I have also noticed with sad reflections the way in which, if there happens to be a chorus at the close—a "Hallelujah," or "Praise God"—some will drop into their seats as if they had not thought enough to remember that it was coming, and then, with a jerk, all in confusion, they stand up again, being so asleep in heart that anything out of the common is too much for them. Far am I from caring for postures or tones, but when they indicate lack of heart, I do care, and so should you. Remember well that there is no more of music to God's ear in any service than there is of heart-love and holy devotion. You may make floods of music with your organ if you like, or you may make equally good music—and some of us think better—with human voices. But it is not music to God, either of instrument or of voice, unless the heart is there. And the heart is not fully there—the man, the whole man, is not fully there—unless the soul glows with the praise.

In our private praise, also, we ought to think more of what we are doing, and concentrate our entire energies for the sacred exercise. Ought we not to sit down, before we pray, and ask our understanding, "What am I going to pray for? I bow my knees at my bedside to pray, ought I not

to pause and consider the things I ought to ask for? What do I want, and what are the promises which I should plead? And why is it that I may expect that God should grant me what I want?" We would pray better if we occupied more time in consideration. And so when we come to praise, we ought not to rush upon it helter skelter, but engage in it with prepared hearts. I notice that when musicians are about to discourse sweet music, there is a tuning-up. There is a preparation and there are rehearsals, which they perform before they go through their music in public. So our soul ought to rehearse the subject for which it is about to bless God. And we ought to come before the Lord, both in public and in private, with subjects of praise which our thought has considered, not offering unto the Lord that which has cost us nothing. But with a warm heart pouring out before His throne adoration grounded upon subjects of thanksgiving appropriate to the occasion. So it seems the psalmist would have us do—"To show forth Your loving-kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night." It is not mere praise, but varied praise, praise with distinct subjects at appointed seasons. Upon this we are about to speak for a little while.

And we shall speak first—here is *a subject for morning worship.* Secondly, here is *another for evening devotion.* And this last, before we close our discourse, *we shall try to practice.*

I. First, then, notice MORNING WORSHIP—"To show forth Your loving-kindness in the morning."

"In the morning." There cannot be a more suitable time for praising God than in the morning. Everything around is congenial to it. Even in this great wilderness of brick, the gleams of sunlight in these summer mornings seem like songs, songs without words, or rather music without sounds. And out in the country where every blade of grass twinkles with its own drop of dew, and all the trees glisten as if they were lit up with sapphire by the rising dawn, and when a thousand birds awake to praise their Maker, making harmonious concerts, all with all their hearts casting their entire energies into the service of holy song—it seems most fit that the key of the morning should be in the hand of praise, and that when the daylight lifts its eyelids, it should look out upon grateful hearts. We ourselves have newly risen from our beds, and if we are in a right state of mind we are thankful for the night's sleep—

"The evening rests our wearied head,
And angels guard the room.
We awake, and we admire the bed
That was not made our tomb."

Every morning is a sort of resurrection. At night we lay us down to sleep, stripped of our garments, as our souls are of their bodies when we come to die. But the morning wakes us, and if it is a Sunday morning, we do not put on our work-day clothes, but find our Sunday dress ready to hand. Even thus shall we be satisfied when we wake up in our Master's likeness, no more to put on the soiled raiment of earth, but to find it transformed into a Sunday robe in which we shall be beautiful and fair, even as Jesus our Lord, Himself. Now, as every morning brings to us, in fact, a resurrection from what might have been our tomb, and delivers us

from the image of death which through the night we wore, it ought to be saluted with thanksgiving. As the great resurrection morning will be awakened with the sound of the trumpet's far-sounding music, so let every morning, as though it were a resurrection to us, awaken us with hymns of joy—

"All praise to You who safe have kept,
And have refreshed me while I slept!
Grant, Lord, when I from death shall wake,
I may of endless life partake."

"To show forth Your loving-kindness in the morning." We are full of vigor then. We shall be tired before night comes round. Perhaps in the heat of the day we shall be exhausted. Let us take care, while we are fresh, to give the cream of the morning to God. Our poet says—

"The flower, when offered in the bud,
Is no mean sacrifice."

Let us give the Lord the bud of the day, its virgin beauty, and its unsullied purity. Say what you will about the evening, and there are many points about it which make it an admirable season for devotion, yet the morning is the choice time. Is it not a queenly hour? See how it is adorned with diamonds more pure than those which flash in the crowns of eastern potentates. The old proverb declares that they who would be rich must rise early. Surely those who would be rich towards God must do so. No dews fall in the middle of the day, and it is hard to keep up the dew and freshness of one's spirit in the worry, care and turmoil of midday. But in the morning the dew should fall upon our fleece till it is filled. And it is well to wring it out before the Lord, and give Him our morning's vigor, our morning's freshness and unction.

You will see, I think, without my enlarging, that there is fitness in the morning for praising God. But I shall not merely confine the text to the morning of each day. The same fitness appertains to the morning of all our days. Our youth, our first hours of the day of life, ought to be spent in showing forth the loving-kindness of God. Dear young friends, you may rest assured that nothing can happen to you so blessed as to be converted while you are young. I bless God for my having known Him when I was 15 years of age, but I have often felt like that Irishman who said that he was converted at twenty, and he wished it had been 21 years before. I have often felt the same desire. Oh, if it could have been so, that the very first breath one drew had been consecrated to God, that it had been possible for the first rational thought to be one of devotion, that the first act of judgment had been exercised upon divine truth, and the first pulsing affection had been towards the Redeemer who loved us, and gave Himself for us! What blessed reflections would fill the space now occupied with penitent regrets. The first part of a Christian life has charms peculiar to itself. In some respects—

"That age is best which is the first,
For then the blood is warmer."

I know the later part is riper, it is mellower. There is sweetness about autumn fruit, but the basket of early fruit—the first ripe fruit—this is what

God desires. And blessed are they who, in the morning, show forth the loving-kindness of God!

Or the words may be explained mystically to signify those periods of life which are bright like the morning to us. We have our ups and downs, our ebbs and flows, our mornings and our nights. Now, it is the duty and the privilege of our bright days, for us to show forth God's loving-kindness in them. It may be some of you have had so rough a life that you consider your nights to be more numerous than your days. Others of us could not, even in common honesty, subscribe to such a belief. No, blessed be God, our mornings have been very numerous. Our days of joy and rejoicing, after all, have been abundant—infinitely more abundant than we might have expected they could be, dwelling as we do in the land of sorrows. Oh, when the joy days come, let us always consecrate them by showing forth God's loving-kindness. Do not as some do, which, if they are prospering, make a point of not admitting it. If they make money, for instance, well, they are "doing pretty well." "Pretty well," do they call it? Time was, when, if they had done half as well, they would have been ready to jump for joy. How often the farmer, when his crop could not be any larger, and when the field is loaded with it, will say, "Well, it is a very fair crop." Is that all? Oh, what robbery of God! This talk is far too common on all sides, and ought to be most solemnly rebuked. When we have been enjoying a long stretch of joy and peace, instead of saying that it is so, we speak as if—well, well, God has dealt very well with us upon the whole, but at the same time He has done for us nothing very remarkable. I saw a tombstone the other day which pleased me. I do not know that I ever saw an epitaph of that kind before. I think it was for a person of the age of 80, and it said of her, "Who after a happy and grateful enjoyment of life, died," and so on. Now, that is what we ought to say, but we talk as if, really, we were to be pitied for living, as if we were little better off than toads under a hallow, or snails in a tub of salt. We whine as if our lives were martyrdoms, and every breath a woe. But it is not so. Such conduct slanders the good Lord. Blessed be the Lord for creating us. Our life has mercies, yes, and innumerable mercies. And, notwithstanding the sorrows and the troubles of it, there are joys and benedictions past all count. There are mornings in which it becomes us to show forth the loving-kindness of the Lord. See, then, the season, the morning of each day, the morning of our days, and the morning of our brightness and prosperity.

The psalmist suggests that the best topic for praise on such occasions is loving-kindness. And, truly, I confess that this is a theme which might suit nights as well as days, though doubtless he saw appropriateness in allotting this topic to the morning. Verily it might suffice for all the day long. Was there ever such a word in any language as that word loving-kindness*?* I have sometimes heard Frenchmen talking about their language, and I have no doubt it is a very beautiful tongue, and Germans glorify the speech of the Fatherland, and I have heard our Welsh friends extolling their unpronounceable language, and crying it up as the very tongue that was spoken in Paradise. Very likely, indeed! But I venture to

say that no language beneath the sky has a word in it that is richer than this—*loving-kindness*. It is a duplicate deliciousness. There are within it linked sweetnesses long drawn out. *Loving-kindness,* it is a kind of word with which to cast spells which should charm away all fears. It was said of Mr. Whitefield that he could have moved an audience to tears by saying the word, "Mesopotamia." I think he could have done it better with the word, "loving-kindness." Put it under your tongue, now. Let it lie there: LOVING-KINDNESS. *Kindness:* does that mean kinned-ness? Some say that it is the root-sense of the word—*kinned-ness,* such feeling as we have to our own kin, for blood is always thicker than water. And we act towards those who are our kindred as we cannot readily do towards strangers.

Now, God has made us of His kin. In His own dear Son He has taken us into His family. We are children of God—"heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus." And there is a *kinned-ness* from God to us through our great kinsman, Jesus Christ. But then the word is only half understood when you get to that, for it is *loving*-kindness. For a surgeon to set a man's limb when it is out of joint or broken is kindness, although he may do it somewhat roughly, and in an off-hand manner. But if he does it very tenderly, covering the lion's heart with the lady's hand, then he shows *loving*-kindness. A man is picked up on the battlefield, put into an ambulance, and carried to the hospital. That is kindness. But oh, if that poor soldier's mother could come into the hospital and see her boy suffering, she would show him *loving*-kindness, which is something far more. A child run over in the street outside yonder, and taken to the hospital, would be cared for, I have no doubt, with the greatest kindness. But, after all, send for its mother, for she will give it *loving*-kindness. And so the Lord deals with us. He gives us what we need in a fatherly manner. He does to us what we need in the tenderest fashion. It is kindness. It is kinned-ness, but it is loving-kindness. The very heart of God seems written out in this word. We could hardly apply it in full force to any but to our Father who is in heaven.

Now here is a subject for us to sing about in the morning.

How shall I begin with the hope of going through this subject? It is an endless one. Loving-kindness begins—ah, I must correct myself—it never did begin. It had no beginning. "I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Everlasting love, therefore, is what we must begin to sing of. And that everlasting love was infinite in its preparations, for before we had been created, the Lord had made a covenant on our account, and resolved to give His only-begotten Son, that we might be saved from wrath through Him. The loving-kindness of God, our Father, appeared in Jesus Christ. Oh, brethren, let us always be talking about this! I wonder why it is, when we meet each other, that we do not begin at once to say, "Brother, have you been thinking over the loving-kindness of the Lord in the gift of His dear Son?" For, indeed, it is such a marvelous thing that it ought not to be a nine-day' wonder with us. It ought to fill us with astonishment every day of our lives. Now, if something wonderful happens, everybody's mouth is

full of it, and we speak to one another about it at once, while like the Athenians, all our neighbors are greedy to hear. Let our mouths, then, be full of the marvelous loving-kindness of God. And for fear we should leave the tale half untold, let us begin early in the morning to rehearse the eternal love manifested in the great gift of Jesus Christ. If we have already spoken about these things, and wish for variety, let us speak concerning the loving-kindness of God to each one of us in bringing us to Jesus. What a history each man's own life is. I suppose that if any one of our lives should be fully written, it would be more wonderful than a romance. I have sometimes seen a sunset of which I have said, "Now, if any painter had depicted that, I would have declared that the sky never looked in that way, it is so strange and singular." And in the same way, should some of our lives be fully written, many would say, "It could not have been so." How many have said of Huntingdon's, *"Bank of Faith,"* for instance, "Oh, it is a bank of nonsense"? Yet I believe that it is correct, and bears the marks of truth upon its very face. I believe that the man did experience all that he has written, though he may not always have told us everything in the best possible manner. Many other people's lives would be quite as wonderful as his if they could be written. Speak about, then, the loving-kindness of God to yourself in particular. Rehearse, if to no other ear, to your own ear, and to the ear of God, the wondrous story of how—

"Jesus sought you when a stranger
Wandering from the fold of God,"

His grace brought you to Himself, and so into eternal life. And then, brethren, sing of the loving-kindness of God to yourselves since your new birth. Remember the mercies of God. Do not bury them in the grave of ingratitude. Let them glisten in the light of gratitude. I am sure that you will find this a blessed morning portion; it will sweeten all the day. The Psalmist would have you begin the day with it, because you will need all the day to complete it. Indeed, you will need all the days of life and all eternity. And I am half of Addison's mind—though the expression is somewhat hyperbolical—

"But, oh, eternity's too short
To utter half Your praise."

What a blessed subject you have before you—the loving-kindness of the Lord. Not yourself—not yourself. That is a horrible subject to speak upon. When I hear brethren get up and glory in their own attainments and graces, I remember the words of the wise man, "Let another praise you; not your own lips." Above all things, when a man says that he has made great advances in sanctification, it is sickening, and clearly proves that he has not learned the meaning of the word, "humility." I hope the eyes of our friends will be opened, and that they will come to loathe the devil's meat which now deceives them. May we no longer see spiritual self-conceit held up among us as a virtue, but may it be shunned as a deadly evil. No, let my mouth be filled with God's praise, but not with my own.

My brethren let not our tongues be always occupied with our griefs. If you have a skeleton in your house, why should you always invite every friend who calls upon you to inspect the uncomely thing? No! Tell what

God has done for you. Tell of His loving-kindness. I have heard—and I repeat the story because it ought to be repeated, simple as it is—of a pastor who frequently called upon a poor bedridden woman who, very naturally, always told him of her pains and her needs. He knew all about her rheumatism. He had heard of it 50 times, and at last he said to her, "My dear sister, I sympathize with you deeply, and I am never at all tired of hearing your complaints. But could you not, now and then, tell me something about what the Lord does for you—something about your enjoyments, how He sustains you under your pain, and so on?" It was a rebuke well put and well taken, for afterwards there was less said about the griefs, and more heard about the blessings. Help us from now on to resolve, Great God, "To show forth Your loving-kindness in the morning."

Thus we have considered the time and the topic. And now we are bound to observe the manner in which we are to deal with the subject. The psalmist says we are to *show it forth,* by which I suppose he means that we are not to keep to ourselves what we know about God's loving-kindness.

Every Christian in the morning ought to show it forth first, in his own chamber before God. He should express his gratitude for the mercies of the night, and the mercies of his whole life. Then let him, if it is possible, show it forth in his family. Let him gather them together and worship the Lord, and bless Him for His loving-kindness. And then when the Christian goes into the world, let him show forth God's loving-kindness. I do not mean by talking of it to everyone he meets, casting pearls before swine, as it would be to some men, but by the very way in which he speaks, acts and looks. A Christian ought to be the most cheerful of men, so that others should say, "What makes him look so happy? He is not rich, he is not always in good health, he has his troubles, but he seems to bear all so well, and to trip lightly along the pathway of life." By our cheerful conversation we ought to show forth in the morning God's loving-kindness. "Ah," says one, "but when you are depressed in spirit?" Do not show it if you can help it. Do as your Master said—"Appear not unto men to fast." Do not imagine that the appearance of sadness indicates sanctity, it often means hypocrisy. To conceal one's own griefs for the sake of cheering others betokens a self-denying sympathy which is the highest kind of Christianity. Let us present the sacrifice of praise in whatever company we may be, but when we get among God's own people, then is the time for a whole burnt offering. Among our own kith and kin we may safely open our box of sweets. When we find a brother who can understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, let us tell it forth with sacred delight. We have choice treasures which we cannot show to ungodly eyes, for they would not appreciate them. But when we meet with eyes which God has opened, then let us open the jewelry box, and say, "Brother, rejoice in what God has done for us. See His loving-kindness to me His servant, and His tender mercies which have been ever of old."

Thus, beloved friends, I have set before you a good morning's work, and I think, if God's Spirit helps us to attend to it, we shall come out of our chambers with our breath smelling sweet with the praises of God. We

shall go down into the world without care, much more without anger. We shall go calmly to our work, and meet our cares quietly and happily. The joy of the Lord will be our strength. It is a good rule never to look into the face of man in the morning till you have looked into the face of God. An equally good rule is to always to have business with heaven before you have any business with earth. Oh, it is a sweet thing to bathe in the morning in the love of God. To bathe in it so that when you come forth out of the ivory chambers of communion where you have been made glad, your garments shall smell of the myrrh, and aloes, and cassia of holiness. Do we all attend to this? I am afraid we are in too much of a hurry, or we get up too late. Could we not rise a little earlier? If we could steal even a few minutes from our beds, those few minutes would scatter their influence over the entire day. It is always bad to start on a journey without having looked to the harness, and to the horse's shoes. And it often happens that the time saved by omitting examination turns out to be a dead loss when the traveler has advanced a little on his journey. Not one minute, but a hundred minutes may be lost by the lack of a little attention at first. Set the morning watch with care if you would be safe through the day. Begin well if you would end well. Take care that the helm of the day is put right. Look well to the point you want to sail to, then whether you make much progress or little, it will be so far in the right direction. The morning hour is generally the index of the day.

II. Now, let us turn to the second part of our subject very briefly. The psalmist says, "To show forth Your faithfulness EVERY NIGHT.

Now, the night, beloved, is a peculiarly choice time for praising God's faithfulness. "Oh," says one, "we are very tired." Well, that may be, but it is a pity that we should be reduced to such a condition that we are too tired to praise God. A holy man of God always used to say, when they said to him, "Can you pray?" "Thank God, I am never too tired to pray." If anything can awaken us, the service of Christ should do it. There should be, within us, an enthusiasm which kindles at the very thought of prayer. Have you ever known an army on the march, weary and ready to drop, and the band played some enlivening tune which has bestirred the men afresh? They have gone over the last few miles as they could not have done if it had not been for the inspiration of the strain. Let the thought of praising God wake up our wearied energies, and let not God be robbed of His glory at the close of the day. The close of the day is calm, quiet, and fit for devotion. God walked in the Garden in the cool of the day, before man fell, and Adam went forth to meet Him. Isaac walked in the fields at eventide, and there he received a blessing. The evening is the Sabbath of the day, and should be the Lord's.

Now, notice the topic which is set for the evening. It is *faithfulness*. Why? Why, because we have had a little more experience of our God. We have a day's more experience than we had in the morning. Therefore we have more power to sing of God's faithfulness. We look back, now, upon the day, and see promises fulfilled. May I ask you to look over today, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ? Can you not notice some promises which God has kept towards you? Show forth His faithfulness, then. Pro-

vision has been given you—He promised to give it—He has given it. Protection has been afforded you, more than you know of, infinitely more. Guidance, also, has been given in points where you otherwise would have gone very much astray. Illumination has been granted you. Comfort, also, in a season of depression or upholding in a time of temptation. God has given you much, today. If He has taken anything away from you, yet still bless His name. It was only what He had given, and He had a right to take it. Look through the day and you will find that God has acted towards you as He promised that He would act. You have had trouble, you say. Did not He say, "In the world you shall have tribulation"? Has He not spoken concerning the rod of the covenant? Affliction only illustrates His faithfulness. Carefully observe the fulfilled promises of each day. It is a good custom to conclude the day by rehearsing its special mercies. I do not believe in keeping a detailed diary of each day's experience, for one is very apt, for lack of something to put down, to write what is not true, or at least not real. I believe there is nothing more stilted or untruthful, as a general rule, than a religious diary. It easily degenerates into self-deceit. Still, most days, if not all our days, reveal singular instances of providence if we will but watch for them. Master Flavel used to say, "He that notices providences shall never be without a providence to notice." I believe we let our days glide by us unobservant of the wondrous things that are in them and so miss many enjoyments. As in nature the uneducated person sees but little beauty in the wild flowers—

"The primrose by the river's brim,
A yellow primrose is to him,
And it is nothing more."

And so we, for lack of thought, let great mercies go by us. They are trivial to us, and nothing more. Oh, let us change our ways, and think more of what God has done, and then we shall utter a song concerning His faithfulness every night.

Did you notice, in the text, that word, "every"? It does not say, "To show forth His loving-kindness every morning," though it means that. But concerning the nights it is very distinct, "And His faithfulness *every* night." It is a cold night. Did He not promise winter? And now it has come, the cold only proves His faithfulness. It is a dark night, but then it is a part of His covenant that there should be nights as well as days. Supposing that there were no nights, and no winters, where was the covenant which God made with the earth? But every change of temperature in the beautiful changes of the year, and every variation of light and shade only illustrate the faithfulness of God. If you happen, now, to be full of joy, you can tell of divine faithfulness in rendering love and mercy to you. But if, on the other hand, you are full of trouble, still tell of God's faithfulness, for now you have an opportunity of proving it. He will not leave you. He will not forsake you. His Word is, "When you pass through the rivers I will be with you: the floods shall not overflow you." Depend upon it, that promise will be faithfully fulfilled.

Beloved friends, you who are getting old are nearing the night of life. You are peculiarly fitted to show forth the Lord's faithfulness. The young

people may tell of His loving-kindness, but the old people must tell of His faithfulness. You can speak of 40 or 50 years of God's grace to you. And you can confidently affirm that He has not once failed you. He has been true to every word that He has spoken. Now, I charge you; do not withhold your testimony. If young people were silent they would be guilty, but they might speak, perhaps, another day. But for you advanced Christians to be silent will be sinful indeed, for you will not have another opportunity in this world of showing forth the faithfulness of God. Bear witness now, before your eyes are closed in death! The faithfulness of God every night is a noble subject for His gray-headed servants.

And this it is your great business to *show forth*. O beloved let us publish abroad the faithfulness of God. I wonder, sometimes, that there should be any doubts in the world about the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, and I think the reason why there are any is this—those professors who fall are very conspicuous, everybody knows about them. If a high-flying professor makes a foul end of his boasts, why, that is talked of everywhere. They speak of it in Gath and publish it in the streets of Ashkelon. But, on the other hand, those thousands of true believers that hold on their way, they cannot, of course, say much about themselves. It would not be right they should, but I wish they would, sometimes, say more about the unfailing goodness, and immutable truthfulness of God, to be a check to the effect produced by backsliders, so that the world may know that the Lord does not cast away His people whom He did foreknow, but that He gives strength to them even in their fainting, and bears them through. If there is any one topic that you Christians ought to speak about thankfully, bravely, positively, continuously, it is the faithfulness of God to you. It is that upon which Satan makes a dead aim in the minds of many tempted ones, and therefore, to that you should bring the strength of your testimony, that tried saints may know that He does not forsake His people.

III. And now, to close, I desire in the name of God's people here present, TO SHOW FORTH GOD'S FAITHFULNESS THIS VERY NIGHT. My brethren, as a church, let us declare how faithful God has been to us! Our history as a church has been very wonderful. When we were few and feeble, and brought low, God appeared for us. Then we began to prosper, and we began, also, to pray. And what prayers they were! Surely the more we prayed, the more God blessed us. We have now had almost 20 years of uninterrupted blessing. We have had no fits and starts, revivals and retreats, but onward has been our course, in the name of God, a steady, continued progress, like the growth of a cedar upon Lebanon. Up to this time God has always heard prayer in this place. This very building was an answer to prayer. There is scarcely an institution connected with it but what can write upon its banner, "We have been blessed by a prayer-hearing God." It has become our habit to pray, and it is God's habit to bless us. Oh, let us not waver! Let us not hesitate! If we do, we shall be straitened in ourselves, but not in God. God will not leave us while we prove Him in His own appointed way. If we will but continue mighty in earnest intercession, we may, as a church, enjoy another 20 years, if it

so pleases God, of equal or greater prosperity. If ever there was a spot on earth where it became men to speak well of a faithful God, it is the spot where I stand, and I do speak of it to His glory. We have used no carnal attractions to gather people together to worship here. We have procured nothing to please their taste by way of elaborate music, fine dress, painted windows, processions, and the like. We have used the gospel of Jesus without any rhetorical embellishments, simply spoken as a man speaks to his friend. And God has blessed it and He will bless it still.

Now, dear friends, each one of you can say of yourselves, as well as of the church, that God has been faithful to you. Tell it to your children; tell them God will save sinners when they come to Him, for He saved you. Tell it to your neighbors; tell them He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins if we confess them to Him, and to save us from all unrighteousness, for He forgave you. Tell every trembler you meet with, that Jesus will in nowise cast out any that come to Him. Tell all seekers that if they seek, they shall find, and that to everyone that knocks, the door of mercy shall be opened. Tell the most desponding and despairing that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the very chief. Make known His faithfulness every night. And when your last night comes, and you gather up your feet in the bed, like Jacob, let your last testimony be to the Lord's faithfulness. And like glorious old Joshua, end your life by saying, "Not one good thing has failed of all the Lord God has promised, but all has come to pass."

The Lord bless you, dear friends, and give you all to know His loving-kindness and His faithfulness. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 92.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—193, 675, 34

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THE MINISTER'S PLEA
NO. 1139

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 2, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."
Philippians 1:19.

THE apostle was in prison, in great jeopardy of his life. He was much troubled by many who had begun to preach Jesus Christ, but did not preach Him in a proper spirit. He was often depressed by that which came daily upon him, the care of all the Churches. Yet, while he looked in the face the evils which surrounded him, he was able to see beyond them, and to believe that the consequences of all his trials would be a real and lasting good. He felt sure that it was a good thing for him to be in prison. That it would be a good thing, even if he had to die there, that it was well that many were preaching Christ, even though some did it for the wrong reasons, for Christ was still being preached, and the result could not be evil. And he felt that the troubles and trials of the churches were good, for somehow or other they would be overruled for God's glory. Let us learn from him to look at the end as well as at the beginning of things. The bud of our present trouble may have no beauty in it, but fair will be the flower which will ultimately develop from it. The clouds hang heavily above our heads, but let us not, like little children, be alarmed at their blackness, but remember that they are—

"Big with mercy and will break
With blessings on our head."

Whatever happens to the true servant of the Lord will turn out for the furtherance of the gospel. Therefore will we rejoice in tribulations, and accept God's will, whatever it may be.

But observe that the apostle did not expect that good would arise out of everything, apart from prayer. He believed that it would be through the prayer of his beloved friends at Philippi, and the supply of the Spirit, that everything which happened to him would work to promote his salvation, his spiritual advantage, and his success as a minister of Christ. He looked for the transformation of the evil into good by that sacred alchemy of heaven which can transmute the basest metal into purest gold. But he did not expect this to happen apart from the ordained methods, and ordinary institutions of grace. He counted upon the result because he saw two great agents at work, namely, prayer and the supply of the Spirit. Whoever else may be foolish enough to look for effects apart from causes, the apostle was not of their mind.

This morning my sermon will be mainly upon my own behalf, and on the behalf of my brothers in the ministry. We ought, sometimes, to have a sermon for ourselves, for we preach a great many for others, and we may the more boldly become pleaders on our own account, inasmuch as what we ask for is really intended for the profit of our people, and for the good of Christ's cause.

My real subject will be, "Brethren, pray for us." The end to which I shall drive at will be to excite you to be much in prayer, both for myself and all ministers of Christ Jesus, so that everything that is occurring abroad, and happening personally to any one of us may be turned to the best account, "Through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit."

Let us speak, first of all, upon *the prayer of the church;* and then concerning *the supply of the Spirit.* The two matters are closely connected, and cannot be separated.

I. THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH. The apostle evidently expected to be prayed for. He had the fullest confidence that his brethren at Philippi were praying for him. He does not ask for their prayers as much as assumes that he is already receiving them. And, truly, I wish that all pastors could always, without doubt, assume that they enjoyed the perpetual prayers of those under their charge. Some of us are very rich in this respect, and this is our joy and comfort, the reward of our labor, and the strength of our hands. We have abundant evidence that we live in the hearts of our people. But I am afraid that there are many of my brother ministers who are sad because they hear not their people's loving intercessions. They are weak because they are not prayed for and unsuccessful because they have not so gained their people's affections that they are borne upon their hearts at the mercy seat. Unhappy is that minister who dares not take it for granted that his people are praying for him.

Paul exceedingly valued the prayers of the saints. He was an apostle, but he felt he could not do without the intercessions of the poor converts at Philippi. He valued Lydia's prayers, and the prayers of her household. He valued the jailer's prayers, and the prayers of his family. He desired the prayers of Euodias and Syntyche, and Clement and the rest—the most of them, probably, persons of no great social standing as the world has it, yet he valued their supplications beyond all price; and he was as grateful for their prayers as for those temporal gifts whereby the Philippians had again and again ministered to his necessities. If the apostle thus felt indebted to the pleadings of the brethren, how much more may we, who are so far inferior to him!

He expected great results from the prayers of the church. That is certain from the text. He expected evil to be turned to good, and himself to be helped onward in the divine life. Beloved, my heart has no deeper conviction than this, that prayer is the most efficient spiritual agency in the universe next to the Holy Spirit. He is omnipotent, and does as He wills. But next to the omnipotence of the in-dwelling Spirit is the power of prayer. "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock,

and it shall be opened to you." This great charter of the church of Jesus Christ confers upon her powers which are almost, if not quite, omnipotent. And if a church will but pray, it shall set in motion the second most potent agent under heaven. The apostle knew the power of prayer, and we know it, too, and hope to prove it more and more.

Paul expected the people at Philippi to be praying for him all the more because his troubles were, just then, more heavy than usual. He was sure that this would excite their sympathy, and so make them plead more eagerly. Truly, if ever there were times when the people of God should pray for their ministers, these are the times, for the minister of Christ is beset by legions of evils of all kinds, and has to cut his way through perpetual opposition. The church is sailing, now, like a vessel in the Arctic Sea when the frost is setting in and is turning the sea into plates of iron, and each wave into an iceberg to block up the vessel's path. These are evil days, almost beyond any age that has gone before, and therefore we may exhort the church to pray more persistently, because her prayers are more than ever needed.

Plunging into the middle of my subject, I would say, first, that *ministers may justly claim the prayers of their brethren.* Every Christian should be prayed for. We have each a claim upon the other for loving intercession. The members of the body of Christ should have a care for one another, but especially should the minister receive the prayers of his flock. I have, sometimes, heard *his duties* called arduous, but that word is not expressive enough. The works in which he is occupied lie quite out of the region of human power. The minister is sent to be God's messenger for the quickening of the dead. What can he do in it? He can do nothing whatever unless the Spirit of God is with him through the prayers of his brethren. He is sent to bring spiritual food to the multitude, that is to say, he is to take the loaves and fishes, and with them, few as they are, he is to feed the thousands. An impossible commission! He cannot perform it. Apart from divine help, the enterprise of a Christian minister is only worthy of ridicule. Apart from the power of the Eternal Spirit, the things which the preacher has to do are as much beyond him as though he had to weld the sun and moon into one, light up new stars, or turn the Sahara into a garden of flowers. We have a work to do concerning which, we often cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And if we are put to this work, but have not your prayers, and in consequence have not the supply of the Spirit, we are, of all men, the most miserable.

Remember, also, that in addition to extraordinary duties, the minister is burdened by remarkable *responsibilities.* All Christians are responsible for their gifts and opportunities, but peculiar responsibilities cluster around the preacher of the Word. "If the watchman warns them not, they shall perish; but their blood will I require at the watchman's hands." When I look at Paul laboring night and day, weeping, praying, pleading, pouring out his soul in his ministry, I feel his example to be such that I cannot attain to it, and yet I shall never feel satisfied with anything below

that standard. The responsibilities resting upon one minister are the same as those which press upon another, in proportion to his sphere, and capacity of service. Oh, unhappy men, if we are found unfaithful!—of criminals, the chief, murderers of immortal souls. If we have not preached the pure gospel, we shall be wholesale poisoners of the bread of men, the bread which their souls require. We, if we are not true to God, are the choice servants of Satan. Judas, himself, was not more the son of perdition than the man who calls himself an ambassador for Christ, and yet dares to be unfaithful to the souls of men. Brethren, we claim your prayers by the solemnity of the responsibility which rests upon us.

Remember, too—what I think is not often noticed—that every true minister of Christ who is sent to men's souls, has an *experience* singular and by itself. A physician who has to treat the diseases incident to our flesh need not have personally suffered from the sicknesses with which he deals, but a physician of souls never handles a wound well unless he has felt a like wound himself. The true shepherds who really feed the sheep, must, themselves, have gone through the experiences of the flock. Did you ever read the life of Martin Luther? Then you must have observed the mental storms and spiritual convulsions which shook the man. He could not have been so influential with his fellow men if he had not felt within himself a sort of aggregation of all their sorrows and their struggles. You can not bring forth God's living Word to others till first you have eaten the roll, and it has been in your own stomach like gall for bitterness, and yet at times like honey for sweetness. Every successful farmer in the Lord's vineyard must, first, have been a partaker of the fruit; yes, and of each kind of fruit, too. Therefore it often happens, that to comfort yonder desponding heart, we must have been, ourselves, despondent; to console yonder downcast, despairing spirit, we must have been despairing, too. To direct the perplexed, we must ourselves, have been in dilemma. To ride the whirl wind and come as God's messenger to the help of those who are in the storm, we must have, ourselves, been tossed with tempest and not comforted. David could not have written his psalms, which, as in a mirror, reflect all changes of the human mind, if he had not, himself, been the epitome of the lives of all men. And in proportion as God qualifies His minister, really and effectually, to feed the souls of His people, that minister must go through the whole of their experience. And I ask you, whether in such a case, he does not have a claim to, and should not have the prayers of the church of God?

Remember, too, that the *temptations* of those who serve God in the public ministry are subtle, numerous, and peculiar. Do you suppose that when a man attracts thousands to listen to him, that when he conducts large agencies successfully, that when he wins souls to Christ and edifies the household of faith, that the temptation to pride never crosses his soul? Have you not seen men who have been set upon a pinnacle of eminence, and their heads have been turned, fall to their own disgrace and to the church's sorrow? Do you wonder at it? If you do, you know not

what is in men. And do you wonder that ministers are often tempted to grow formal in service? Here, so many times in the year, must I come and speak to you, whether I am fit to do so or not. How can I always be zealous when even the weather has an effect upon nerves and brain? Are you always earnest in your hearing? Do you wonder, therefore, that sometimes the preacher does not find it easy to be earnest in his speaking? And yet he would loathe himself if he dared speak to you what he did not feel, and would think himself accursed if he dared to preach with cold and chilly lips those matchless truths which have been bedewed by the bleeding heart of Jesus. We, who would instruct others, must keep up our spiritual life to a high point. And yet the temptation is, from our familiarity with holy things, to become mechanical in our service, and to lose the freshness and ardor of our first love. I might give many instances of temptations which are peculiar to us, but the recital might be of no benefit to you. Suffice it to say that there are such. And if by your choice, you place any man, in the name of God, in a place where he is so peculiarly assailed by the enemy, you will not be so ungenerous as to leave him without the perpetual support of your extraordinary prayers. Fail not your standard-bearer, but form around him a bodyguard of valiant intercessors.

And then, mark you, if any man shall lead the way in the church of God, he will be the main objective of the *assaults* of the enemy. The private Christian will have some persecution, but the minister must expect far more. His words will be misrepresented and tortured into I know not what of evil, and his actions will be the theme of slander and lies. If he shall speak straight out and boldly, fearless of man, and only fearful lest he should grieve his God, he will stir the kennels of hell, and make all the hounds of Satan howl at his heels. And he may count himself happy if he shall do so, for who is he that wants to be on good terms with this evil generation, which cares nothing whatever for God's truth, but sets up, for its own church, a church which has made a league with Antichrist, and a compromise between the gospel and idolatry, so that it may drag down this nation into the deeps of Romanism? I say, who cares to have honor from this adulterous generation? And yet, if a man once dares to provoke its wrath by his faithfulness, he needs the prayers of those who believe with him, that he may be sustained. Many are the archers who sorely shoot at us, and grieve us. Pray, therefore, that our bow may abide in strength, and that the arms of our hands may be made strong by the Mighty God of Jacob.

One plea more and I will not further add to the points of my argument. Among the worst trials of the ministry are the *discouragements* of it. I do not, just now, refer to discouragements from the outside world. We expect opposition from that quarter, and are not discouraged by it. If the world hates us, we remember that it hated the Lord before it hated us. But our saddest discouragements arise from within the church and congregation. There are those whom we hoped to see converted, who go back

to their old sins and disappoint us. And there are others who are a little impressed, relapse into their natural indifference. There are those who are, we hope, right at heart, which nevertheless live inconsistently. For many walk so far from Jesus that they pierce us with sorrow. And then there are others who profess great things, and united themselves with the church of God, of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. They shame us. They make the world ask, "Is this your religion?" They open the mouths of atheists and infidels, and ungodly men of all sorts against the precious Christ, Himself, so that He is wounded in the house of His friends, and put to an open shame by those who ought rather to have laid down their lives to promote His cause and kingdom. Oh, if you are called of the Lord to shepherd His flock, and if you bear in your bosom the church of God, and the cause of Christ, and live for it with all your heart and soul, you shall not live many days without many heartbreaking trials. And you will greatly need the supply of the Spirit in answer to the prayers of the people of God.

Now, having stated the case, and pleaded not for myself, only, but for all my brothers, let me say, next, that *the prayers which are needed are the prayers of the entire church.* From some other labor some of you might be exempted, but from this service, not a single one can be excused. "Your prayer," says the apostle, and he means the prayer of all the faithful. My brothers and sisters, my fellow worker, you of the Sunday school, you of the Evangelistic Society, you who visit from house to house, I need your prayers. You can sympathize with us. You know something of this way. You can, therefore, bear us up with hands that have been exercised in the same warfare. We need your prayers, also, who are not workers in any public capacity, you who feel you have not the ability or the opportunity. If there are such among us, you ought to pray doubly for those who are working, and so in some measure, make amends for your own lack of energy. If you feel laid aside from actual service yourselves, so that you have to abide by the staff, let your prayers go up doubly for those who go down to the battle. Hold up their hands, I pray you, if you can do nothing else.

We ask the prayers of all who profit by our ministry. If you feed upon the word, pray to God that we may feed others also. If your hearts are ever made glad within you by the word we speak, do plead for us that we may have the power of God resting upon us yet further. If you do not profit, we have an equal claim upon you. We beseech you pray that you may profit. If we are not suited to teach you, pray the Lord to make us suitable. If you discover some lack or deficiency which mars our ministry, do not unkindly go and speak of it everywhere, but tell the Lord about it. You will be doing more good and acting more after the mind of Christ. And, who knows?—the very ministry which is flat and unprofitable to you now, may yet become a great blessing to you when you have prayed concerning it.

Some of you are our spiritual children, begotten unto God by us. Surely we don't need to take you by the hand and say, "Brethren, children, pray for us"? There is between us and you a tie which neither life nor death can break. We shall recognize it in eternity. When fathers, mothers, husbands and wives will find all human relationship forgotten, the relationship which exists between the spiritual father and his children shall last on. Therefore, as you feel the tie, yield to its gentle persuasions, and let your pastor have a very warm place in your prayers.

You aged men and matronly women, you of experience, you of power with God, you who are mighty in your private wrestling, we need your prayers. And you young Christians with your new-born zeal, in the freshness and vigor of your spiritual life, we need your entreaties too. My little children, you who have been added to the church while yet you are boys and girls, there are no intercessions more precious than yours. Do not forget your minister when you say, "Our Father which are in heaven." God will hear the petitions of little children who love Him.

As for those who are not, and could not be here this morning, my voice will reach them through the press, and therefore let me say to them: You cannot come up to the house of God, but are appointed to lie tossing upon the bed of pain, and yet, from you, also, we ask intercessory prayer. You are especially set to do this service for the church. If you cannot appear in the public assembly, you may in secret wrestling bring down power upon that assembly. You keep the watches of the weary night when pain forbids your eyelids to find rest. Let each weary hour be cheered for yourselves, and enriched for us by prayers for the church of God, and prayers for us. Perhaps to this end some among the Saints are always sick, that pleaders for the hours of night may not be lacking. The sleepless sufferers change guard before the mercy seat, lest, perhaps, there should be an hour in the night unhallowed by a prayer in which the world should pass away beneath the unrestrained wrath of God. Prayer must be kept up like the quenchless fire on Israel's altar. We must belt and girdle the world with prayer, and the sick ones are they to whom much of the sacred work is allotted. I believe in the efficacy of united prayer, but each one must pray. There would be no clouds unless the drops of dew from each blade of grass were exhaled by the sun. Each drop ascending in vapor falls, again, in the blessed shower which removes the drought. So the grace that trembles upon each one of you, my brethren, must exhale in prayer and a blessing will come down upon the church of God.

Let me suggest for a moment, in passing on, that the prayers of God's people ought to go up for the minister in many forms. I think it should be daily work. I was pleased to hear one of our brothers' say, the other day, what I am sure was true, and true of a great many besides himself that he never did pray for himself without praying for me. That he never bowed his knee, morning or night, without remembering the work carried on in this place. It ought to be so with us all.

Besides that, if we expect a blessing on our families through the ministry, we should as families ask God to bless that ministry. When we come around the family altar, among the petitions never to be forgotten should be this—that he who is set to feed our souls may, himself, receive the bread of heaven.

Then there are our prayer meetings, our public gatherings for intercession. Ah, beloved! I may well glory in our prayer meetings, for I know not where the like have been found continuously, year after year. Still, though *I* may glory, I am not sure that all of you could, for as I look around upon you today I cannot help remarking that I see some faces on the Sunday which I have never had the pleasure of seeing on the Monday evening. Or, if ever I did, I remember it very well, because it has not been so common an occurrence that it is likely to slip out of my mind. I know there are some who could not come, and would be neglecting family duties if they did. Their duty and their calling keep them from it. At the same time, there are others to whom a gentle hint may be serviceable. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together for earnest prayer, as the manner of some is.

Beside the prayer meetings, there ought to be meetings very frequently of Christian friends who gather by appointment for this very purpose. When they come together, professors often waste time in idle talk which would be used to great profit if they spent it in prayer. When two Christians meet together for united prayer, among their other supplications should be one that the Lord would bless throughout all England the preaching of the gospel of Jesus. Oh, dear friends, we need, more than anything else, to have the gospel preached with power. God forbid we should criticize severely those who may be doing their best, but how much preaching is utterly powerless? We need a telling ministry. We need a ministry which cuts like a two-edged sword, and goes through into the very heart. O God, send us thousands of men armed with Your Spirit's own sword, endowed with the muscle of grace, and gifted with manliness to use the celestial weapon. Pray for such, often, not at set times only, but at all convenient seasons.

And here, let me remark, should there not be special prayer by each Christian for his own minister before every service, before going up to the house of the Lord, and when he arrives there? Many people have a habit of looking into their hats to see the name of the maker whenever they get inside a place of worship. They are themselves, the best judges whether it is not a piece of Pharisaic formalism or fashionable hypocrisy. There is a formalism about it, and we are the very last to care about outward forms. Still, what can be a better beginning for a service than secret prayer? Then, during the service, how much of prayer there should be for the preacher—"Lord, help him to speak the truth outright. Put Your power into it to send it home to the hearts and consciences of the hearers." It is well to pick out someone in the congregation, and pray, "Lord, bless the word to him or her." You would often find God hearing you in that re-

spect. Then, after the whole service is done, what can be better than to rake in with earnest prayer the good seed which has already been sown?

I must not keep you longer on this point. Suffice it to add that the prayers of the church of God must always be true prayers to be good for anything, and if they are true prayers, they will be attended with consistent lives. The man who says, "I pray for the church, and pray for the minister," and then is a thief in his business, or is guilty of some secret vice—why, he is pulling down, not building up. Can unclean hands ever be acceptable in prayer? Consistent living there must be, or prayer will be a vanity of vanities. And there must be consistent effort too. If I want God to bless the church, I must try to bless it myself, by the gift of my substance, by the consecration of my talents, by the laying out of my time for the glory of God. To pray one way, and to act another is to be a hypocrite. When the wheel sticks in the mire, to pray to God to help the cart out of it, and never to put my shoulder to the wheel is to mock the Most High. We must act as well as pray. And we must believe as well as act. We must have faith in the gospel, and faith in prayer. And if, beloved friends, such prayer as this shall go up from this church, we shall continue to enjoy the prosperity we have had for many years. And we may hopefully look for an increase of it, though sometimes, I must confess, I can hardly look for an increase, for God has blessed us so much that we have rejoiced and wondered as we have seen that His hand is still stretched out.

II. The apostle has put in connection with your prayer THE SUPPLY OF THE SPIRIT. "The Spirit of Jesus Christ," does he not say? Yes, because the Spirit we need is the Spirit that rested upon Jesus Christ, the Spirit which gave power to His ministry, for He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." That same Spirit we need, even the Spirit who represents Christ on earth, for Jesus is gone, but the Comforter abides with us as His vicegerent. He moves at Jesus Christ's will, and operates upon human thought and heart and will, subduing all to God. Now the Holy Spirit is essential to every true minister. We must have Him. A preacher may save souls without being learned—it is a pity but what he should possess a good education—but he can be useful without it. The preacher can save souls without eloquence—it is well if he is fluent—but even stammering lips may convey the message of life from God. But the man of God is nothing without the Spirit of God. It is the *sine qua non* of a ministry from God that it should be in the power of the Spirit. The preacher must be, himself, first taught of the Spirit, else how shall he speak? And being taught, he must be led as to which shall be the proper theme for each occasion, for much of the power of true ministry lies in the fitness of the word to the case of the hearer, so that the hearer perceives that his experience is known, and is met at the time by the ministry. The Spirit of God must teach us the truth, and then guide us as to which truth is to be spoken. Then the Holy Spirit must inflame the minister. The man who never takes fire, how is he sent of God? He who never

glows and burns, what knows he of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is also the baptism of fire? Pray, therefore, for the supply of the Spirit. Without the Spirit every ministry lacks that subtle, I was about to say indescribable, something which is known by the name of *unction.* Nobody here can tell what unction is. He knows that the Spirit of God gives it, and he knows when it is in a discourse, and when it is absent. Unction is, in fact, the power of God. There is an old Romish story, that a certain famous preacher was to preach on a certain occasion, but he missed his way, and was too late. And the devil, knowing of it, put on the appearance of the minister, took his place, and preached a sermon to the people, who supposed they were listening to the famous divine whom they had expected. The devil preached upon hell, and was very much at home, so that he delivered a marvelous sermon in which he exhorted persons to escape from the wrath to come. As he was finishing his sermon, in came the preacher himself, and the devil was obliged to resume his own form. The holy man then questioned him, "How dare you preach as you have done, warning to escape from hell." "Oh," said the Devil, "it will do no hurt to my kingdom, for I have no unction." The story is grotesque, but the truth is in it. The same sermon may be preached, and the same words uttered, but without unction there is nothing in it. The unction of the Holy One is true power. Therefore, brethren, we need your prayers that we may obtain the supply of the Spirit upon our ministry, for otherwise it will lack unction, which will amount to lacking heart and soul. It will be a dead ministry, and how can a dead ministry be of any service to the people of God?

The supply of the Spirit is essential to the edification of the church of God. What if the ministry should be the best that ever was produced, its outward form and fashion orthodox and ardent? What if it should be continued with persevering consistency? Yet the church will never be built up without the Holy Spirit. To build up a church, life is needed. We are living stones of a living temple. Where is the life to come from but from the breath of God? To build up a church, there is needed the light, but where is the light to come from but from Him who said, "Let there be light"? To build up a church, there is needed love, for this is the cement which binds the living stones together. But from where, comes true genuine love, but from the Spirit who sheds abroad in the heart the love of Jesus! To build up a church, we must have holiness, for an unholy church would be a den for the devil, and not a temple for God. But from where, comes holiness, but from the Holy Spirit? There must be zeal, too, for God will not dwell in a cold house. The church of God must be warm with love, but from where comes the fire except it is the fire from heaven? We must have the Holy Spirit, for to build up a church there must be joy. A joyous temple God's temple must always be. But only the Spirit of God produces the fruit of heavenly joy. There must be spirituality in the members, but we cannot have a spiritual people if the Spirit of God Him-

self, is not there. For the edification of the saints, then, we must have, beyond everything else, the supply of the Spirit.

And, O brethren, we must have it for the salvation of sinners. Here comes the tug of war, indeed. Who can enlighten the blind eye? Who can bring spiritual hearing into the deaf ear? Yes, who can quicken the dead soul but the eternal, enlightening, quickening Spirit? There it lies before us, a vast valley full of bones. Our mission is to raise them from the dead. Can we do it? No, by no means, of ourselves, yet we are to say to those dry bones, "Live." Brethren, our mission is absurd, it is worthy of laughter unless we have your prayers, and the supply of the Spirit with us. And if we have those, the bones shall come to their bones, the skeleton shall be fashioned, the flesh shall clothe the bony fabric, the Holy Spirit shall blow upon the inanimate body, and life shall be there, and an army shall throng the charnel house. Let us but invoke the Spirit, and go forth to minister in His might, and we shall do marvels. And the nation and the world, itself, shall feel the power of the gospel of Jesus. But we must have the Spirit.

And, oh, we must have the Spirit of God just now, I am sure! It is essential to the progress of the gospel, and to the victory of the truth. At this moment the Gospel is on trial. It has had its trials before, and has come out of them like gold from the furnace, purified by the heat. But just now they are telling us on all hands that the old-fashioned gospel is powerless. I have found myself dubbed in the public prints by the honorable title of *ultimus puritanorum*—"The last of the Puritans"—the last preacher of a race that is nearly extinct, the mere echo of a departed creed, the last survivor of a race of antiquated preachers. Ah, my brethren, it is not so! They come, they come, a mighty band, to bear on the truth to future ages, and even yet there are among us men who hold the truth and preach it. Yet everywhere we encounter the sneer of the servants of error. They dress themselves out in many colors, in blue and scarlet, and fine linen, and I know not what. And they tell us that the day of our stern, gaunt religion has passed. Then, your wise men, the philosophers, the men of thought, the men of culture, they sneer at us. Such preaching of the gospel as ours might have been fine 200 years ago—might even, perhaps, have sufficed for Whitefield and Wesley, and the Methodists who followed at their heels. But now, in this enlightened 19th century, we do not need any more of it. From this insult we make our appeal to the God of heaven. O God, the God of Israel, avenge Your own truth. O You whose mighty hammer can yet break rocks in pieces, You have not changed your hammer. Strike and make the mountains fall before You. O You whose sacred fire burns in Your Word, forever the same flame, You have forbidden us to offer strange fire upon Your altar. And we have not done so, but kept the faith, and held the truth. Acknowledge it, we beseech You, and prove that it is the gospel of the blessed God. Let the sacrifice that is now before You in the midst of this great nation be

consumed with the flame from heaven, and let the God that answers by fire be God.

The fact is, the church only lives in the esteem of men by what she does. If she does not convert sinners, she has not a reason for existing. The proof of the gospel is not to be found in theories and problems, or propositions in catechisms or creeds, or even in scriptural texts alone. The proof of the gospel lies in what it does. And if it does not raise the depressed, if it does not save the sinful, if it does not send light into the dark places of the earth, in fact, if it does not make sinners into saints, and transform the nature of men, then let it be thrown on a dunghill, or cast away. For, if the salt has lost its savor, it is therefore good for nothing. But we cry to God that the savor of our salt may continue in all its pungency, penetrating, and preserving power. I ask you to pray that it may be so—that God will bring to the front the old gospel, the doctrines of Whitefield, and Calvin, and Paul, the old gospel of Christ, and once and for all by a supernatural working of the Holy Spirit give an answer to those who, in this age of blasphemy and of rebuke, are reviling the gospel of the living God, and would have us cast it behind our backs.

By the name of Him who never changes, our gospel shall never change. By the name of Christ who is gone to heaven, we have nothing to preach but Christ and Him crucified. By the name of the Eternal Spirit who dwells in us, we know nothing but what the Holy Spirit has revealed. To your knees, my brethren! To your knees, and win for us the victory. Feeble as we are, and unable as we are to cope with our antagonists in any other field but this, we will vanquish them by the power of prayer through the supply of the Spirit of God!

With you I leave it, my own beloved friends, for through your prayers, and the supply of the Spirit all will be well. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PHILIPPIANS 2.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—175, 454, 953.

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LET HIM ALONE
NO. 1140

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone."
Hosea 4:17.

TO what purpose these vast assemblies Sunday after Sunday? Why do you crowd these aisles and galleries till every seat is occupied, and every foot of standing room is filled? Have you, all of you, a zeal to worship? Do you all thirst to hear the Word of the Lord? Ah me! I am beset with fears and misgivings. My heart is troubled for full many of you. Many persons entertain the evil notion that preaching sermons and hearing sermons is a light matter. When the occasion is past, the exhortation closed, the congregations broken up, and the Sunday over, they think that all is done and ended. The doors are shut, and what they have heard they no longer heed any more than if they had been at the theater, and the curtain had fallen, and the lights were out. To them the Sunday is but as any other day, and the preacher but an orator who helps them to while away an hour. But it is not so. Whether *we* look for a result from the proclamation of God's Word or not, you may be sure God looks for it. No man in his senses sows a field without looking for a harvest. No man engages in trade without expecting profit. Oh, sirs! God is not mocked. He does not send His Word that it may return unto Him void. Neither does He think that it is enough when His servants have been as those who make pleasant music, or sing a sweet song, and the audience may repair to the sanctuary as they would go to a theater, content to be pleased and careless about being profited. Listen, then, to this solemn lesson. For every Sunday that I occupy this place, I shall have to give an account before God. My fidelity to my congregation is of such solemn moment that were it not for the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus, I feel it had been better for me that I had never been born, than to have to render in that account. Oh, the faults of which I am, myself, personally conscious! They fill me with shame, though they are, I fear, but few compared with what God Himself beholds in the service I attempt to render.

But, then, *you* also will have to answer for every sermon you have heard or may yet hear. Dare any of you imagine that an opportunity of hearing the gospel is given to you that you may tread it under foot? Oh, what would dying men give to hear the gospel again! What would lost souls in hell give if they could have the opportunities of grace again! They are priceless beyond all estimates, and as they are so precious, a strict account will be taken of them. The hearer who went his way and said, "I

heard the sermon, and I formed a judgment of the preacher's style," and flippantly quoted this or that, will find that another view of the service has been taken by Almighty God, and another form of reckoning will be carried out before His judgment seat. Do you suppose that the preaching of the gospel is no more than the performance of a play? Or shall men come and listen to the truth, as it is in Jesus, preached earnestly to them with less concern than to an orator in Parliament? Are death and judgment, heaven and hell, to be looked upon as common themes which awaken nothing but a passing interest? You may judge so if you will, but God's servants dare not think so, nor does God Himself, think so. The text suggests these inquiries. It appears that the Ephraimites, or rather the whole people of Israel, the 10 tribes, had been warned again, and again, and again. And because they did not turn at the warning, but refused the message of God, and continued in their sin, at last God was provoked with them, and He said to His servants, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." No longer waste your powers on careless minds. On such a rock as that it is vain to plow. The case is become utterly hopeless. Cease your labor. Go somewhere else where your hallowed occupation will be more remunerative, where hearts will be touched, and ears will be opened to the Word. "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone."

Fearing lest there may be some in this congregation—no, being persuaded that there are some on the verge of being such, I shall try to speak, first, *upon the sin which provoked this punishment;* then I will speak upon *the strange punishment;* and thirdly, upon such *practical reasoning as arises out of the whole subject.*

I. WHAT THEN, IS THE SIN WHICH PROVOKES THIS UTTERANCE, "Let that man alone"? The sin appeared to be, in Ephraim's case, *continuance in idolatry*. Israel had set up idols. They knew the Lord, but when they separated from the tribe of Judah, Jeroboam, in order to keep them from going up to Jerusalem, set up golden calves. It was not intended that they should worship other gods, but the theory was that they would worship God, the true God, through the representation of an ox, which represented power. It was a symbol which they conceived to be appropriate and instructive, just as they tell us nowadays, "We do not want people to worship idols, but they are to worship Christ through a representation of a cross, or of a man hanging on a crucifix. This will teach them, and assist their devotions. They are not to worship the image itself, but to worship God through the image. Now, be it never forgotten that this method of devotion is expressly forbidden in the law, and is contrary to one of the ten commands. "You shall not make to yourself any graven image, or the likeness of anything which is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them nor worship them."

This command was disregarded, and the 10 tribes became practically the representatives of the Papist or Ritualist of the present day. They worshipped God through images, and after a while they went further, (as

this kind of superstition always does go further)—they began to set up false gods and goddesses—Baal, Ashtoreth, and the like. Thus at length they went aside altogether from the Most High. Prophet after prophet came and said, "If you do this, you will be visited with judgments for it. The Lord our God is a jealous God, and can only be worshipped in the manner which He has Himself, ordained. If you decide to worship Him in these new-fangled ways, with these devices and superstitious ordinances of your own, He will be angry with you, and will smite you." They listened not to these prophets. Even Elijah, that mightiest of God's messengers, gained but a slender hearing from them. Elisha, his successor, was equally disregarded. Servant after servant of God's household came to them and admonished them in the name of the Lord, but it was all to no purpose. They despised the message, persecuted those who delivered it, and in the sequel put many of them to evil deaths. So, at last, the Lord said, "They are bound to their idols; they cling and cleave to them with a morbid infatuation. Their heart is callous, their purpose stubborn, they will never give them up. Let My servants, therefore, return and refrain themselves, and go no more to them. Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone."

I fear the same judgment will come upon the Ritualists of our time, but I prefer to deal rather with you who hear me this day. To you, also, this bitter foreboding is addressed as long as your ears are deaf to counsel, and your conscience numb to reproof. Any vice deliberately harbored, any one sin persistently indulged may bring about this fearful result. God will speak of you, then, not as an erring creature that it is possible to reclaim, but as a wretched outcast whom it is necessary to abandon. A man may be overtaken with a fault. If he has been guilty of drunkenness, his conscience rebukes him. Falling into that sin once or twice, he has felt, (as well he may) that he has been degraded by it. Let that man continue—and I might especially say, "Let that *woman* continue," (for the common use or the constant abuse of intoxicating drinks exerts its baneful spell over both sexes)—let anyone continue to violate the laws of sobriety, and before long that sin will become a rooted habit. Then conscience will cease to accuse, and God will practically say, "Ephraim is given to his cups: let him alone!" Or let a man begin some practice of fraud in his business. At first it will trouble him—he will feel uneasy. By-and-by his systematic dishonesty will bring him no compunction. He will become so familiar with crime that he will call it custom, and wonder how he could have ever been so chicken-hearted as to feel any trouble about it at all. God will let him alone, and leave him to eat the fruit of his own ways. He is given to his sin, and his sin will bind him with iron chains, and hold him a captive.

I cannot, of course, pick out the special sin of any here present, but whatever your sin is, you are warned against it. Your conscience tells you it is wrong. If you persevere in it, it may come to be your eternal ruin. God will say, "The man is joined unto idols: let him alone!" *Continuance*

in sin provokes sentence—especially when that continuance in sin is perpetrated in the teeth of many admonitions. A person who continues in sin, unwarned may, comparatively, have but little fault compared with another who is frequently and faithfully rebuked. The child, who in his early sinfulness was affectionately admonished by a gracious mother, who felt the hot drops of her tears fall on his brow because his offense had grieved her, the child who was again and again admonished by a faithful father, when he has grown somewhat older, and laughed to scorn paternal teaching, and went further and further astray, does not sin at all so cheaply as the little Arab boy of the streets who has been poisoned by bad example from his youth up. Some of you who have sat under the sound of the gospel, where the word is preached in awful earnestness, will sin 10 times more grievously if you despise the exhortations of the Lord, than those whose Sundays were wasted by listening to sermons which never touched their conscience, and were never intended to do other than lull the moral sense, and charm the taste. You, young man, cannot have been warned as you have been of late by that kind friend. You cannot have been admonished as you have been, lately, by that Bible you have been reading, which has deeply impressed you. You cannot have been impressed as you have recently been by the example and especially by the dying words of your departed sister, and then go on as you used to do, without incurring seven-fold guilt. Continuance in sin after admonition is that which provokes God to say, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone."

Remember, too, that where a man becomes guilty of *despising the chastisements of God,* and perseveres in his wickedness after having suffered for it, there, again, the guilt assumes a double dye. For instance, the sailor has been profane, a common swearer, and at whatever port he has touched, he has spent his time in riotous living. But the other day he was at sea in a tremendous storm, and he cried unto God. He escaped, as it were, by the skin of his teeth, and while he was being saved from impending death, his heart trembled on account of his guilt. Now, if that man, after being saved from shipwreck, goes back to blasphemy and debauchery, there will be sharp reckoning with him. That soldier who has been in the hospital, laid aside by sickness brought on by his own folly, who, after his life was despaired of, has nevertheless recovered, if he shall return like a dog to his vomit, every sin that he will commit will count for many times as much as those sins he rebelled in before that warning. That young man who left his father's house in the country, where he had been trained to virtue, and came to London, and plunged into its whirlpool of vice, but who, in the infinite mercy of God has been snatched like a brand from the burning for a while, and is able, again, to come up to worship with God's people—if he should go back like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, woe be unto him! It may be that he will never have God's rod to make him smart again. The rod will be put up, and the axe of Justice will be used before long!

You know how the Roman lictors, as they went through the street with the consul, carried a bundle of rods, and when a culprit was brought before the consul, he would say sometimes, "Let him be smitten with rods," and they began to unbind the bundle. It was a rule that the "fasces," as they were called, should be tightly bound so that it would take a long time to unbind them. This was to give time for the criminal to make confession, or to plead something as a mitigating circumstance. Sometimes, where the case was one of treason, which perhaps the culprit repented of, and confessed, he would be forgiven. They would be, for a while, untying the knots, and the consul would look the man in the face, to see if there were any signs of relenting, or if he were altogether stubborn. Then when the rods were unbound, it was a good thing for the criminal if the lictors began to smite him with the rods, because that might be a token that he was not to die. But if the rods were laid aside, and the axe brought forth, then it was known that he must die. So God has smitten you in mercy. Fever and disease have been God's lictors that have used the rods upon you. By-and-by He will say, "Let him alone," because He is reserving you for the axe of future and inevitable doom. Oh, sirs, the Lord knows all your hearts. Where are you? I may be speaking right into the face of some of you who have endured many afflictions, and been brought low by poverty and want, or by disease and sickness, so that you have come to death's door. And all this has been the milder chastisement of God, by which He has been saying to you, "My Child, do not destroy yourself!" It has been the hand of mercy put upon the bridle of that wild horse of yours, to draw him back, that he may not leap with you over the precipice. But if you spur him on in defiance of the hand of mercy, you will be permitted to take the leap to your own destruction, for God may say, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone."

Once again, this punishment may be brought, and generally is brought, upon men when they have done distinct *violence to their conscience.* Before sin has come to its worst, there is a great deal of struggling in men's minds. Conscience will not be quiet. It cries out against the maltreatment which it suffers from ungodly lives. Many a young man, especially if he has been well brought up, and many a young woman too, if she has been trained in religious ways, will have times in which they are pulled up short, and it comes to this—"I have been wrong. If I go further in this wrong I shall suffer for it. There is a way of grace; I see the door of mercy open to me." They have stood hesitating, as if a hand had been laid on their shoulder, and they have felt as though they were turned from the wrong, and drawn into the right way. But some have fought against mercy, and the evil spirit has set before them all the sparkle of fleshly lust and worldly pleasure. And at last, with a desperate effort, they have dragged themselves away to their sins. Now, the next time they do that they will not suffer half the compunction, and the next time after that they will have less, still, for every time conscience is violated, it becomes less vigorous, and is more easily tranquillized. I remember an

earnest Christian telling me how, before conversion, he used to spend his nights in shameful ways, and frequently would be in the streets—though the son of a most respectable man—in a state of half intoxication. As he stood under a lamp one night, with his brain confused, and his mind bewildered, he put his hand into his pocket and took out a letter. By some strange impulse he was induced to begin to read it. It was a tender appeal from a loving, pious sister. Unknown reflections cast their shadows across his breast. Taking counsel with himself he thought, "Well, what is it to be?" He was sober enough, even then, to feel as if he had come to a decision. Thinking over the matter, and deliberating upon it, it pleased God to lead him to put that letter back into his pocket, and say, "I will go home, and I will seek my sister's God." That resolution proved to be the first step to his conversion—

"He left the hateful ways of sin,
Turned to the fold, and entered in."

Ever afterwards he came to regard this as the crisis of his soul's history. He said to me, "If that night I had gone elsewhere, and God's Spirit had not graciously led me, there and then, to something like decision, it may be that it would have been the very last time my conscience ever would have troubled me. And I should have gone headlong to destruction." I wonder whether such a time as that may have come to some of my hearers! If it is so, O Eternal Spirit, throw in the weight of Your omnipotent influence to decide the will of man for that which is good and right, and let not evil win the day. Do you not see in the pictures I have drawn, and the descriptions I have given, some delineation of that aggravated guilt which provokes the withering blast of incensed mercy turned into wrath which wails forth the woe of my text, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone"?

II. Now, I crave your earnest attention to THE SINGULAR PUNISHMENT—"Let him alone."

Is there anything in this to excite our surprise? The calamity is so dire that we may well shudder at it. But the sentence is so just, and the issue so reasonable that we can only acknowledge it to be such as might have been expected. What can be more natural? There is a piece of ground. Last year it was fertilized, and it was sown with good seed, but nothing has come up from it. The year before, the same pains were bestowed upon it. They trenched it, and it has been thoroughly drained. There could not have been better seed cast upon it than has been used. Yet nothing grew last year. No harvest rewarded the laborer's toil. Year after year its hopeless barrenness has vexed the farmer's soul. Farmer what will you do this year? "Do?" he asks. "Why, I will do nothing! What can be done with it? Let it alone." Is he not right in his verdict? Here is a man grievously sick. The doctor called upon him, but they shut the door in his face. He called again, and he gained access to the patient, and the patient cursed him. He called again, and gave him a prescription; but the sick man took the prescription, tore it in pieces, and flung it away. What

do you mean to do, Doctor? "What can I do?" he says. "I must let him alone! What can I do? My services are rejected. I am treated with insult! What more remains for me?" And here is a sinner in danger of being lost. The Lord says to him, "Behold My Son! I have anointed Him to be a Savior. If you trust Him, He will save you." This counsel is despised. It is thought nothing of, forgotten, neglected, put off, in some cases scoffed at, made a matter of ridicule, treated with hatred, and perhaps the deliverer of the message is made the subject of persecution. What will God say? Why, "That is a case in which I will let him alone! I sent his mother to him when he was a child. I sent his Sunday school teacher to him. I sent a godly friend to him. I have sent My servant, the minister, to him, times out of mind. I have put good books in his way scores of times. It is all in vain!" Brethren, is there anything that can be more reasonable or more just than for God, on His part, to say, "Let him alone"? The tree never has brought forth any fruit! What need is there to waste any more time upon it? It seems right on God's part that He should say, "Let him alone." You judge if it is not so!

Well, but what happens when a man is thus let alone? Why, he is as a great many people would like to be. Liberty is given him. No. Let me correct myself, he takes license to pursue his own course. He is no more "pestered and bothered about religion." He is no more fretted and worried in his conscience about duties and obligations. God's people begin to let him alone. For, if they speak to him, he only growls at them, and returns an answer which grieves their hearts. So they keep out of his way, or if they do speak to him, their word, though given in earnest, is taken in jest. Like water on a slab of marble, the warning does not penetrate the surface or affect his heart. He has got out of the way of being impressed. Now he has no mother to trouble him. She has long slept under the green lawn. He has no poor old father now, to talk to him about his sins; he has long been carried to heaven. No minister disturbs him now, for he gives the servant of God a wide berth, and keeps clear of him. No books come in his way that can at all alarm him. He will not open them if they do. Give him the Sunday newspaper that is enough for him. Give him a book of science, or something that has to do with this times state. Having put his faith in infidelity, he fortifies his heart against fear. He takes care not to trouble himself about religion. No qualms or questions, no doubts or disputes disturb him. No fierce temptations or fiery trials distract his peace. Everything seems to go merrily and smoothly with him. He is the man to make money. He is the jolly fellow that can indulge in sin with impunity, put his hand into the fire and take it out again without being hurt, where another would be badly burned. He seems to have a charmed life. God has said, "Let him alone!" Those about him envy him, but if they knew! If they knew! If they knew! If they knew that God had "set him in slippery places," and that "his foot will slide in due time," they would no more envy him his prosperity and peace than they would

envy the bullock that is fattening for the Christmas show, or the full-fleshed sheep that is driven to slaughter. His end is destruction.

Perhaps I am speaking to some who are wrapping themselves up quite complacently, in the idea that the lines have fallen to them in pleasant places, that fortune smiles on them, and their reputation is in the ascendant. They would not wish to have their course altered, and yet the terrible sentence has gone out against them, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." O men, I pity you from my soul, but I fear you will ridicule my sympathy. Alas! Alas, I can but mourn in secret, for I see that your day is coming.

I have shown you, then, what it is to be let alone by God. Do you ask now, "What is the general result of it?" Why, let me tell you. For the most part it leads the man into greater sin than he had ever committed before. It leads him to become more defiant, and more boastful than before. Very frequently he becomes a scoffer and a skeptic. And not infrequently he becomes intolerant to the poor and a persecutor of those who fear the Lord and observe His ordinances. Restraints are taken off him, those moral obligations which curbed him, and that respect for public opinion which induced him to practice a little decency, he has renounced. They are nowhere to be found. Vain conceits fill the place of virtuous counsels. He violated conscience, and conscience has left him. He wearied those who rebuked him, and they have ceased to reprove him, or if they rebuke him, he turns a deaf ear to their admonitions. He has become like the adder that cannot and will not hear the wisest charmer. So the man goes from bad to worse, still with the full conceit that he is among the happiest and most highly favored of mortals.

But here is the evil of it! The dreadful sound is in my ears. God has said to all the agents that might do that man good, "Let him alone!" But wait awhile. He will not say that to the agents which can do him harm. God has not said to the Devil, "Let him alone!" He will not say to Death, "Let him alone!" He will not say to Judgment, "Let him alone!" Nor will He say to the flames of hell, "Let him alone!" He will not say to infinite misery, "Let him alone!" On the contrary, He will let loose all the destroying angels against him, and the man who was let alone in sin shall not be let alone in punishment. I cannot speak of this as I could wish. These are things to be thought of and weighed in the soul. I pray that you may so weigh them, that if you have fallen into a state of indifference, you may be awakened out of it, and resolve that it shall not be so any longer. Oh, that you would cry out in terror, "God helping me, I will not be one of those of whom God shall say, 'Let him alone!' "

III. THERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM THIS VERY SAD SUBJECT to which I must now draw your attention.

It becomes the preacher, so long as he does not know the individual—and this he never can know—to whom God has said, "Let him alone!" to try and use the utmost endeavor to awaken every careless and indifferent man within his reach. I pray the Spirit of God to help me while I try to do

so. Some of you are living in this world entirely for your own pleasure or your own gain. I do not deny that it is right that you should seek gain, or that it is natural that you should desire pleasure. Neither do I think that attention to the things of God will deprive you of any gain that is worth having, or of any pleasure that is desirable. But the sad thing is that many of you are living as if there were no hereafter. Now, do you really believe that there is no future in reserve for you? Because if you are quite persuaded that you are no better than a dog, if you are quite certain that you are nothing but an animal, and that in due time when you die and the worms eat you, that will be the end of you—why, sirs, if I were of the same mind, I should have but little to say to you. I should wish you to be as virtuous as may be in this life, for that is the best way to be happy and to benefit the community. But I do not know that this is any particular business of mine—I would leave that matter to the policeman and the magistrate.

But do you really suppose that you have no higher origin than the flesh, and no further destiny than to mingle your dust with the mold of the earth? Would you like me to speak to you as to a dog? Would you like anybody to treat you as a dog? Being, as you say, only a dog, why should you not be treated as such? Can you, in your heart of hearts, really believe that the cemetery, and the shroud, and the sexton's spade will be the last of you? You do not believe it. You cannot believe it. You may try to persuade yourself that the terrors of judgment to come are merely bugaboos of the imagination. But there is something within you, an irrepressible consciousness of immortality which tells you that you will live after death. God has fixed the conviction of a future state as a kind of instinct in men, so that where the gospel has never come, a future state has been conjectured, though for the most part but dimly inferred rather than distinctly expected. There has scarcely been a heathen tribe so abject but they have had glimmerings of the fact that there is another state after death. Well, my dear sir, I cannot conceive that you have degraded yourself into the notion that you are a beast—at any rate, I will not allow myself to think that you are a beast. You will live somewhere or other after your present career is closed. Does it not stand to reason that if you have lived entirely for self, there must be a reckoning with you?

Somebody made you! *God* made you! If you keep a horse or a cow, you expect some service of it, and if God made you, He must expect you to render Him some service. But you have rendered Him none. Though He has winked at your disobedience in this life, do you think He will always wink at it? Well, if you think so, you are grossly mistaken. For, as the Lord lives, there is a day of judgment coming, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, and all the dead shall rise out of their graves. And all the living shall appear before His great white throne. You will as certainly be there as you are here. And when you are there, you will discover that every secret thought of yours has been written down against you, and will be read out and published be-

fore mankind. Then and there, for every idle word you have spoken, you will be brought into judgment. Can you think of this as possible, even though you may not admit that it is certain? Can you yet remain callous, indifferent, unconcerned? Is there not a something in your heart that says, "If this is so, it is terrible—it is terrible for *me!* What must I do to be saved?" I am bound to answer you, (and cheerfully do I answer you), "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Whoever you may be, however far you may have gone astray, trust Jesus, dying and bleeding for sinful men, and now gone into the highest heavens to plead at the right hand of the infinite Majesty—trust Jesus and you shall live. But if you have not Christ to put away your sin, to espouse your cause, and to plead for you in that last great day, as surely as you live, whether you believe it or not, this is true, the Judge will say, "Depart from Me you cursed, into everlasting fire in hell, prepared for the devil and his angels."

And that may happen to you within much less time than you dream. Not many Monday nights ago, there came a beloved Christian Sister, here, who joined with us in prayer. She was taken ill; she did not leave this house conscious. She was taken home with death upon her. Her disease proved to be past human aid, and in an hour or two she died. I hope there will never be another death in this Tabernacle, but more than once individuals have been thus called away from our very midst. Before this congregation shall have broken up, some of you may have gone to the world of spirits. In all probability within this week, one of you will be summoned before the Great Judge. If it is you, sir, or if it is you, good woman, are you ready? Are you ready? Do you feel no trouble about that question? Then I think you may be among those whom God has given up. But if the question rings through your soul like a knell, and cuts like a sharp knife, then I pray you do not think God has given you up. And do not give yourself up, but fly to Jesus. Yes, before you lay your head upon the pillow, and fall asleep, cry mightily unto the living God to save you so that you may be His in the day when the earth and the heavens will be in a blaze, and ungodly men will sink into hell. That is the first practical inference—it is the preacher's duty to continue to warn men.

Another practical thought is—if any of you are awakened, be obedient to the voice of conscience, and the calling of the Spirit. Oh, if you have any life, do not attempt to stifle it! Rather fan it to a flame! If you do but feel a little of the pain of penitence, pray God that it may deepen into true contrition, and sincere repentance. If you feel anything, do not, I pray you, repress the feeling if it is anything of a spiritual kind. I knew when I was seeking the Lord what it was to feel that. I would have given everything I had to be able to repent. When on my knees, I felt that if I could but have shed a tear for sin, I would have been willing to be poor and blind my whole life long. To have a hard heart is an awful thing! It is well, however, when it can repent, and when the man can smite upon his bosom, with tears, and sobs and groans, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" If there is any tenderness in you, oh, do not crush it out! Do not

despise it. Look well to it, and above all, fly away to Christ at once. With many a man it is, "now or never." Whenever you hear the clock tick, this is what it says to you, "Now or never," "Now or never," "Now or never," "Now or never." Ah, if some would hear that, it might be the means of driving them to the cross of Christ at once, where they would find eternal life. Dear young people, especially, do not postpone the thought of eternal things while you are young and tender. Do not say, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for you."

"'Tis easier work when we begin
To serve the Lord betimes."

When grace comes into the heart while the heart is yet young and tender, there is less struggling against it in most cases, and it is a more cheerful task for the soul to submit itself to the power of Christ. The Lord bless that thought to you, and make it a converting power to your souls.

And, last of all, if there should be an unhappy individual here who says, "I believe God has given me up"—let me ask you a question, friend. Does the suggestion of such a thing make you very sad? Then the Lord has not given you up. Do you say, "I feel alarmed lest I am given up"? Then you are not given up. *He* is more likely to be given up of God who says, "I do not care whether I am or not! Give me my jolly companions, give me my amusements, give me plenty of money to spend, and good health and strength to enjoy myself, and you may have heaven if you like. I will run the risk of the future." Ah, sir, though you talk big, I do not believe in your bravado, for I know that many braggadocio sinners are cowards at heart. And I hope, notwithstanding what you say, there is something in you that answers to the appeals I have made. But there may be some who really mean, down deep in their souls, that they have steeled themselves against reproof, and are prepared to dare all consequences. They stand like oaks I have seen splintered from top to bottom by lightning, never to send forth a shoot again. Ghastly and grim amidst the forest they lift up their heads as though they were huge deer with antlers, glorying in their desolation. There are such withered souls, defiant in awful desperation. Oh, if there are such here, if they were friends of mine, I would say, "O man, be in pain and travail like a woman with child rather than be damned! O man, better for you that you should, from this moment, begin a life of torment and agony, and never look up to God's sun again, and never see the fields, nor hear the birds sing with joy, nor ever have a hopeful thought of this world again. So that you may but be saved, rather than go on with all your mirth and jollity, and then lift up your eyes in that eternity to come where you shall be forever, forever, forever, lost! For, let those say what they will, who are the enemies of your soul—I speak the truth before the Lord—if you are lost, you will be lost forever. And if God once pronounces that word, "Depart, you cursed!" back to Him you can never come, but departing, and departing, and departing into blacker night, and into denser glooms you must for-

ever and forever continue. This is the dread inscription over the gate of hell—

"All hope abandon, you who enter here!"

This is branded on their chains, and stamped upon their fetters. This is the worm that never dies, and the fire that can never be quenched. The letters of fire that burn overhead in the dungeon of eternal despair spell out this word, "Eternity! Eternity! Eternity!" O my fellow men and women, as I shall meet you at the judgment seat, I implore you to fly away to Jesus lest you eternally perish.

When your eyes and mine shall meet again in the next state, when we have passed through the grave and the resurrection, do not say I did not tell you of sin, and of punishment, and of the Savior! You will not dare to say it. But as I, poor guilty sinner that I am, stand there, this shall not be one of the sins laid to my charge, that I was not in earnest with you and that I did not speak all that I felt to be the truth. To Jesus Christ I fly myself, on my own account, for if I am not washed in His blood, unhappiest of mortals surely am I. For I have preached to more men for a larger number of years than any other man, perhaps, that lives. And if I have played with souls, I have their blood upon me, and the most accursed of men am I. But I shelter my soul beneath the purple canopy of my Savior's atoning blood. My hearers come under that same shelter, all of you. There is room enough for you. That blessed purple covering will hang between us and God even though there were millions of us, and it will cover us all. Nor can there be any fear that the dart of divine vengeance shall smite any of us who will cower down beneath the blood-red Propitiation. God save you, friends, who are strangers here! God save you, friends, who frequent these courts! God save you all, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PROVERBS 1:20-33.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—95, 466, 520

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GOOD NEWS FOR THE DESTITUTE
NO. 1141

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 9, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." Psalm 102:17.

OBSERVE that the verse which precedes the text describes the Lord as appearing in His glory. His Zion is to be built up, and therefore her King puts on the robes of His splendor. The imagery sets forth the Lord as a great monarch, superintending with great pomp and state, the building of a sumptuous palace. We see Him commanding the architects and the workmen, and passing from point to point amid attending courtiers. Trumpets are sounding, banners are displayed, princes and nobles glitter in their array and the King appears in His glory. But who is this, whose mournful wail disturbs the harmony? Where does this ragged beggar who bows before the Prince come from? Surely he will be dragged away by the soldiers, or cast into prison by the wardens for daring to pollute so grand a ceremony by such wretched presumption! Were there not streets, lanes, and dark corners enough for beggars? Why need he thrust himself in where his rags are so out of place? But look, the King hears him; the sound of the trumpet has not drowned the voice of the destitute. His Majesty listens to him while he asks for alms and in matchless compassion pities all his groans. Who is this King, but Jehovah? Of Him, only, is it said, "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." The verse is enhanced in its beauty by its connection, even as a fair jewel receives an added beauty from the lovely neck upon which it sparkles. Let us read the verse, again, in this soft silver light. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." It is clear that the heart of the Lord delights in the cries of needy souls, and nothing can prevent His hearing them. No occupation is so sublime as to distract the Lord's attention from the prayer of the most humble of His mourners. The songs of seraphs, the symphonies of angels, the ceaseless chorales of the redeemed are not sweeter in the ears of the all-merciful Jehovah than the faint breathings of poor dying wretches who confess themselves condemned by His justice, and therefore appeal to His loving-kindness and tender mercy.

This morning I am going to preach about the destitute. I hope there are many of them here. At any rate many are here who once were destitute, and would be so now, if it were not for the riches of divine grace. Hear me, you poor in spirit, and may the Lord comfort you by my words. Our first work, this morning, shall be to speak about a *spiritual pauper,*

the "destitute." Then we will talk of *his special occupation*—it is clear that he has taken to begging, for the text speaks twice of his prayer, and prayer is the essence of begging. Then, thirdly, here is *a very natural fear* of this spiritual beggar, namely, that his prayer will not be regarded, and will even be despised. And then, fourthly, the whole text is *a most comfortable assurance* to this spiritual beggar that his begging will be successful, for the Lord of whom he begs will regard his prayer, and will not despise his supplication.

I. First, then, let us go down among the beggars, and look upon THE SPIRITUAL PAUPER. It will do you good to have your spiritual gentility shocked for a while, and it will be a lasting benefit if you are made to feel anew, your own poverty, and to cry, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me."

The spiritual pauper is, in our text, described as *destitute,* and you may take the word in its extreme sense—the spiritually poor man is not only positively, but utterly, thoroughly, terribly destitute. He is destitute of all wealth of *merit* or possession of righteousness. Time was, years ago, when he was as good as anybody else, in his own esteem, and perhaps a little better. He was rich, and increased in goods, and had need of nothing. True, he had some faults, but he considered them to be outweighed by his excellences, and if he fell sometimes, into error and sin, he had most ingenious excuses with which to shift the blame—either some companion beguiled him, or else his circumstances necessitated the fault. He was a sinner, he admitted that, but he put his own meaning upon the title, so that he did not feel degraded by it. He was no vagrant or pauper in the universe of God, but rather a fellow citizen with the worthy, and of the household of self-satisfaction. He was at least as good as the average of men, and possibly better than, under present circumstances, men may generally be expected to be. And if he did not actually claim anything of God by way of merit, it was because he deferred to the books of the Protestant religion. But in his inmost soul he really thought he could have maintained a decent position on the score of good works, and have shown up a very presentable righteousness had it been asked for. He never did, in his heart, see anything amiss in the Pharisee's prayer, "God I thank You that I am not as other men are." He, himself, reflected with a very great deal of comfort upon the fact that he had never been a drunk, that no profane word had dropped from his mouth, that he had been upright in his business, and that to all intents and purposes he was a reputable and respectable man, worthy of the divine regard. This, however, is all changed. The man has come down from an emperor to a penniless beggar. His outward character may not have changed, but his own estimate of himself is as different as light from darkness. Now he sees the hollowness of an outward morality which does not proceed from a renewed heart. Now he knows that the sins which he has committed are exceedingly sinful, and that the religious professions he has made, are nothing better than mere pretences, the heart not going with them, were a mockery of God, and an insult to the Most High.

Look at him, then, you rich men. Here was one of you, richer than most and far superior to the majority. But now he is as poor as the unfeathered bird which cruelty has flung from its nest. He has no good work that he dares bring before his God, but he admits to ten thousands of sins, every one of which accuses him before the Most High, and demands punishment at the hands of justice. He feels this, and shivers in his wretched rags. Do you inquire, "Where is he?" Is he not here at this moment? Can I not see his tears, and hear his groans? "God be merciful to me, a sinner," is his cry. He is so far from claiming anything like merit, that he loathes the very thought of self-righteousness, feeling himself to be guilty, undeserving, ill-deserving, and hell-deserving, meriting only to be banished from the presence of God forever.

There is a kind of destitution which is bearable. A man may be quite penniless, but he may be so accustomed to it that he does not care. He may even be happier in rags and filth than in any other condition. Persons of this order are well known to the guardians of our workhouses. Have you ever seen the lazzaroni of Naples? Notwithstanding all their attempts to move your compassion, they generally fail after you have once seen them lying on their backs in the sun, amusing themselves the whole day. You feel sure that beggary is their natural element. They are perfectly satisfied to be beggars, like their fathers, and to bring up their sons to the profession. The ease of poverty suits their constitutions. But the spiritual pauper is not a member of this free and easy lazzaroni club by any manner of means, he is destitute of *contentment.* The poverty which is upon him is one which he cannot endure, or for a moment rest under. It is a heavy yoke to him; he sighs and cries under it. His is hungering and thirsting after righteousness. He knows there is something better than the state into which he has fallen, and he pines for it. He knows that if he does not escape from his present condition, he will fall into woes infinitely worse, and he trembles at the grim prospect of it. Therefore he sighs and cries before God in bitterness of spirit, "Have mercy upon Your poor destitute creature! Have mercy upon Your undeserving servant." He has no contentment in his poverty; his penury is irksome to the last degree and he cannot complacently endure it.

A man, however, if he is without money, is still not utterly destitute if he has *strength,* a stout pair of limbs, and can work and earn wages. Such a man will soon get out of his destitution. Only give him a chance, and those rags will be exchanged for decent attire. He will no longer be skin and bones, he will improve into a good condition; only give him employment and fair pay. But this is not the case with the spiritual pauper. He has no merit, and he cannot earn any. His strength is gone. Once he was so strong that he used to think if heaven were to be merited by good works, he could do it, or if not, if eternal life were to be had by conversion and by believing in Christ, he could be converted at any time, and believe in Jesus just whenever he liked. Religion appeared to him to be a very easy matter. "Only believe, and you shall be saved"—could that be managed in the twinkling of an eye? If ever he heard a sermon about,

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, and few there are that find it," he disliked the doctrine and the preacher. He could not agree with such narrow-minded views. He felt that he had all requisite spiritual power within himself, and he did not believe either in natural depravity or spiritual inability. He had done well in business, and was a self-made man. He had worked himself up from the lowest ranks into an honorable position, and surely he could do the same in the matters of his soul as in the affairs of the world. That gentleman is not one of the destitute, you clearly see. And I have nothing to say to him except that I pray God to take away his fancied power from him, and make him feel himself to be weak as water. The spiritual pauper feels that he can do nothing right, and that he cannot even think a good thought without the help of divine grace. As to believing in Jesus, simple as that matter is, he has come to this pass—

"I would, but can't believe,
Then all would easy be.
I would but cannot, Lord, relieve,
My help must come from Thee."

He is so staggered with doubts and fears, and so bemisted and beclouded with dark remembrances of his past sins, that he does not seem able to fix his eyes upon the atoning sacrifice, and to find comfort there. He is destitute, in the very worst sense, because he is "without strength."

Still, a man may be very poor at present, and he may have no power to earn his bread, but he may not be utterly destitute, for he may have an estate in *reserve*. When his long-lived uncle dies, he may come into a fortune. It may be that in some years' time, if the steed can live till then, the grass will be up to its knees. Many a man pressingly needs present help, though by-and-by, he will have enough to spare. The spiritual pauper has nothing to look forward to which can at all alleviate his soul's distress. His future is even gloomier than his present. Well do I remember when I looked out upon eternity, and saw nothing but a fearful prospect of judgment and fiery indignation for me. I peered into the future, and I could not expect to live a better life, for I had so often tried and failed that I feared I might be left to a callous conscience, and go from bad to worse. In fact, I knew I would unless Christ would interpose and save me. And as for my hope in another world, alas, alas! I saw nothing but the great white throne, an angry Judge, and everlasting fire in hell. I had no hopes, but numberless fears. Such is the outlook of every man whom God really convinces of sin. He is stripped of hope itself, and the man who has lost hope has lost all, and he is destitute with a vengeance. For him there remains neither in heaven nor on earth any hope whatever, unless he can obtain one as the gift of grace. He has indeed, reason to cry unto his God.

A man who is spiritually destitute is destitute of all *friends* who can help him. For those, who love him best can only pray for him, they cannot save him. We who would help him, if we could, can only point him to

the Savior. But he has blind eyes, and how shall he see while he is in the dark?

He is also destitute of all *plans* for doing better. Schemers sometimes manage to live by their wits when they can no longer subsist by their hands, but the poor soul who is really destitute before God has not even a plan by which to help himself. All his schemes have turned into mere wind bags, and his hopes from his own wisdom have altogether failed him. He has, in fact, nothing left; nothing whatever. He is as naked as Adam and Eve beneath the trees of the garden when God, their offended Maker, met them, and they sought to cover themselves with fig leaves. He has come to the very lowest degree of spiritual penury. It is only necessary for death to put an end to his present misery for him to be in the ruin that will never end. Such is the case of the spiritually destitute.

I do not know whether I have managed to depict in any way, the state of any really distressed conscience here. I have tried to do so, but if I have failed, allow me to add another sentence or two. If any in this place feel that they are sinful, feel that they deserve the wrath of God, feel that they cannot help themselves, feel that unless infinite mercy shall interpose they must forever be lost, if, moreover, they cannot find any reason why they should be saved, cannot find any argument which could move the heart of justice to have pity on them, they are just the very persons intended by my description and by the text. I pray them not to put away from them the comfort which the text contains, but listen to it as we read it again—"He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer."

So much, then, for the spiritual pauper.

II. Secondly, here is HIS SUITABLE OCCUPATION—he has taken to *begging,* and it is a very fitting occupation for him. Indeed, there is nothing else he can do. When a man is shut up to one course, it is useless to raise objections to his following it, for necessity has no law, and hunger will break through stone walls. The man can do nothing else but beg. And so, since we cannot let him perish, and he will not perish through lethargy, he turns to do the only thing he can do, namely, to begging and praying. Blessed is that soul which is shut up to prayer. It thinks itself accursed, but indeed now, the blessing is come upon it. If you feel you cannot do anything but pray, and equally feel that you must pray, I have hopes for you. If now, you dare not appeal to justice, but simply cry, "Mercy, Lord! Mercy, mercy! I have no merits, but, oh, forgive me for Your mercy's sake." I am right glad of it. Why, dear friends, you are shut up in the very same place where David was shut up when he could only say, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness, according to the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions." You are shut up where every soul has been shut up that ever was saved, for unless you are driven to admit that nothing can save you but undeserved mercy, pity, and free grace, you have not come to the place where God can meet with you in pardon. But when you stand as a condemned criminal at the bar and plead, "Guilty, guilty, guilty," then you

stand where God can look upon you with an eye of pity, and will save you.

The trade of begging is one which is most suitable for a spiritual pauper. Because if he cannot do anything else, I guarantee you he can do this right well. They say in London that many of our beggars are mere actors, they mimic distress. If so, they do it uncommonly well, and are splendid imitators. But I will venture to say that nobody will ask for help as well as the man whose distress is real. He needs no one to teach him, starvation is his tutor. Take away his diffidence, and give him enough courage, and his distress will make him eloquent. You may, by chance, have been accosted by a man who sought alms with awful eagerness, starvation looking out of his eyes, and speaking from his pinched countenance. He has held onto you with terrible vehemence, and at last has said, "I have not eaten anything for many hours." You can see by his very looks that it is true. And he adds, "I could bear to famish myself, but I have seven little children at home, and unless I take them bread, they will be crying about me, and, therefore, I do entreat you to help me." Now, if all this is true, and you look into the case and find it so, the man's case speaks for itself, and he is the man to move your heart. He does not need to go to a boarding school to learn elocution, need schools his tongue. The words drop into their right places of themselves, and as to his gestures and postures, they are all apt and telling, though no teacher of rhetoric ever gave him a lesson. He will be sure to plead rightly, the suit lies heavy on his heart. Nobody prays before God like a man who feels his sins. He cries, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," and says it as it ought to be said. Ah, brethren, some of us have to pray often in public, but we never pray as well as when we feel your needs and the needs of the times, and of the country pressing urgently upon our hearts. You, yourselves, pray best when your own sense of sin and need most burden your souls. You are the men to pray, I say, you destitute people. You make the best of beggars, for you are most in need. You pray best who feel that you must have mercy or die.

There is this to be said about the spiritual beggar, he is begging where he is permitted to beg. I remember being in Paris on a certain day in the year, I forget the name of the *festival,* and I was astonished at the immense number of beggars, and at their perseverance and daring. I had not observed them before, in such swarms and such force, but I found that on one special day license was given to the poor, the lame, and the blind to persecute everybody for alms. I guarantee you they made good use of the permission, and needed no pressing or inviting. Oh, spiritual paupers, this day, even this day, is a day of grace. A warrant has come from the King's court that you may ask, and it shall be given you. You may seek, and you shall find. You may knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Yes, every day is a free-grace day, a festival for prayer. As long as you live and are in need, you have the King's permit to open your mouth wide, and He will fill it. You have His royal authority that you may come to His mercy seat and ask in every time of need right boldly for whatever

you want. Well may the spiritual pauper, take to a trade, which is permitted by the King of Heaven. He is beggar by appointment to the King's Most Excellent Majesty.

Yes, more, spiritual begging is commanded by supreme authority. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." It is the privilege of a sinner to be allowed to ask for grace. It is also the duty of the sinner to seek mercy at the Savior's hand. "Acquaint, now, yourself with Him, and be at peace." "Seek you the Lord while He may be found; call you upon Him while He is near." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." These are promises, but they are also precepts, precepts with the weight of commands. Oh, who that is poor will be slow to beg when the Lord of love, Himself, commands him to ask? At the back of this there is an implied certainty. There is a sacred promise that he who asks shall surely receive, for God would not tantalize us by commanding us to pray if He had not at the same time, intended to give.

Let me further remind every spiritually destitute man here that he may pray with confidence, because begging has been the source of all the riches of the saints. Some of them are rolling in heavenly wealth, for all things are theirs. Their mouths are satisfied with good things, and their hearts are filled with gladness. You may see their riches, for the joy of their countenances, and the bliss of their daily work is visible to all. Do you not envy them, for they feed on Christ every day, and have the bread of heaven always on their tables, and the water of life always flowing at their feet? Do you know how they became so rich? I will whisper it in your ear. They gained all they have by begging. "Not very creditable to them," you say. No, but wonderfully creditable to Him who gave them all they have. And they are accustomed to give the entire honor and the glory to that dear and blessed, and generous Savior, who has never denied them their requests. If the richest saint on earth were to take you into his spiritual mansion, he would say to you, "Do you see this treasure, and that covenant blessing, and yonder priceless gifts? I obtained all these by begging. I asked, and I received. All that I have came to me in that way." The Lord has said, "For this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Now, since all the saints on earth have grown rich by begging, I recommend you poor, destitute souls to take to the business, and you will find it the most lucrative one that ever you undertook. You cannot dig, do not be ashamed to beg. Your digging will dig your own grave, that is all you will do by your self-righteous efforts; but you will obtain grace for the asking, pardon for the asking, and heaven for the asking. Who would not be a spiritual beggar when he may be thus enriched?

One thing more I will say, and leave this point. You may begin begging at once. You, who are poor in spirit, may begin begging right now. I could not start in some trades tomorrow morning, I would need the capital, and should need to go to the wholesale traders and get what I needed to stock

me in the trade. But a beggar needs neither stock nor capital to begin with. All his capital lies in his need of capital. He never makes a good beggar till he has nothing left, and then when his clothes are rags and his shoes are old and worn out, and he himself looks sick and wan, then he is the man for his business. And you, sinner, you need no preparations in order to ask for mercy. Nothing need be done in you, or for you, in order to prepare you for the mercy of Christ. You may come to Him just as you are. Tarry not to mend, or wash, or cleanse, come in your foulness, come in your rags, come in your loathsomeness. Come just as you are. The worse you are, the more room for the display of the wonders of divine grace—

"Cast your guilty soul on Him,
Find Him mighty to redeem.
At His feet your burden lay,
Look your doubts and cares away.
Now by faith the Son embrace,
Plead His promise, trust His grace."

Still, perhaps, there will be some here who say, "I do not feel in a fit state to ask for mercy." My dear friends, it is your unfitness that is your fitness. Your poverty fits you for alms, your sickness fits you for the physician, your being nothing fits you to have Christ made all in all to you. Your emptiness is all He wants, that He may fill it with all the fullness of His grace. Take to begging, that is the way to be rich towards God.

III. But now, thirdly, here is THE BEGGAR'S VERY NATURAL FEAR. He is afraid that the great King will despise his prayers, or will not regard them. And he is afraid of this, first, from the greatness and holiness of that God to whom he addresses himself. He is thrice holy. Will He regard the cry of one who has been a drunk or a harlot? He is infinitely great, and fills immensity. Will He listen to the prayers of a poor little boy or of a gray-headed old rebel, whose only inheritance is a place in the workhouse? Can He look on such an insignificant worm as I am, the creature of a day, and whose non-existence would make no flaw in the universe; whose damnation would be no loss to Him? Can He look on worthless me? Infinite, and yet listen to my sigh? Eternal, and yet catch my tears? Can it be? Beloved, many are a long while in distress of soul because they do not remember that there is a Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. God is thus glorious, but He is not far from any of us, for there is one who is God, and at the same time a man like ourselves, even Jesus, who has compassion on the ignorant and on those who are out of the way. Stop then, your fearing, for the gulf is bridged. You may approach the Lord, for Jesus has paved the way.

The same fear takes another shape. Trembling souls are afraid that God can never look upon them in love, because their prayer itself is so unworthy of notice. "I would not wonder if God despised my prayer," says one, "for my fellow men despise it. I should not like them to hear it. It is such a broken, disconnected affair. I could not expect my own parents to have patience with it. And when I get up from my knees, I despise my own prayer, and hardly dare think I have prayed. I feel I have tried and

failed. I have only groaned because I could not groan, and mourned because I could not mourn." Ah, yes, but the Lord looks at the heart, and He does not regard the eloquence or the style of prayer after the manner of man. The Pharisee's was a very fine prayer I dare say, and very well delivered. The poor publican's prayer was a very poor affair by the side of it, and rather undelivered than delivered, for he would not so much as lift his eyes towards heaven, but the Lord heard it and had mercy upon him. Go and groan before God that is praying. Go and weep before Him that is praying. You need not get the book down and turn up a liturgy. I do not know of one that would quite suit a sinner in utter destitution. Men seldom use book prayers when they come before God in real earnest. Forms will suffice for playing at praying, but when you come to real earnest work with God, you have to put your books away. And you have to plead with the Lord with the first words that fly forth from your soul, like sparks from a piece of hot iron beaten with the hammer. When the heart boils and swells with grief, then prayers roll down from the soul like lava from Vesuvius, because it cannot help running over and burning its way. That is the way to pray. May God help us to pray out of our very souls, and then it matters not what form the prayer takes, for it is beautiful before the Most High.

"Yes," says one, "but I am afraid my prayer may be disregarded because my needs are so great. If a beggar in the street asks for a copper, he may get it. If he were even to venture to ask for silver, he might gain it. But if he asked for thousand pound notes he might stand a long time in the street corner before he would find one who would supply him. Now, sir, my prayer is for great things—I need the Savior's blood upon my conscience. I need the Holy Spirit Himself, to renew my nature. I need the whole Godhead to come and bless me. I need heaven itself, nothing short of that will satisfy me. And how can I hope that such a great prayer as mine will be answered?" Ah, dear soul, you are dealing with a great God, and a great Savior, and great promises. Do not be afraid to ask for great things; rather be afraid of limiting the Holy One of Israel. Open your mouth wide and He will fill it.

Ah, and I think I hear one exclaim, "He may well despise my prayer, for my faith is so weak. If I had more faith, I think then, He would listen to me." Well, but the Lord has never said anywhere that He despises little faith. Can you find a passage of Scripture in which He says, "I will trample on the bruised reed, and I will quench the smoking flax"? If you have ever read a passage of Scripture like that, I never have. The whole run of the Bible, goes the other way. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arms, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." It seems that the poor and the weak are the chief objects of His care, and are not, therefore, rejected. Suppose He bruised and crushed the mustard seed, where would be the tree that is to grow out of it? Suppose He despised the day of small things, where would the day of great things be? "Behold your King comes, meek and lowly, riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass."

And as He comes, the little children gather round Him, and they say, "Hosanna." Look, He does not rebuke them. Rather does He say, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings have You ordained strength, because of Your enemies." Now, your faith is like a little child. God will grant you full manhood eventually, but even now He does not despise your feebleness. He looks upon it with favor and He hears your prayers.

Now, somewhere in this place there is a young man in the same condition as that in which I was found some 23 years ago. He has learned to weep in secret before God, and pray for mercy. But he has not found it yet, and he is tempted to give it all up. Listen, dear brother, to this Word—"He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." Cry on and look to Jesus, and you shall find all your destitute soul needs. And one of these days, you who have learned to pray shall learn to praise and bless the prayer-answering God, who did not allow the soul of the destitute to perish. May the Lord visit you at this moment, and give you peace!

IV. Our last head is to be this: our text affords to the destitute beggar A MOST COMFORTABLE ASSURANCE. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute." Now, beloved whatever is in Scripture we accept as infallible truth. We dare not doubt when God speaks. If He says it is so, it is so. Others may doubt the inspiration of Scripture, but we have not gone that length yet. Now, poor destitute sinner, if you believe the Scripture to be inspired believe this passage—"He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer." Now, there is something about this text I want you to notice, namely, that God, in order that destitute sinners should never doubt His willingness to hear their prayers, has left this on record with a very special note appended to it. I will read you the note, which is in the 18th verse. "This shall be written for the generation to come, and the people who shall be created shall praise the Lord." You see the Lord not only said that He would regard the prayer of the destitute, but He added, "This shall be written," because, when a poor soul is in doubt and fear, there is nothing like having it in black and white. God has said it, but, says He, they shall not merely go by their ears, they shall see with their eyes. "This shall be written." Look at it. There it stands before you, written by the pen of inspiration, no doubt about it. "This shall be written for the generation to come," that is, for you. It was not merely true in David's time, or in Hezekiah's time, but this shall be written for the generation to come—written for you and for your children, that God will hear the prayer of the destitute. Blessed be His name for that. I recommend, the next time you kneel down to pray, to put your finger on this verse, and say, "Lord, I have Your Word for it. No, more, I have your writing for it. Behold I put it to You—You have said, 'This shall be written.' O, fulfill this written pledge to me." When a man brings my own handwriting to me, and says, "You promised me, and here is the writing," I cannot get away from it. And how shall the Lord draw back from what He has said, "This shall be written for the generation to come"? Oh, it must stand true. Be of good courage, poor seeking sinner,

God will hear you. Remember too, that when the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, He used to choose for His associates the destitute. "This man receives sinners," they said, "and eats with them." "Then all the publicans and sinners drew near to Him to hear Him." He would sometimes sit in the house of the Pharisee, but while He was there His heart was after the poor woman that came behind Him and washed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, for His heart was always with needy sinners. Upon the self-righteous He looked with an eye of indignation. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees," He said. But to poor guilty sinners He always looked with eyes of tenderness. He was ready and willing to receive them. In fact, it was His life's work to seek and to save that which was lost. Do not be afraid to come then. Jesus has made a feast, and has not called in His rich friends or acquaintances. But He has brought in the poor, the lame and the blind, for they cannot repay Him, but will forever love Him. And such are you. Come, and welcome! Come, and welcome! Jesus cast out none when He was here. He will cast out none that come to Him now.

Remember, in the matter of praying, that God loves to hear sinners pray. We may be quite sure of that, because He teaches them how to pray. There are passages in Scripture where God even puts the words into sinners' mouths. He says, "'Take with you words, and say unto Him, 'Receive us graciously, and love us freely, so will we render the sacrifices of our lips.'" God must be very fond of prayer when He teaches us how to pray. Do not be afraid, therefore, to pour out those broken sentences which God the Holy Spirit has taught you.

He has never despised a sinner's prayer yet. Search and look down the chronicles of His Word, and see what sinner He ever rejected. Look round among your kinsfolk and acquaintances, and find out one who has ever fled to Him for mercy, and was repulsed. I appeal to those who are saved on earth, and they will tell you that it was infinite love and mercy that accepted them. If I could appeal to the white-robed hosts in heaven, they would all tell you that like yourselves, they were destitute. They had to come *in forma pauperis* before the Lord, and He did not despise them, nor disregard their prayers.

I wish I could take a poor trembler by the hand, and say, "Dear brother, sister, come with me." Gladly I would do it. I have a hope of heaven this morning, and I will tell you what it is. I am as destitute this day, of all righteousness of my own as anyone here can be. My eyes are fixed upon the Lord Jesus on the accursed tree. There He was, my substitute, and I trust in Him and in Him alone. Now, if you are enabled by the Spirit of God to look right away from yourself and your misery to Christ Jesus, the sinner's Savior, you shall have this very morning, the peace of God which passes all understanding to keep your heart and mind, and you shall know that you are saved.

I am going to close with a remark upon another subject. You will have noticed, I dare say, that the whole of this verse is connected with the building up of Zion. Therefore there must be some connection between

the two, and it is just this—the church of God must never expect to see great revivals, or to see the world converted to Christ till she comes before the Lord as *destitute.* I am afraid that when we plead the most with God, we still feel we are a very respectable community of Christians with a large number of ministers, and a number of wealthy laymen, a large amount of chapel property, and a good deal of power and influence. You say, "I am rich and increased in goods." It may be that all this is the sign of your poverty, and we may be naked, and poor, and miserable. But when we get right down and feel, we are nothing and nobody and we could not save a soul if our lives depended upon it, that we are weak as water and must come to God as utterly impotent apart from the power of the Spirit of God, then will the Lord appear in His glory. And His destitute church shall become rich in His riches, strong in His strength, and victorious in His might. We must be brought down. I see among the various denominations too much emulation as to their position. We stand in this position, and they in the other, and the voluntaries are doing such wonders. But, brethren, we are just a lot of poor unworthy sinners, who owe everything we have to the sovereign grace of God. And what we are to do for God must be accomplished, not by might nor by power, but by His Spirit. When we feel this, the building of Zion will come, but not till then. The Lord send it!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 102.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—146, 554, 544.

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"I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins."
Isaiah 43:25.

THIS extraordinary passage is rendered the more remarkable from its context, for it follows a description of the sins of God's people, a description which mentions their sins of omission in that they had neglected the service of the Most High, and their sins of commission in that they had gone so far in breaking God's law that they had even wearied Him with their iniquities. There is the charge, a thousand facts prove it, and nothing can be urged by way of extenuation. We might expect that the next utterance would be the sentence, and the next motion of the divine hand would be the execution. But, instead of that, O wonder of wonders—(Who is a pardoning God like unto You, O Jehovah?)—there comes a full remission, a complete absolution—"I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions." The verse is succeeded, moreover, by other sentences which go on, still further, to convict the people of great sins. The Lord asks them to come and plead with Him, if they can. If they have anything to say in extenuation of their faults, He gives them an opportunity of speaking for themselves. And then He tells them that they had sinned as a nation from their very beginning, and had continued still to sin. Though the Lord knew that He would add those words of expostulation, He made a break and a pause in the very middle of His righteous accusation, and before He had concluded His charge against them, He had already forgiven them, and said, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake." The remarkable point is not merely that the absolution contained in the text is preceded and succeeded by verses of accusation, but that it breaks in upon the context, and cleaves the sense right in the middle. The King's messenger of mercy rides through the ranks of the men-at-arms in hot haste, sounding his silver bugle as he clears his way. He cannot linger, his message is too precious to be made to tarry. Sooner may sun and moon stand still than mercy be hindered. Such breaks as those, of which the text is a specimen, are very precious to me because they show the intense love of God to deeds of grace, and His eagerness to perform them. I love these soft showers of grace and mercy all the more because they so abruptly interpose between the tremendous peals of thunder of well-deserved wrath.

It will be our wisdom not only to weigh the text, but to notice the practical lesson of its context, namely, that since God is sure to reveal His mercy when it will be most valued, we may conclude that men know and prize divine mercy most when they most feel the weight of their sins. Un-

til a man is consciously condemned and pleads guilty, he will not ask for mercy. And if mercy were to come to him, he would treat it with disdain. He would look upon the offer of forgiveness as an insult, for what better would it be than an insult to pardon an innocent man? As well send medicine to a man who was never sick, or alms to a millionaire. We must be proven guilty, and confess it, before we can be forgiven. We must know that we are sick, and we must distinctly recognize that our sickness is a mortal disease, or else we shall never value the divine medicine which Jesus came to bring. A sense of sin, although it is exceedingly painful, is a most blessed thing, and I pray God, if you have never felt how guilty you are, that you may be made to feel it at once. If you have never been broken down before the awful majesty of divine justice, may the Holy Spirit break you down now, for Jesus will never clothe those who are not stripped. He will never wash those who are not foul, nor will He attempt to heal those who are not wounded. Others may spend their strength in flattering human goodness; the Lord Jesus has come on another errand, and deals only with our sin and misery. If you are not poverty-stricken, you will have no dealings with the blessed soul-enriching Savior.

Having thus considered the context, let us notice two other points. The first is *the nature of the pardon which is here so graciously proclaimed;* and the second is *the effect which this pardon produces upon the minds of those who are enabled to receive it.*

I. First, dear friends, let us carefully notice THE NATURE OF THE PARDON WHICH IS HERE SO GRACIOUSLY ANNOUNCED. "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins."

Note, first, *it is a pardon from God Himself,* whereupon we further observe that it is a pardon *from Him who is offended.* Sin is mainly an attack upon God. It is an offense against His own most excellent person; it is treason against His most glorious sovereignty. God therefore feels more, sees more, and is more thoroughly affected by the evil of sin than anyone else. And the context of the text shows that He does not treat sin as a trifle as some do—that He does not regard it as a thing which can be readily passed over, but takes solemn note of the sinful omissions and commissions of His people, and in due time calls them to account, mentioning their sins in a way which shows that He is sorely displeased. Sin is, in Jehovah's eyes, exceedingly sinful, an abominable thing which His soul hates. And yet, notwithstanding this, it is the very same God who has such a hatred of sin who, nevertheless, says, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions." We have offended God, and the same offended God forgives us. We have violated His law, and yet the lawgiver Himself, pardons us. We have insulted His majesty, and yet the King Himself, deigns to say, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions."

This is the more delightful because we know that *only He could forgive.* What is the use of forgiveness from one who has not been offended? How can I forgive you for a transgression which you have committed against

another person? He, alone, whose law has been broken, and who is both the fountain of justice, and the executive of the law, is able to forgive committed offenses. Power to forgive resides nowhere but in the great Supreme, but then, if you obtain pardon from Him, *it is pardon* beyond question. If some man, like yourself, who takes upon himself to say that he has received a commission from heaven, shall absolve you, it is not worth the breath he spends in uttering the mimic absolution, or the time you waste in listening to it. But if the Lord Himself, out of His excellent glory, says, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions," then, indeed, the pardon is divinely precious and effectual. There is reality in divine forgiveness. It is no dream or fiction of the imagination. Whom God forgives, who can condemn? This led the apostle Paul to say, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies; who is he that condemns?" Deep is the peace which the Lord's own absolution brings to the soul. If He has said to the greatest offender, "I forgive you," what more is needed? What is the use of adding ceremonies and rituals, and the like, if the Lord, Himself, has spoken? One word from the lips of Jehovah, the great forgiving God, is worth millions of "masses," and billions of indulgences from the Pope himself. Our conscience demands no more than pardon from the Lord, and it will never rest satisfied with anything less. O Lord, against whom we have erred, Your own sure Word of grace contents us, but without that Word, spoken home to us by Your Spirit, our heart continues to condemn us, and we pine away in our sins.

Brethren, there is something about the character of God which is not always dwelt upon as it should be, which tends to make His forgiveness more full of consolation to the soul. There are many idolaters in the world besides those who worship blocks of wood and stone. There are men who would scorn to be called idolaters, who, nevertheless, are not worshippers of the true God, but followers of a deity of their own making. They have not made him with wood, or clay, or gold, or silver, but they have fashioned him out of their own conceptions. They believe in a god such as they think God ought to be and according to the general rule and fashion nowadays, the god whom men invent for themselves is a being entirely devoid of justice. They say that the God of the Bible, (who is the real, living, and true God who made the heavens and the earth), is vindictive because He severely punishes rebellion against His law. Because, being at the head of all moral government, He will not allow His law to be trampled on with impunity, and will by no means spare the guilty. The God who executes vengeance and terribly rewards the proud doer is not the God for men of the modern school. They want an easier deity, a far less stringent governor. They want a god of as easy virtue as themselves. The Lord God of Elijah will never suit the fair-spoken Ahabs of this age who cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace. He was never beloved by proud and carnally-minded men. They set up an effeminate deity of their own who is like themselves, who cares nothing about the evil of sin, and will wink at it, and will allow sinners to go unpunished—a god who does their bidding, for he quenches the fires of hell, or renders it

only a transient punishment for a few years. Theirs is a god who gives them license to think as they like, and treat his word as a roll of cloth for them to cut according to their own fashion. The god of modern thought is not the God of the Bible; neither is he any more the true God than Baal or Ashtoreth, Jupiter or Apollo. The true God is the God who is revealed in the Scriptures, and manifested in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is known only to those, to whom He reveals Himself and the rest, by their own carnal wisdom, are blinded so that they have not seen Him, neither know Him. Now, I say it here, that if there were a god whose nature was nothing else but gentleness, and who, therefore, winked at sin, his pardon would never have satisfied my conscience, for when my conscience was awakened to know the evil of sin, I felt that if God did not punish me, He ought to. There was about my heart this feeling that my sin ought not to go unpunished. In fact, I punished myself for my sin by the deep convictions, fears, and trembling of my soul. And if anyone had said God blots out the sin, and thinks no more of it, the assurance would have given me no peace. I would have felt that there was an injustice involved in my being pardoned. My sin would still have cried for vengeance, and therefore my conscience would have had no peace.

And when I came to understand that the God of the Bible would not pass by sin without first vindicating the honor of His moral government; that He would not permit sin to be trifled with and to go unpunished, and that, therefore, He, Himself, in the person of His own Son, had suffered the penalty for my sin, then I said, "This is the kind of pardon which I need; a pardon which satisfies God's justice, and, therefore, satisfies my own instincts of right. The bearing of my sins by the Lord Jesus in His own body on the tree makes me feel perfectly content, for now God, Himself, can bring no charge against me, since He cannot punish me for that which He laid upon His own Son." Shall He demand payment twice for one debt, or punish twice for one offense? If my sins were laid upon His Son, then is His justice abundantly satisfied, and my soul accepts the free pardon which He gives, without a fear that the strictest justice will ever pronounce my pardon null and void. Now, when God, even Jehovah, the Jehovah of this book, says, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions, I who thundered from the top of Sinai, I who drowned Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, I who smote Sennacherib with all his armies, I, the just and terrible God, who revenges and is furious, and whose anger burns like fire against sin, I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions," this is a glorious word, indeed. "A just God and a Savior." "Just and yet the justifier of him that believes." Oh, here is a solid foundation for the heart, the conscience, the entire man to rest upon! This is pardon which weighs well in the scales of judgment, and is not mere wind. This is pardon which acts as balm to the wounds of conscience, and breathes life into hearts dying of despair.

So, you see, there is much in the fact that the pardon comes from God. But I have not brought it all out yet, for remember, beloved, that inasmuch as it comes from God, *He alone, knows the full extent of sin,* and there can be no pardon given for a sin which has not been recog-

nized somewhere or other. It might be that pardon would only reach to a part of the offense through the ignorance of the person offended, supposing him to be a fallible, finite being. And though he forgave the wrong done, as far as he knew it, yet he might soon wake up to a fuller sense of the offense committed against him, and feel new anger at the transgressor. A king can only forgive a rebel for those acts of which he knows him to be guilty. Now the Lord knows all our sins. There is not a sin that has ever escaped His eyes. Those committed in the secret chamber, in the darkness of the night, those which never struggled into action—sins of the heart and imagination, those which have never been whispered into any human ear, God has known. What does He not see? And this is a blessed thing for us because it causes the pardon to cover fully the whole extent of the sin. A priest once said that if we did not remember all our sins and confess them, they would never be forgiven. Well, then, certainly they never will be forgiven, for no man can ever remember one thousandth part of his transgressions. But blessed be God, the pardon does not rest with *our* knowledge of the sin, but with *God's* knowledge of the sin. And therefore that pardon is complete which comes from the all-seeing God. "I, even I, am He"—the Omniscient who is everywhere present, who saw you in the darkness, and heard your heart in all its evil speeches against the Most High—I, the all-knowing one, "I am He that blots out your transgressions."

Oh, this unrivalled pardon, how full of consolation it is! Every attribute of God adds to its splendor. Every beam of the divine glory heightens its grandeur. When we think it is our Father Himself, our Father whom we have offended, who now kisses us with the kisses of His lips, and presses His penitent children to His bosom and says, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions," the pardon is rendered inestimably precious by the person from whom it comes.

II. Notice, next, *the reason why it is given,* the grounds upon which it is based, for they are profoundly comforting. "For My own sake." The entire motive of God for forgiving sin lies within Himself—"For My own sake." No man has his sins forgiven because they are little, for the smallest sin will ruin the soul, and every sin is great, however little it may seem to us. Each sin has the essence of rebellion in it, and rebellion is a great evil before God. No man, therefore, will have God say to him, "I have blotted out your sins because of the littleness of them." Never!

Again, no man's sin is forgiven on the ground that his repentance is meritorious. There is nothing in Scripture to warrant such an idea. Repentance precedes a sense of forgiveness in some measure, but it follows forgiveness in a larger measure. It is not the cause, though it is the attendant, of remission. God's motive for pardoning a sinner is not because that sinner repents, for repentance of itself is no recompense to God. There is repentance, I think I had better call it remorse, which the lost feel in hell, but it changes not their doom. And had it not been for a Savior, we might have known the repentance which Esau felt when he went out and wept, but, nevertheless, lost the blessing—lost it irretrievably. Neither does our text tell us that God forgives men's sins because He

trusts that after they are forgiven they will do better. By His grace, forgiven men are made to do better, but it is not the foresight of any betterness on their part which leads God to the forgiveness. That cannot be a motive, for if they do better, their improvement is His work in them. Left to themselves, they would do even worse after they were pardoned than they had done before. And from the mercy of God they would argue immunity to sin, as, alas, too many which hold the truth in unrighteousness have already done. No, the only motive which God has for pardoning sinners, according to the text, is one which lies within Him—"for My own sake."

And what, I pray you, is that motive? Brethren, the Lord knows all His motives, and it is not for us to measure them. But is it not, first, that He may indulge His mercy? Mercy is the last exercised, but the most pleasing to Himself, of all His attributes. Therefore, because He is full of mercy, He blots out sin. He has this motive, too, which is within Him, that He may glorify His Son, who is one with Himself. His Son has made atonement; has offered and presented it, and now, in order that He may have His full reward, the Lord delights to blot out the sins of those who come to Him. It is within Him that the motive lies. And what a comfort this is, for if, when looking into my soul, I cannot see any reason why God should save me, I need not look there, since the motive lies yonder, in His own gracious bosom. According to the multitude of His loving-kindnesses, He will blot out my transgressions. I may look to all my past life, and not discover a solitary action out of which I could make a plea for mercy. I may look to my present condition, and perceive not even a glimpse of improvement, or even a ray of hope that I shall be better in the future, but rather a dreadful fear that I shall grow worse and worse. And when I have seen these discouraging facts, I have only seen what the truth, for in itself, my case is deplorable, indeed. But this is my comfort—I may look right away from myself to God, yes, it is my duty to do so. O man, if God is to save you, it will not be because of anything you are, or ever will be. He must do it for His own sake. And, oh, how splendidly this sets the door of mercy open! It does not stand, now, upon the latch, that those may enter who are little sinners. But the great gate of grace stands wide open—what if I say nailed back to the wall? For what sinner is there whom God cannot pardon, if He pardons for His own sake and not for the sinner's sake? What if the man were black with lusts which we dare not mention? What if he were red with murder? What if every crime in the catalog of guilt had been committed by him? Yet if God pardons, not because of anything He sees in the man, but because of what He finds in Himself, it remains a possibility for God to pardon the vilest of the vile, and the truth revealed in the Bible makes it certain that God will forgive such if they turn to Him, confess their transgressions, believe in His dear Son, and so pass from death unto life. How blessed, then, it is to look not only at the God who gives the pardon, but at the reason why He gives it—for His own sake!

III. And now, thirdly, it is noteworthy in this glorious text *how complete and universal the pardon is.* He does not say, "I, even I, am He that

blots out *some* of your transgressions, and will not remember *a certain number of* your sins." No, the Lord makes a clean sweep of the whole dreadful heap of our sins. They are all driven away at once by one stroke of almighty mercy. The text includes all the sins which the Lord had mentioned before—their buying Him no sweet cane with money—their refusing to attend to His sacrifices. Our *sins of omission* are all gone. Beloved friends, can any of us number our sins of omission? Those are the sins which ruin men. At the last great day the Judge will say, "I was hungry, and you gave Me no meat, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, sick, and you visited Me not." Those on the left hand were not condemned for what they did do, but for what they did not do. And the things which we have not done—the things which we have left undone which we ought to have done—these are the majority of our sins. Who shall count them? They outnumber the sands of the ocean. Yet the divine pardon cleanses us from them all. No spot or wrinkle remains.

And then He mentions *actual sins.* He says, "You have made Me to serve with your sins." [You have burdened Me with your sins.] But He declares that He blots them out, transgressions and sins, both forms of evil. They are both gone, all gone, wholly gone.

Now, I know not what particular sins may have been committed by the members of this congregation. Suppose we were to begin at yonder aisle, and each one had to stand up and acknowledge his sins? Well, it would take much time and we would have sinned a great deal more before we had come to the end of the confession. What a pile of sin there would be on this threshing floor, if every man were compelled to bring his own mass of sin, and pour it out upon the common heap. Yet the Lord does not set bound or measure, but says, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins." All the believer's sins are gone, and all are gone at once.

This is the very joy and glory of gospel absolution. The believer knows that his sins are not in the process of being pardoned, but *are* actually pardoned at this moment. No remnant of our sins remains to be dealt with in the future, the whole mass is put away. However black the guilt, however aggravated the criminality, however repeated the crime, however heinous because committed against the light, however enormous because perpetuated despite the Holy Spirit—they are all forever made an end of, annihilated, and forever gone when we believe in Jesus. Sins against God's law, and Word, and day, sins against Christ's blood, sins against His love, sins against His person, sins against His crown, sins against Himself in all His offices—an infinite variety of sins—they all vanish before that gracious declaration, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions."

Once more upon this point, the pardon is noteworthy on account of its being *most effectual.* It is described as blotting out. Now, blotting out is a very thorough way of settling a thing. If an account has been standing in the ledger a long time, and the pen is drawn through it, it remains no longer. Whether it is a large account or a small one, the same stroke of the pen will do it. If you owed a creditor a thousand pounds, and another

owed him only ten, the word, "paid," takes as many strokes of the pen to write for the one account as for the other, and it is just as easily done if the creditor is satisfied. Whatever sin there may have been in God's people, when they come before Him, He writes, "Acquitted," at the bottom of the page which is against them, and its condemning power is gone. What a joy it is to see the long catalog of my sins blotted out by the bleeding hands of Jesus, so that it cannot be read in the court of heavenly justice! What bliss to see it nailed to the cross of the dying Savior! Heavy as my soul's debts were, I doubt no longer, now that I see the grim reckoning fastened to the bloody tree.

And then mark the wonderful expression, "I will not remember your sins." Can God forget? Forgetting with God cannot be an infirmity as it is with us. We forget because our memory fails, but God forgets in the blessed sense that He remembers rather, the merit of His Son, than our sins. Indeed, God forgets sin in the sense of remembering that it is forgiven. I think it was Augustine who had been once a great sinner. After he was converted he was met in the street by one with whom he had often fallen into sin, and when she spoke to him and said, "Augustine, it is I," he said, "Ah, but it is not *I,* I am dead, and made alive again." Now, when God's justice meets a man who believes in Jesus, that man is no longer, the *I,* that sinned, for that *I* is dead in Christ. "Know you not that we were crucified with Him? "The believer was buried with Christ, so that, as he that is dead is free from the law which condemned him—for how shall the law arrest a dead man?—so we, being dead in Christ and risen again in Him, are new creatures, and do not come under the divine sentence. And God knows us not as sinners, but only, now, knows us as new creatures in Christ Jesus. He knows and recognizes in us the new life, having "Begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

That is one of the instructive features of the ordinance of baptism. The believer, there, sets forth the doctrine of salvation by death and burial. That was Noah's salvation. He went into the ark as one dead to the world, he was buried in the ark, and then he floated out from the old world into the new. "The like figure," says Peter, "whereunto baptism does also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." That is to say, baptism is a like figure of salvation, for it sets forth in a figure, and only in a figure, our death with Christ, our burial with Christ, our resurrection with Christ. Therefore where there is true faith, and the soul has communion with Christ, we are buried with Him in baptism unto death, "That like as Jesus rose from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also may rise to newness of life." Death has passed upon us, "For we thus judge," says the apostle, "that if one died for all, then all died"—(for such is the literal Greek)—and that He died for all, that they which live should not live from now on unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them, and rose again." Well, then, beloved, if we are dead, I do not wonder that God says He does not remember our sins, for we are new creatures. We have passed from death to life. We

have come into a new life, and God looks upon us from a new point of view. He regards us under a new aspect as members, not of the first Adam condemned and dead, but of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, the living and the quickening Spirit. Well may He say to men who are new creatures, "I will not remember your sins."

Every word of the text is delightful, and I cannot attempt to go into the fullness of it. May the Lord lead each one of you into it, and especially you young people. As for those who are not converted—oh, that they would long for the precious things here set forth! May God speak to some who came in here vile sinners, and say to them, "For My own sake I forgive you." Oh, how you will leap for joy! What a thrill will go through your heart! You will not doubt the existence of God any more, I will guarantee you. You will have no more questions and quibbles. The Spirit of God will speak to your heart, and that will convince you, though nothing else will, and you will go away to glorify the grace you once despised.

IV. Now I come to the consideration of the second point very briefly—THE EFFECT OF THIS PARDON WHEREVER IT COMES WITH POWER TO THE SOUL.

Timid persons have thought that the free pardon of sin would lead men to indulge in it. No doubt some are base enough to pervert it to that use, but there was never a soul that did really receive pardon from God who could find in that pardon any excuse for sin or any license to continue any longer in it. All God's people argue thus—"Shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" And again, the apostle says, "Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." He utters a most solemn disclaimer against the idea that the amazing mercy of God can lead the regenerate into sin.

The first effect of pardon upon the man who receives it *is surprise*. The man has been lying at the foot of the cross looking for mercy, and all of a sudden he glances at the bleeding Savior, and he is forgiven. And he feels something like Peter when he was brought out of prison. "He knew not that it was true that was done unto him by the angel, but thought he saw a vision."—

"When God revealed His gracious name,
And changed our mournful state,
Our rapture seemed a pleasing dream—
The grace appeared too great!"

I remember how overjoyed I was when I received pardon. I did not know how to contain myself for delight. But after a while this thought assailed me—such great mercy is too good to be true. My surprise at it staggered me. How could it be that I was actually forgiven, and through the blood of Jesus made clean in the sight of God? The goodness of God astounded me. It reminds me of an illustration I have used before, but it is a good one. If you have a dog at the table, and you throw him a scrap of meat, he swallows it directly. But if you were to set the whole joint down on the floor before him, he would turn away. He would feel that you could not mean to give a fine joint of meat to a dog. He would not think of touching it, at least, few dogs wouldn't. And it seemed to me as if the Lord could

not have meant all the wonders of His love for such a dog as I was. I was ready to turn away from it through the greatness of it. But then I remembered that it would not do for God to be giving little mercy. He was too great a God to spend all His power in pardoning little sinners, and granting little favors. And I came back to this—if His grace was not too big for Him to give, I would not be such a fool as to refuse it because of its greatness. You remember how Alexander told a soldier that he might have whatever he asked? The man went to the royal treasury, and demanded such a vast sum that the officer refused to let him have it, and said to him, "How can you be such an unconscionable fellow as to ask for so much?" When Alexander heard of it, he said, "It is much for him to receive, but it is not too much for Alexander to give—he has a high opinion of my greatness. Let him have what he has asked for. I will not fall short of his expectations." God is a great God, and to forgive great sins is just like Him. *We* cannot forgive at this rate, but God can. To forgive great sins, tremendous sins, unspeakably black sins, adds to His glory, and makes men say, "Who is a God like unto You, passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin?"

At first, then, mercy fills us with surprise. The next thing it does is to fill us with *holy regret*. We feel, "What? And is this the God I have been standing out against so long? Is this the God whom I have despised or neglected, whose gospel I put away from me, saying that there was time enough for me to attend to it when I grew old, and had seen a little of life? Is this the God whom I have been slighting, who has loved me at this rate, and given His dear Son from His own right hand to bleed and suffer in my place?" It has been said—I think by Aristotle—that a person cannot know that he is loved without feeling some degree of love in return. I am quite certain that you cannot know in your soul, by the experience of pardon, that God loves you, without feeling at once, "I am ashamed that I did not love my gracious God. I am disgusted with myself that I could have acted in such a disgraceful way towards Him. Did He love me before the world began? Did He write my name in the roll of His electing love? Did He ordain me to a crown of life, and to a harp of gold? Did He predestinate me to be conformed to the image of His Son? When the Savior bled, did He think of me as He was dying, and did He especially lay down life for me? Am I one whom He has betrothed unto Himself forever in faithfulness and love, and mercy? And yet have I been foolish enough to live all this while a stranger, and an enemy to Him?" When a sense of dying love comes mightily into the heart, we feel that we cannot be enough revenged upon our cruel hearts for having treated such a generous, such a forgiving God so.

As this sense of pardon first breeds surprise, and then intense regret, it next creates in us *fervent love.* "We love Him because He first loved us," and we love Him best of all for having pardoned us. No one loves God as much as the man or woman who has had much forgiven. Scripture tells us this in the case of the woman who was a sinner—she alone, washed the Savior's feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Commonplace Christians have never experienced any deep sense of sin,

and consequently, Christ is a very commonplace Savior to them. Ah, but when a man feels that he is a vile sinner, and that he should have been in hell, and in the hottest part of it, if it had not been for sovereign grace, I tell you, sir, if the Lord lifts that man up out of the pit, and gives him a place among His servants, that is the man who will feel the water in his eyes when he talks about the Savior's grace. That man cannot speak about redeeming grace and dying love without feeling that there is charming music in those precious words and the best of all music in their precious sense. The viler the sinner, the more love has he to the Lord when he is forgiven. As he feels his sin, so He loves his Redeemer. "The burnt child dreads the fire," but I will tell you the child that dreads the fire most, if there could be a child which had burnt itself in the fire, and then all its sores and blisters were taken off it, and laid upon its mother, and that child saw its mother's face all scarred and marred with the burning, and saw her body in pain on her dear one's account, I am sure the child would hate all idea of playing with fire as long as it lived. Many suffer for sin in their own persons, but do not hate it. They will go back to the very sin which injured them, as moths fly again to the candle. But to see another suffering for my fault—such a one as Emmanuel, God with us—to see His hands fastened to the cross, and His feet pierced, and His heart gashed, and all His life flowing out in blood, and Himself bearing agonies unutterable for my sins, it makes me feel that the very name of sin is accursed, and I utterly abhor it. We would, if we could, be perfect. We long and sigh, and cry to be delivered from everything that has one murderous spot of the Savior's blood upon it. If yonder knife had killed your friend, would you hoard it up, and think a great deal of the deadly instrument? You would hurl it out of your sight as an accursed thing. Yet sin slew Jesus! Sin slew Jesus! Away with it, then! Away with it! Away with it! My precious Christ was murdered by sin! From now on I am dead to sin! This is the spirit which free grace breeds in every Christian, and the surer he is of his pardon, the more intensely he hates his sin. Therefore our gospel is a reforming gospel, a sanctifying gospel. It is a gospel that delivers men from the power of sin, and brings them through the power of love into the blessed liberty of the children of God.

In closing, I would say to every unconverted person—your state before God is here in this picture. Many years ago in Russia a regiment of troops mutinied. They were at some distance from the capital, and were so furious that they murdered their officers, and resolved never to submit to discipline. But the emperor, who was an exceedingly wise and enlightened man, no sooner heard of it than, all alone and unattended, he went into the barracks where the men were drawn up, and, addressing them sternly, he said to them, "Soldiers, you have committed such offense against the law that every one of you deserves to be put to death. There is no hope of any mercy for any of you unless you lay down your arms immediately, and surrender at discretion to me, your emperor." And they did it, then and there, though the heads of their officers were lying at their feet. They threw down their arms and surrendered, and he said at

once, "Men, I pardon you; you will be the bravest troops I ever had." And they were, too. That is just what God says to the sinner, "Now, sinner, you have done that which deserves My wrath. Down with your weapons of rebellion! Ground arms at once. I will not talk with you until you submit at discretion to My sovereign authority." And then He says, "Believe in My Son, trust Him, accept Him as your Savior. This done, you are forgiven, and from now on you will be the most loving creatures that My hands have made. You will love Me better than the angels, for though they never sinned, they never had a God to become incarnate and to bleed and die for them. You know what sin is, and will hate it, and you know what goodness is, for you have seen it in My Son, and from now on you will strive to be like Him, and among the sweetest notes that shall come up to My throne will be your grateful songs."—

"Blessings, forever on the Lamb,
Who bore the curse for wretched men!
Let angels sound His sacred name,
And every creature say, 'Amen!' "

None will more loudly sing the praises of God than those who have been washed in the precious blood, and have had their transgressions blotted out.

The Lord bless you, and allow every one of you to know and taste all this, and that, too, at this very hour if it is His will, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
ISAIAH 43:22-28, 44:1-22.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—600, 598, 566.

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DEATH FOR SIN AND DEATH TO SIN
NO. 1143

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 16, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed."
1 Peter 2:24.

PETER, in this chapter, exhorted Christians to holiness, and dwelt upon that branch of holiness which consists in the patient endurance of wrong. He could find no better argument with which to plead with the saints than the life and example of their Lord, and, indeed, who could find a better? Since the Lord Jesus is all our salvation, He is also all our desire, and to be like Him is the highest objective of our ambition. If, therefore, we find Him patient under wrong, it is to us a conclusive argument that we should be patient too. I admire the apostle Peter, because in using so good an argument, he selected from the life of his Lord that particular portion of it which must have been most vividly written upon his own soul. You judge, my brethren, if I am not correct in this. Which hour do you think, of the sufferings of the Lord, from Gethsemane to Golgotha, would be most deeply engraved upon the memory of Peter? Surely it would be that space of time in which He was mocked and buffeted in the hall of the high priest, when Peter sat and warmed his hands at the fire, when he saw his Lord abused, and was afraid to admit that he was His disciple, and by-and-by, became so terrified that, with profane language, he declared, "I know not the man." As long as life lingered, the apostle would remember the meek and quiet bearing of his suffering Lord. He alluded to it in the 23rd verse, "When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously." Many a tear had Peter to brush out of his eyes as he wrote that verse. He remembered having seen the Lord with his own eyes, and so he mentioned, as an argument with others, that which was the most forcible upon his own mind, in the hope that whenever they were misjudged, or falsely accused, they might remember their Lord, and like Him, be dumb as a sheep before her shearers, and silent as a lamb led to the slaughter.

Lest, however, we should think that the patience of our Lord was intended to be our example and nothing more, the apostle goes on to speak expressly of the expiatory nature of the sufferings alluded to. He has held up the Savior in all His woes as our example, but knowing the evil tendency of skeptical minds, by any means, to becloud the cross, he now

puts aside the example, for a moment, and speaks of the Redeemer as the great sacrifice for sin. The sacred writers are always very clear and distinct upon this truth and so must we be. There is no preaching the gospel if the atonement is left out. No matter how well we speak of Jesus as a pattern, we have done nothing unless we point Him out as the substitute and sin-bearer. We must, in fact, continually imitate the apostle, and speak plainly of Him, "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

It is to Christ, then, this morning, the sin-bearer, that I am about to direct your attention. It may not be many times longer that I may have the opportunity to preach the gospel, for bodily pain reminds me of my mortality. How soon are the hale and the strong, as well as the sickly, carried off! And so many during the last few days whom we knew have been borne from among us to the silent tomb, that we are reminded how feeble our life is, how short our time for service. Let us, then, brethren, deal always with the best things, and attend to the most necessary works while yet our little oil suffices to feed the lamp of life. Rising newly from the sick bed, I have felt that if any theme in the Scriptures has an importance far above all the rest, it is the subject of the atoning blood. And I have resolved to repeat that old, old story again and again. Though I may be guilty of needless repetition, I shall keep on sounding this silver trumpet, or ringing this golden bell again, and again, and again. So when I am dead and gone the way of all flesh, you will perhaps say, "His fault was that he dwelt too much on his favorite subject, the substitution of Christ." Ah, may I have no other fault to account for, for that shall be accounted to be one of my highest virtues! I would know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. At the same time, we shall try to make our subject practical, because the second half of our text suggests the way by which the great sacrifice for sin leads us to make a slaughter of sin, and tells us that when Christ puts sin away *for* us, we are moved to put away sin *from* us. Two things this morning, then: first, *Christ's death for sin;* secondly, *our death to sin.*

I. First, then, we will consider OUR LORD'S DEATH FOR SIN. May the Holy Spirit help us to behold that wondrous sight of the Redeemer dying in our place, a sacrifice for our sins! And here, before we approach to behold the great sight, let us take our shoes off and bow down in lowest reverence of repenting grief, for, remember, if Jesus had not died for sins, we must have died, and died eternally, too. The pangs of the Savior on the cross surpassed all estimate, but, such as they were, they would have tormented us if they had not put Him to anguish. That cup which made Him sweat in the garden was bitter beyond imagination, but to your lips and to mine it must have been placed, and unable as we would have been to drain it dry, we would have continued to drink thereof forever and forever. "In the day you eat thereof you shall surely die" is the great sentence against sin, and for a soul to die is a terrible doom indeed. Our great father, Adam, felt the first drops of the dreadful shower of

death in the moment that he ate of the forbidden fruit, for he died to God and holiness, virtue, and true happiness, in that same hour—and stood aghast before his God, before that very God whom at other times he had met with rapture, and adored with delight. We, his children, share in his spiritual death in our depraved natures, and we would soon have passed away from the present death of this time state to that corruption which naturally follows upon death in the world to come, when restraining and preserving influences are removed, and the worm begins its work, "where their worm dies not, and their fire is not quenched." Yes, was it not for Him "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree," we should not have been here to speak to one another, or look each other in the face. Or if the forbearance of God had allowed us a brief existence on earth, I might have stood here compelled to tell you that there remained nothing for any of us but to die, and to endure the wrath of God in body and soul, world without end. Oh, the bitterness of our souls had we been in such a state! With my hands upon my loins this morning, in anguish of spirit, I might have been compelled to utter more woes than ever fell from the lips of Jeremiah, from whom all joy was gone, while I declared to you, and to your children, that there was no hope here or hereafter. That we had offended God, and He had given us over to utter destruction. Blessed be His name, we have another message to deliver now! We may rather imitate Isaiah, today, than Jeremiah, and tell of redeeming grace and dying love, instead of having to sound the dreadful knell of every hope, and to proclaim the birth of legions of sorrows. With this fact upon our minds, let us come lovingly to the blessed place of Calvary, once cursed on our account. *Jesus died for me;* that is the uppermost feeling of each one.

There was a substitution for our sins, and by that substitution believers are saved. There was a substitution. "He His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." A substitute intervened; the sins which would have crushed us were borne by another, actually and literally borne by another. "He His own self bore our sins." The sentence means that He bore the punishment which was due to our sins. We are sure it means that. But surely it means more. I cannot divest myself of the conviction that it means more, for it does not say, "He bore the punishment of our sins," which would be the most natural expression if that were the meaning intended, but, "He bore our sins." In that wonderful gospel chapter of Isaiah we are told, "The Lord has made to meet on Him *the iniquity* of us all." And again, "He bore *the sin* of many." It does seem as if the bearing of the punishment, great as that is, would not exhaust the meaning of such phrases. The expression is so compact, so concise, and so definite; it must mean what it says. At any rate, I am content to believe that God knows how to speak and to express His own meaning. And that the less we twist the Scriptures or get away from the simple sense, which they would suggest to a child, the more likely we are to understand them. "He His own self bore our sins." In some wondrous sense He bore the sin, as

well as the punishment. I know not how. This I know, He was never a sinner, for "in Him was no sin." This I know, He never was defiled; it could not be. Reject the blasphemy with indignation. He, the Son of God, the immaculate man, stained with sin? Never! We abhor the thought. And yet, "He bore our sins" is still a truth, and we must not flinch from it.

Does it not mean that He was a representative person? He was the Second Adam, and therefore He stood for His people, and therefore the Lord dealt with Him as if the sins of all He represented had been His own sins. He was the Shepherd, and the Lord bade Him give an account for the flock, and all the wanderings of all the sheep, and all their transgressions. Divine justice visited upon the Shepherd's head, because He was, by office and by nature, the representative of all those for whom He died, and so could justly be called to account for all that they had done. Sin was laid upon the Lord Jesus, for He was forsaken of His God The Lord did not merely chasten Him, and scourge Him, and put Him to grief by the use of agencies which were suitable for such a purpose in an innocent person, He went further and hid His face from Him, which was a sorrow fitting only for one upon whom sin was laid. Why should God forsake Him, unless He had first laid sin upon Him? When Jesus asked, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" there was no answer to that inquiry except this one, (at least I cannot imagine another), "I have laid sin upon You, and therefore I must forsake You." If He were merely suffering for others in the sense of doing others good by His sufferings, the Father might surely have looked upon Him with approval, and even, if possible, with increased delight, and have encouraged Him in the benevolent selflessness which made Him stoop to such sufferings. But inasmuch as He was not only enduring for others, but enduring in the place of others, and bearing their sins, it became necessary that, despite the love of the Father and the admiration which glowed in His bosom towards His dear Son, who was then above all things magnifying the nature of God—the Father, regarding Him as bearing sin, must hide His face from Him, and smite Him with the blows of a cruel one till He cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani." Yes, there was a substitution, and that substitution went mysteriously far. It was not merely a transfer of punishment from one to another, but there was a transfer of sin in some deep sense, or else the Scripture speaks not what it means—"He bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

Now, I want you to pause a minute, again, having noted the fact of substitution, to *consider the substitute.* "He His own self bore our sins." And who was "He"? Beloved, I want you to feel a personal love to our dear Lord and Master. I want your souls, at this moment, to realize the actual character of His existence, and His true personality. He is not here, this morning, in person, to show Himself to you, else might I very well withhold my words, for His presence would have an infinitely superior power over you. But remember that He lives, and is as real as you are, and at

this moment bears in His body the scars of His sufferings for you. Think, then, who He was and let your spirits kiss His feet in humble contrite love. He who bore our sins in His own body on the tree was God over all, blessed forever, of whom and through whom, and by whom are all things. Without whom, was not anything made that was made. Less than God could not have borne your sins so as to put them away, but the infinitely glorious Son of God did actually stoop to become a sin-bearer. I wonder how I can talk of it as I do. It is a truth scarcely to be declared in words. It needs flame and blood and tears with which to tell this story of an offended God, the Heaven-Maker, and the Earth-Creator, stooping from His glory that He might save the reptiles which had dared to insult His honor, and to rebel against His glory. And, becoming one of them, to suffer for them, that without violation of His law, He might have pity upon the offending things—things so inconsiderable that if He had stamped them all out, as men burn a nest of wasps, there had been no loss to the universe. But He had pity on them, and became one of them, and bore their sins. Oh, love Him, adore Him, let your souls climb up to the right hand of the majesty above, this morning, and there bow down in lowest reverence and adoring affection, that He, the God over all, whom you offended, should, His own self, bear our sins. Though God over all, He became a man like ourselves. A body was prepared for Him, and that body, mark you, not prepared alone, and made like man but not of man. No, He was not otherwise fashioned than ourselves. He came into the world as we come, born of a woman, a child of a mother—to hang upon a woman's breast. Not merely like man, but man, born in the pedigree of manhood, and so bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, yet without a taint of sin. And He, in that double nature, but united person, was Jesus, Son of God, and Son of the Virgin. He it was who "bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

Here we call to your remembrance the fact stated in the text so positively, that *the substitution of Christ was carried out by Him, Personally,* not by proxy. "He His own self bore our sins in His own body." The priest of old brought a substitution, but it was a lamb. He struck the knife, and the warm blood flowed down it, but our Lord Jesus Christ had no substitute for Himself, He, "His own self bore our sins in His own body." O priest of God! The pangs are to be Your own pangs; the knife must reach Your own heart; no lamb for You, You are, Yourself the Lamb. The blood which streams at Your feet must be Your own blood. There must be wounds, but they must be wounds in Your own flesh. Oh, turn loving eyes to your Lord, and remember that everything He did for you, He did Himself. You sometimes say that another voice may speak for Jesus, you are often willing to serve God through the energy of another, and I will not chide you. But oh, remember His personal sacrifice for you. The griefs which Jesus bore put His own soul into a tempest of grief, and made His own heart to boil like a cauldron within Him. The heart which was broken for our sins was His heart, and the life given up was His life.

Not by another, though he was an angel, could Christ have redeemed mankind, but He, "His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

Notice, also, that *the substitution of Christ is described in our text in a way which suggests consciousness, willingness, and great pain.* "He His own self bore our sins." They were upon Him; they pressed Him. The Greek word for "bore" suggests the idea of a great weight, "He bore our sins"—stooped under them, as it were; they were a load to Him. There are men in the world that may be bearing in their bodies the result of the sin of their parents, but they are not aware of it, and even if they were, they are voluntary bearers, of the same. But our Lord assumed our sins as one takes a weight upon his shoulders, and when the sins were there, He knew that He was carrying our burdens, and still consented to do so. There was not a moment in Christ's life in which the pressure of our sin was unfelt. Though the wrath of God, on account of sin, was more especially felt by Him at Gethsemane, and up to the tree, yet at all times He was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. What a weight was this! The solid earth cannot bear the weight of sin. It groans and travails in pain together, even now, like a creaking chariot whose axles are unable to bear up under the stupendous freight. Yet on Jesus was the burden laid, a far weightier one than the fabled Atlas bore, and He sustained it to the tree.

The text, in our English version, might seem to teach that our Lord bore our sins only on the tree, and that erroneous dogma has been drawn from it. No inference could have been more feebly sustained, for the original does not necessarily set forth anything of the kind. The word translated "on" is precisely the same word which in the next verse is translated "to," or, "unto"—"We are now returned 'unto'"—and might have been just as correctly read, "unto," in this case. I have not the slightest doubt that the meaning of the text is, "He His own self bore our sins in His own body to the tree," so that when He reached the tree, He left our sins there, condemned and crucified forever and ever. Instead of the doctrine being deduced that Christ was a substitute only on the tree, the fact is He always was a substitute up to the tree, and then and there that substitution culminated in His dying as a sin-offering. Let us this morning, know that consciously, from the time He was a babe in Bethlehem, till the moment when He bowed His head and gave up the ghost, "He His own self bore our sins in His own body" to the tree.

And, brethren, *He manifestly bore those sins*. I think that is the mind of the Spirit. When He says, "In His own body," He means to give vividness to the thought. We are so constituted that we do not think so forcibly of mental and spiritual things as we do of bodily things. But our Lord bore our sins "in His own body." If you had looked at Him, had you been instructed by the Spirit, you would have seen in His body that He was a sin-bearer. Listen to this verse—"As many were astonished at you, so His visage was more marked than that of any man, and His form more than

the sons of men." Remember another text—"Yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God." Think of that. Those who looked into the Savior's face thought Him "smitten of God." First they thought Him stricken or demented, like one who has passed through such an awful sorrow that the mind has trembled beneath it, and then they looked at Him as smitten of God. Even the Jews judged Him to be near to 50 when He was scarcely 30 years of age, so worn and haggard did He look, that "Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief." He smiled and He cheered others. He wore a cheerful countenance among the sons of men, that He might not make those who saw Him, sorrowful, and deep down in His heart there glowed a secret fire, a wondrous joy that He was redeeming His own chosen. But still imponderable, incomprehensible infinite griefs perpetually rolled over Him, so that all His lifetime He might have said, "All Your waves, and Your billows have gone over Me." "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body"; so that His visage seemed to tell of it!

And when He came to the tree, oh, how His body bore our sins, then, in communion with His sinless soul! I do not care who it is that speaks against descriptions of the crucifixion, or who would have us keep in the background the bodily sufferings of Jesus, I am persuaded that the highest, most intense, and forceful piety that ever existed among men has arisen out of contemplations of the agony of Gethsemane, and the death throes of Calvary.

The Romish Church, with all her errors, and they are countless, has always had in her midst a band of loving, adoring spirits who have entered into the Redeemer's passion, and whose meat and drink have been the flesh and blood of Christ in their silent contemplations. And if Protestant Christians ever fall into the idea that we must not think too much of the blood and wounds of Jesus, they will lose the richest spiritual sustenance, and we shall cease to have eminent saints among us. I shall not be ashamed at any time to talk to you of the bodily griefs of Jesus, when I remember that Peter, or rather the Holy Spirit by Peter, puts it so in the text—"Who His own self bore our sins *in His own body* to the tree." There is the cross, and there is the body. There are the visible things, as well as the spiritual and the unseen. We will not forget the second, but we will, by no means ever despise the first. We will speak lovingly and tenderly of the body, and of the bodily sufferings of the Lord. Oh, see, then, the Lord of life and glory taken outside the city gate of old Jerusalem, and there, amidst a depraved throng, treated as a common criminal. It was the Tyburn, the Old Bailey of the city, where felons were usually executed, and they took our Master, malefactors being with Him, and treated Him as a felon. They nailed His hands! Look! The cruel iron is driven through His feet! They lift Him up, a spectacle of shame! They have stripped Him! They have gambled over the few garments which He had, and there He hangs. They gather around Him, and they mock Him, as if the cross were a stock as well as a gallows. They insult Him with studied sarcasm, but He has no reply to make except to bless them with

His prayers, and to appeal to His God. His friends have fled, and when they timidly return they can only share His sorrow, but they cannot alleviate it. He must die, die in extreme pain of body, and die with unknown inward agonies, the veil of which we will not attempt to lift. "He His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." Blessed are You, O Savior, and blessed are the eyes that have seen You and have looked to You by faith.

Be it remembered, our Lord Jesus Christ never ceased to bear our sins till He had taken them right up to the tree. And when He had taken them to the tree, there He hung them forever as a spectacle of eternal scorn, He Himself, dying while He made our sins die! Himself crucified while He crucified our sins once and for all. O you who use a cross as a necklace, why do you do it? It is a gallows whereon our sins were hung up in shame. Will you wear a gallows around your neck? Will you make a necklace of that which was your Master's death! I would as soon wear about my neck a butcher's knife which had killed my mother, as a cross on which my Savior was murdered. It looks as if you had sided with His murderers, and gloried in the instrument of His torture. It was a shameful thing to die the death of the cross, and the Lord knew it to be so, and yet He "His own self bore our sins in His own body to the tree."

Mark the tree of the cross for a moment with much attention. It was the place of *pain*. No death could be fuller of agony than that of crucifixion. When the headsman's axe falls on the neck, the head is severed, and the pain is over. Even to stand burning at the stake is a shorter, if at the time a sharper way to heaven. But the pains of crucifixion may last for days. Cases have been known in which men have actually lived after a three days' nailing to a cross. The pain, itself, is inconceivably great. The most tender parts of the hands and feet, where they are most liable to bring on lockjaw, being torn by the nails—and the strain of the body continues tearing at the wounds. Yet our Savior bore that pain. Ah, it is not till you suffer pain that you begin to know the love of Christ to the fullest. You may thank Him, you sons of sorrow, and daughters of suffering, for all your pangs, for now you have fellowship with Him. Blessed be Your love, O Jesus, that You could bear pain and death for us.

But the cross was not merely the place of pain. It was the place of *scorn.* To be fastened to the cross! Why they would not put the meanest Roman there though he committed murder. It was a death for slaves and menials. When scorn mingles with pain, you know what a compound of grief it makes. To be laughed at when you suffer is to suffer seven-fold.

But more, it was the place of *the curse,* for "cursed is everyone that hangs on the tree," and the Word has told us, "He was made a curse for us."

Last of all, it was the place of *death,* for Jesus must not merely bleed, but bleed to death. Nor suffer only, but suffer till life itself was gone. O dying Savior, Your love to me was wonderful, for death itself, could not turn it aside, and therefore blessed, forever blessed, be Your name.

Before we leave the cross, let the believer sit down and see on the cross his sins hanging up as dead. Christ carried them up to the cross and slew them. The law comes to me, and says, "I arrest you for sin," but I reply, "I have no sin. What would you do with my sins if I had any?" "I would put them to a shameful death." "Lo, they are yonder, executed upon the accursed tree by Jesus Christ." Look, then, at your sins hanged up on the gallows, abhor and loathe them, but rejoice that loathsome as they are, they are dead. The Lord put them all to death, and put sin away forever by His death upon the tree. The death of Jesus is the death of our sins.

I fear I am addressing some who never knew what it was to have sin pardoned. Dear hearer, all your hope of pardon is in what I have been telling you this morning. You cannot make recompense to God for your sin, either by repentance or by future reformation. Your only hope is to look to Jesus Christ, who bore the sins of His people in His own body on the tree. And if you will come and put your trust in Jesus, your sin shall be put away from you, and you shall be accepted. Oh, I pray that at this hour you may be enabled to believe in Jesus, and find peace through the cross and to Him shall be all the glory.

II. And, now I hope I shall not strain your attention while I bid you consider the second part of the text—OUR DEATH TO SIN. "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed." Now, observe right well that we are dead to the condemning power of sin. No sin can condemn a believer in Jesus Christ. Why? Because Christ has suffered what we ought to have suffered on account of sin—He has rendered a full recompense to divine justice. You bring me a large file full of bills, and you say to me, "Are not these bills against you?" I answer, "No doubt they are all correct in every item, and they might take me many a month to examine." You ask me, "Can you pay them?" "No, and I do not need to try." "But do they not trouble you?" "No. I can make a pillow of them, if that is all, and sleep, notwithstanding their number and greatness." You are wonder-struck to think that I should have such a mass of bills, and take the matter so coolly. I ask you to take off these bills from the file one by one, and as you do so you see that they are all paid for. There is a red mark at the bottom of every one. Who troubles himself about a bill when it is paid? "But did you pay those debts?" "No, not I; I have not paid a penny." "Did you not pay part of them?" "Not I; I never contributed a rusty farthing towards them." "Yet you are perfectly easy?" "Yes, because He who bore my sins in His own body on the tree, took all my debts, and paid them for me and now I am dead to those debts. They have no power over me. I am dead to my sins. Christ suffered instead of me. I have nothing to do with them. They are gone as much as if they had never been committed—

"Now freed from sin, I walk at large;
My Savior's blood's my full discharge."

From now on I have nothing to do but to live as a righteous man, accepted in the Beloved, to live by His righteousness, and rejoice in it, blessing and magnifying His holy name.

Beloved, hear the text again. As many of you as have looked to Jesus Christ bearing your sins in His own body on the tree, you are dead to sin as to its reigning power, dead, first, because we have seen its detestable nature. The sin which was so base that it required the Son of God, Himself, to die before it could be pardoned, is too awful and desperate an evil for us to dally with any more. It had its charms, but now we have perceived its hypocrisies. The false prophet Mokanna, who wore the silver veil upon his brow, deceived many, for he said that should that veil be lifted, the light which would gleam from under it would strike men blind, the glory was so great. But when one had once perceived that the man was leprous, and that on his brow, instead of brightness, there were the white scales of a leper, nobody would become his disciple. And so, O sin, at the cross I see your silver veil removed, and I mark the desperate leprosy that is on you. I am dead to you. Begone, you foul blood-stained traitor! I cannot harbor you in my heart. The death of Christ, then, is to us the death of sin.

We are dead to sin, again, because another passion has absorbed all the forces of our life. Have you ever seen men dead to other things because some one passion has eaten them up? Look at the miser—ask him why he does not eat a full meal. His appetite is dead. Tempt him with rich wines; bring before him the dainties of the season. They will cost him money, and he wants them not. He tells you he has no taste, nor love for such things. But you tell him that there is sweet music to be heard, and there are pleasures to be enjoyed. Yes, but there must be money doled out for them, and therefore he has no ear and no eye. His dear gold is everything. He is dead to all else. But there is rent due from a poor widow with many children, and he will pounce upon her, and turn her out upon the cold stones of the street. Tell him of the widow and her tears, of the orphans and their woes—what does he care? He asks you whether you ever had any house property, and assures you that if you had, you would soon have as hard a heart as he has. But has the man no heart! No, sir, he has no life except that which pulsates to the chink of his money bags. The zeal of his gold has eaten him up. Now, it is just so with us as to Christ. We have no eyes or ears for anything but for our dear Lord who bled and died, and who is gone up into His glory. Now sin may charm, but we have the adder's ear. Sin may put on all its allurements, but we are blind as bats to its beauty, and wish to be. We are dead to sin; so says the text. Another passion has sucked up our life, and our life for sin is all dried up.

And yet again, sin appears to us now to be too mean and trivial a thing for us to care about. Picture Paul going along the Appian Way towards Rome, met by some of the Christians far away at Puteoli, and afterwards by others at the Three Taverns. Can you imagine what their

conversation was as Paul walked chained along the highway? Why, they would commune concerning Jesus and the resurrection, and the Spirit, and saints converted, and souls in heaven. I can conceive that the soldiers and others who would come up with them along the Roman road, stopping at the taverns, and so on, would have many things to talk of. One of them would say, "There will be a grand fight at the amphitheatre next week." And another would say, "Oh, but over at such a theater there is a splendid show—a hundred beasts are to be slain in a single night, and the famous German gladiator is to exhibit his prowess tomorrow evening." And others would say, "Who is to be commander in Spain next year?" "Who is appointed over the Praetorian Guard?" And the babble would be about a thousand things—but the apostle would be supremely indifferent to it all. Not a topic that any one of those soldiers could bring before him, or any one of the people around him, could interest him. He was dead to the things to which they were alive, and alive to the things to which they were dead.

So is the Christian. The cross has killed him, and the cross has quickened him. We are dead to sin, that we should live unto righteousness, and now our very power to enjoy sin, if, indeed, we are resting in Christ, is gone from us. We have lost, now, by God's grace, the faculty which once was gratified with these things. They tell us we deny ourselves many pleasures. Oh, sirs, there is a sense in which a Christian lives a self-denying life, but there is another sense in which he practices no self-denial at all, for he only denies himself what he does not need, and what he would not have if he could. If you could force it upon him, it would be misery to him, his views and tastes are now so changed. Have you ever looked at a green field, and marked the sparkling dew drops, and thought how bright they are? Did you ever then turn your eyes on the sun, and look at him and try to stare him out of countenance? If you have, I know what has happened, for when you looked down upon the landscape again, you could not see it. You seemed to have lost your eyes; they had been put out by the brightness on which you gazed. So you may look on the world of sin, and see some beauty in it till you look at HIM, and then the brightness of His glory puts out your eyes. The world is dark and black, after that, and you wish it to be so. Let these eyes be forever sightless as the eyes of night, and let these ears be forever deaf as silence, rather than sin should have a charm for me, or anything should take up my spirit but the Lord of love who bled Himself to death that He might redeem me unto Himself. This is the royal road to sanctification. The death of Christ becomes the death of sin. We see Him bleed for us, and then we put our sin to death.

And it seems to me, brethren, listen to it, as if the last sentence of our text told us this—"By His stripes you were healed." It is as good as if the Spirit said, "There is the recipe for sanctification. If you want to know how to be dead to sin, and alive unto righteousness, there it is—His stripes will heal you." The welts, the blue marks of His scourging; these

will take out the lines of sin. The wounds, the sweat, the death throes of the Savior, these will cure you of sin's disease. You go to a physician, and ask him to heal you. He gives you what we commonly call a recipe. What does "recipe" mean? Take. Ah, there is the cure for sin. We think that the cure for sin is to give something out from ourselves, and to do some good thing. But in truth the cure for sin is, "Take." Take what? Take your dear Lord's wounds, and trust them. Take His griefs, and rest in them. Take His death, and believe in it. Take Him, and love Him. And by His stripes you are healed. Sanctification is by faith in Jesus Christ. We overcome through the blood of the Lamb. And oh, as the topmost stone is stained with the blood, so must the foundation stone be.

And I say, in parting, to every man and woman to whom I have spoken, as you and I shall meet at the great white throne at last, in the general assembly, which shall be the last meeting of the sons of men, and the last parting—if you would be found at the right hand of God, believe the message I have brought you, for it is the very truth of God. Do not only hear it, but act upon it, and before you leave this house I do pray that the Spirit of God may show you what it is to believe in Him, alone, "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." And if you do, though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be as wool. Though you have been the most atrocious offender existing on the face of the earth, you shall be clean every whit from every sin. You may have come here as black as hell, but you shall go out pure as the white-robed hosts in heaven, if you will but believe in Jesus. This is the washing in the fountain, the fountain which alone can make us clean. God help us to wash immediately, lest the time for washing be past, and the time for judgment be today. God bless you, for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 PETER 2.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—286, 299, 291.

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PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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A MIGHTY PLEA
NO. 1144

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 23, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"You have been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me."
Psalm 27:9.

IN times of distress it is somewhat a difficulty to have a choice of helpers, because while we are making our selection, the danger may have overtaken us. While the fox was considering which way to run, the hounds had seized him. While the sick man was selecting the physician, and considering the medicine, his disease carried him off. It is well to be shut up to one sole help, if that help is all we need. It is for our good, in such a case, to have no alternative, but to have, as the old proverb has it, Hobson's choice—that or none. The believer is exactly in that condition. He must trust in his God or remain without hope. He dares not look to others as he once did, for he has discovered their incompetence. He cannot rely upon himself as once he was foolish enough to do, for he has learned, by bitter experience, the folly of self-confidence. He is compelled to look to the Lord, alone. Blessed is that wind which drives the ship into the harbor, blessed is that wave which washes the mariner upon the rock of safety, and blessed is that distress which forces a man to rest only in his God. Such was the condition of the psalmist when he wrote the text. His spirit looked to God, alone. In his past experience the goodness of the Lord shone forth as the pole star of his life's voyage, and therefore, as to the future, he fixed his eyes steadily on that one sure guiding light, and trusted in the God of his salvation.

In supplicating the Lord it is well to have a plea ready for use, a plea available under all circumstances and conditions, a plea of our own, not borrowed from the mouths of other men, and perhaps but half suitable to ourselves. A plea which wells up from our inner consciousness, and is our own personal plea, felt to be weighty in our own souls, and therefore, confidently urged before the throne of grace. It is well to have a simple plea, and one which we can understand ourselves. For when we are in doubt we are like men in a mist, and must have plain directions or we miss our way. If we have a chart in a fog we need it to be a very clear one, or else we shall not be able to see it. And when we plead with God in trouble, we need the plea to be a very plain one, or else our minds may be so confused we shall not be able to urge it. A soul in sore distress is in no fit condition to puzzle itself over deep and dark reasonings, it needs a child's plea, just as Dr. Guthrie, when near dying, needed "Bairn's

Hymns." Blessed, then, is it, if we have a plea like this of the text, "You have been my help," for this is a homely, personal, suitable, simple argument not fetched from afar by subtle wit, but grown at home in our own experience. He that runs may read it, and poor wayfaring men may comprehend it. The illiterate can use it as well as the learned. "You have been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me." Besides, this plea is good and full of real power, and I hope, before we have done this morning, we shall be able to show that there is much heavenly logic in it, and that it is eminently full of that kind of argument which is most sure to prevail with the Host High.

Perhaps it may be well, here, to confess that the plea before us is not one which would ordinarily be available with our fellow creatures. For if they have helped us before, they generally conclude that the next time we ought to knock at some other door. Francis Quarles has well expressed the usual manner of men—

"Man's plea to man is, that he never more
Will beg, and that he never begged before—
Man's plea to God is, that he did obtain
A former suit, and therefore sues again.
How good a God we serve, that, when we sue,
Makes His old gifts the examples of His new!"

Yet there are exceptions to the general custom of mankind, for I read the other day a case in point, in Mr. Moody Stuart's, "Recollections of Dr. John Duncan, of Edinburgh," who was a beautiful character, and a famous Hebrew scholar, and has lately gone to heaven, much to the loss of the Free Church. In that book I met with the following passage—"He was easily imposed upon, but the imposition never soured him, and he was willing to submit to it for the chance of doing good. He said, 'I find they know how to get round me. They say, "You helped me before," and I can never resist that. It teaches me how to pray.'" And now I think of it, many of us like to help our old pensioners, and they come up very boldly to our door remembering the many times in which they have succeeded. If you grant a man a favor several times, he becomes very free in seeking it again. So it seems that even among men it may be a plea, "You have been my help," and most assuredly it is most prevalent argument with God. No man shall be repulsed from the gate of Mercy who comes with this upon his lips—

"You have helped in every need,
This emboldens me to plead.
After so much mercy past,
Will You let me sink at last?"

I shall speak this morning thus: First, I shall try and depict *experience gratefully telling her tale*—"You have been my help." Then *necessity urgently pleading experience*—"Leave me not, neither forsake me." And then *experience soundly instructing faith*—teaching her how to pray, and how to expect an answer—"You have been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me."

I. First then, dear friends, let us listen to EXPERIENCE GRATEFULLY TELLING HER TALE, "You have been my help."

I, the preacher, can say, and must say with all my heart, "O God, You have been my help." Rest a minute, and let the testimony be repeated by all who can declare it. I know that many of you, if this were the fitting time, would rise up and say, "O God, You have been my help." What would we have done without the help given us in time of need, given us from the Lord, Himself? How grandly has our God displayed His power and His mercy on our behalf! Many of you whose heads are adorned with the silver locks of age will say, with trembling, tearful emphasis, "You have been my help." Yes, and those of you in middle life, battling with its cares and trials, can do no otherwise but cheerfully confess, "The Lord is my helper, and has long been such." And the younger ones among us, who have lately put on the harness would not like to be left out, for even in their short conflict they have received such aid that they gladly admit, "You have been our help." If hands had to be held up now, that we might see at a glance those who could say that God has been their help, what a forest of hands would go up in this Tabernacle this morning! Yes, Lord, we Your servants, assembled here in thousands, do solemnly confess that You have been our help.

Now, as I cannot describe the individual experiences of everyone here present, I will just say a little concerning the man who wrote these words. As we find them in this Psalm, and as his experience is singularly like that of every other saint, we may, perhaps, touch most of you in some point or other. David could very early say, "You have been my help," for while he was yet a youth, the son of Jesse sought the Lord and struggled into spiritual life. I should think that his early experience was a very distinct and marked one, and one in which much saving help was displayed. He had deep convictions of sin, a clear view of the great substitutionary sacrifice that was to be offered, and in the end he obtained a very joyful sense of justification by faith. David could look back to the days of his boyish conversion, when he fought hard with doubt and fear, and sin committed, and sin dwelling within him, and yet was able to put his trust in the great sacrifice, so that he said in retrospect, "You have been my help." I invite every converted person here to look back upon that trying time when he was seeking the Lord with a burden of sin upon his back, assailed by a thousand sins, and hindered by ten thousand temptations. You were then, most wonderfully helped. You were helped to fall at the foot of the cross, and helped to look up and view the perfect atonement there, presented by the Redeemer. You were helped to leave your burden in your Savior's sepulcher, and helped to come away with a new song in your mouth, the sweet flavor of which is there to this hour. You were helped to repent, and helped to believe; helped out of self-righteousness, and helped out of despair. In memory of that matchless help you may well resolve to trust in the Lord all the days of your life.

"Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings will I rejoice."

David, however, soon after his conversion, entered upon a scene of severe trial—at least, so I suspect. He appears to have been sent from home to serve as a shepherd boy in the wild places of Judea. I fancy that his condition with regard to his brothers was very much like that of Joseph; they either envied or despised him. When Samuel went to Bethlehem to anoint him, you will remember that all the rest of the family was at home, and the youthful David was not summoned until the prophet specially required it. But, as though he were not worth noticing, he was required to be away watching the flocks. And so, also, when he went, at his father's request, to the battle against the Philistines, his brothers treated him with great scorn, as though he had no business to come near them, or to associate with great men like themselves, in battle for their country. Poor David, therefore, was the marked one of the family, a speckled bird, the butt of household ridicule. But he could say, in looking back upon the times of his loneliness, "You have been my help." Sweet were the songs which he sang among the sheep, such as, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Happy were the quiet hours which he spent amidst the hills and vales of his native land, and by the rivers and the brooks where he made his flock to lie down. Many a time that harp of his, upon which he had learned to play so skillfully, had borne up his devout spirit on wings of music to the throne of God, when his young heart sang in solitude the praises of the Most High. Perhaps some of you look back upon your early troubles as among the bitterest you ever knew. We are always hearing people say that our young days are the happiest we shall ever see. It may be true with many, but there are others whose young days were darkened with sorrow. They had to bear the yoke in their youth, and they can say, in looking back, that it was good for them it was so, for in those times the Lord was their helper. David's father and mother had, in a measure, forsaken him, but God took him up. The Lord had regard to him when others despised him. He was the Lord's anointed when he was an alien from his mother's children. What joy it is if our early sorrows have left this inscription upon the tablets of our hearts, "You have been my help."

But David did not merely suffer when he was young, but did work for God—yes, he did grand exploits for his God, and for his country while yet a youth, of which he could say with great fervor, "You have been my help." It was no little thing when the shepherd lad rushed against the lion, and took him by his beard, and slew him. And when the bear had taken the lamb, it was no slight matter for a raw youth to battle with the monster of the woods, and slay it in the name of God, that he might deliver his sheep from destruction. The Lord was his helper that day, and grandly did he feel it, when he went with his sling and his stone to meet the gigantic Philistine. And openly did he confess his faith when he came back with the giant's head, all dripping with gore, to magnify the Most

High, who had delivered him, and delivered Israel out of the hand of this mighty adversary. "You have been my help." "The Lord delivered me out of the mouth of the lion, and from the paw of the bear, and the Lord has delivered me from the hand of this uncircumcised Philistine."

Now, my brethren, I do not ask you to look back upon what the Lord enabled you to do in your younger days by way of self-congratulation. I do not ask the old soldier to "shoulder his crutch, and show how fields were won," that he may command admiration from younger warriors. But, that God may be glorified, I ask you to remember how the Holy Spirit came upon you in those early days, and enabled you to be valiant for the truth. Perhaps you had more zeal than knowledge in those days, and possessed more confidence than prudence, but you did grand things for God, and God was with you. So you might be content to go back to all the mistakes of youth, if you might win back again, its simple trust and burning love. At any rate, stand here today and admit that whatever you may have accomplished which will bless your fellow men, and honor your God, the glory of it is all due to the help given you by the Lord.

David, after those first trying times, passed through another series of afflictions. He was called to court, but the king was jealous of him, and very soon he had to escape from Saul's murderous attacks. What continuous help did David receive from the God of his salvation! He was almost taken prisoner in the caverns of Engedi, but God delivered him. He was well-near captured among the hills, but Jehovah called off his pursuers. Many a time did he hold his life in his hand, for he was hunted like a defenseless partridge upon the mountains, but always by some means or other the Lord delivered him, as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, the snare was broken, and he escaped. Look back upon the troubles through which God has brought you, my beloved brothers and sisters. Remember the times in which your feet had almost gone, and your steps had well-near slipped, and say with grateful emotion, "You have been my help."

God helped David by raising him up many true friends. When he was in the cave, brave spirits came to him, valiant and faithful men, who loved David as they loved their own souls. And when he asked for a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem, they went with their lives in their hands, to gratify his wish, and let him drink of the water which he was accustomed to taste in his boyish days, for they were denoted to him. Now, it is no small thing to have good, kind, faithful, earnest friends and adherents. And if you have had such, or have been favored with parents, brethren, and friends who have been greatly attached to you, be sure to praise the Lord for them this morning, as I myself, joyfully do in the midst of many tried and attached supporters, and say, "You have been my help."

On one or two occasions David found the Lord to be his help when he was in positions where he might scarcely have expected divine aid. When we plunge ourselves into trouble through our own fault, it is but natural to fear that we may be left to suffer for our folly, and it is peculiarly gra-

cious on the part of our heavenly Friend to come to our rescue. David had unwisely sought refuge with the king of Gath, and there was placed in great jeopardy of his life, so that he had to play the madman in order to escape. But escape he did, through God's gracious help. Yet another time, in his unbelief, he went and joined the army of this heathen king. And if the lords of the Philistines had not spoken against his going down to the battle, he world have been placed in a very awkward position, in having been called to fight against his own countrymen, but God delivered him even then. With what regret may some of us look back upon our own follies, and with what thankfulness may we survey the mercy which plucked our feet out of the net. Where others would have left us in anger, because of our waywardness and ingratitude, You, O Lord, have been our help.

David obtained help under very strong temptations. It was a very strong temptation when he saw his adversary in the cave all alone, and might with one stroke of his sword have taken off his head. He was helped of God to spare his foe, and he only cut off the hem of the king's robe to let him see how completely he was in his power. He also needed help when, in the dead of night, he went with Abishai, his captain, through the sleeping hosts of Saul, and came to the place where lay his cruel enemy asleep. His spear stood temptingly near his pillow, and a deep sleep was on him, and Abishai said, "Let me smite him, let me smite him but once, one stroke shall end it all." Who among ordinary men of war must not have wished to let that one single blow be struck? In what surer manner could a bitter quarrel be ended? But no, "I will not lift up my hand against the Lord's anointed." David must have felt that God was superlatively his helper that night to keep back his hand from blood. You, too, dear friends, have been in such a position that you were strongly tempted to do wrong. Impulses both of your own nature and of Satan were strong upon you, and you had almost put forth your hand unto iniquity. But you have been kept with an unblemished character to this day, and you are compelled to say this morning, "You have been my help."

Yes, and David could remember again, when God helped him in times of direst distress. Perhaps the greatest sorrow of David's life, before he fell into sin with Bathsheba, was the destruction of Ziklag. He came back from the Philistines' country to his own town of Ziklag, and found the town totally sacked, everything taken away, and, what was worse his own wives and children and those of all his men, carried away captive. David might have borne up under this had his friends cheered him, but they were so exasperated that they fell angrily upon him, and spoke of stoning him. He was their leader, he was not to blame in any respect for their loss, but utterly in the bitterness of their hearts they spoke in foolish anger and hot haste. Generally at such times, men need a victim, and in this case they would have made their noble leader the object of their wrath. It is written, "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God," and

sorely did he need to do so. God brought him out of it, for he never lost a farthing by the sack of Ziklag, nor any of his men. They recovered their wives and their children, and beside that, not only all their own goods, but all the spoil the plundering band had taken from other places. David could have sung, and no doubt did sing, "Ebenezer, up to now the Lord has helped us!" Or, in the words of the text, "You have been my help." Have not you had your Ziklag, you businessmen, when things were going all to the bad? You could not help yourself, and bankruptcy stared you in the face? You did what you could, but it seemed as if you would be ruined. That was your Ziklag, and the Lord helped you. Or perhaps there was disease in your house. One child had gone, another was sickening, your wife was laid by, you were unable yourself, to lift hand or foot to help, all things were against you—it was your Ziklag. Or perhaps you are a minister of the gospel, and there was, in your church, spreading disaffection and cruel ill will, and no one was found to stand up for you. Though you had been faithful before the Lord God of Hosts, you seemed quite left and deserted. It was your Ziklag, but you were helped through it, and therefore, I beg you, do not, for the glory of God and for the comfort of tried saints, keep back your testimony, but say, "I was brought low, and He helped me, and therefore, blessed be His name." We do not talk enough about our deliverances. When you get home this afternoon, after dinner, if a friend or two should call, you will go over your bad times, and your troubles, but you will not recapitulate your mercies. Have we not had enough of complaining? Let us touch another string, and bless the Lord for all His loving-kindness. What a tale some of us could tell of His mercies! No novel that was ever composed could possibly equal, in interest, my own experience of God's goodness, and I think there are many here of whose lives the same could be said. Rich with incident, crowded with wonders, crammed full of miracles have our lives been, for God has dealt so well with us that we often stand astonished at what He has done. "You have been my help." Oh, yes, I will sum up the whole of my life in the one sentence, and as we have seen a portrait sketched in a few lines, so will I give you my whole career in miniature—"You have been my help."

Listen, then, to the song of experience, and hasten to join in it. It is most charming and cheering—"You have been my help."

II. Our second point is NECESSITY PLEADING EXPERIENCE. "You *have* been my help; *leave me not, neither forsake me."*

First, You have been my help, therefore it is consistent with Your *holiness* to help me. Lord, I am a poor sinner, unworthy to be noticed, and my doubts and fears sometimes tell me that it would not be fit for Your infinitely holy majesty to look upon such a rebellious worm as I am. But, Lord, You have done it already, You have been my help. And if it were not wrong for You to help me once, it will not be wrong for You to help me twice. If it did not stain Your spotless robe to hold out your hand to a fallen and condemned soul in years gone by, it will not stain Your purity

to lend me Your hand again. I therefore bless Your condescending goodness, and ask You not to leave me!

You have been my help, therefore, in the second place; it is within Your *power* to help me. For, Lord, my case today is not worse than it was when You helped me before, or, if it is, You are all-sufficient. Lord, help me out of this affliction, for You did redeem me on a former occasion. I was weak and friendless then, and could not help myself, but Your own arm of mercy was fully equal to the emergency. Lord, I know it is still quite sufficient now. If You had never delivered my soul out of such a puzzling, perplexing, and intricate case as mine, I might have doubted. But as You have already been my help in times of great strait, when no way of relief was visible, You are able to help me again. Therefore I lay hold upon the hand of Your power, and the arm of Your strength. You have been my help. Therefore You can help me again, O Jehovah! I know You can!

Again, my appeal is to Your *wisdom*. Lord, You have been my help, and if You do not help me now, all that help will go for nothing. It is of no use to have helped me so far, if You do not help me to the end. Now, Lord, I know You do not begin to build, and then leave the work incomplete, so that they that go by may say, "He began to build, but was not able to finish." You have made an investment in me, good Lord; You have gone deep in expenditures of mercy and love with a poor worm like me, and if You stop Your hand, Lord, You will lose all you have invested. You must go right through with it, Lord, or else You will have lost all the works of Your love, and Your power, and Your goodness which You have already so lavishly spent upon me. Is not that good pleading? "You have been my help"—Lord, if it were wise to help me so far, it must be wise to go through with it. Would it have been wise to bring Israel into the wilderness and feed them with manna for 40 years, and then let them die of starvation? What would the Egyptians say? Would they not ask, "Why did He bring them into the wilderness? Why did He conduct them so far, and afterwards allow them to perish?" Well does our poet put it—

"The work which wisdom undertakes,
Eternal mercy never forsakes."

For, if it is wise to begin with, it must be wise to carry it on. Lord Jesus, You have loved my soul as Jacob loved Rachel, and he was bound to serve for seven years to win her. And if he had served six and a half years, and then left off, he would never have had his Rachel. And You have, in Your infinite love, served for me these years, but if You leave off now, I shall never be Yours at last. My poor soul must perish, unless, till the last hour of life, You shall still wait upon me in mercy, and refresh me with Your grace. To my own soul at this moment this plea, "You have been my help," is a very powerful hold upon divine wisdom, and is an urgent reason why I may still ask for grace to be given me.

Perhaps the backbone of the argument lies in the attribute of *immutability*. "You have been my help, if You can change, then can You leave

me. But if You are indeed, Jehovah, "I Am that I Am," the same forever and forever, if You have once blessed, You are bound by the force of Your nature to bless right on, as long as You are God, and I require Your blessing." Have you not said, "I am God, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed"? What blessed notes that text contains. He, who has kept you to this day, if He changed, might leave you, but since He cannot change, He will bear you right through. How wicked we are to doubt our faithful God! The sun rose yesterday, and nobody doubted but what it would be up this morning. And there is not a man living but what believes the sun will shine tomorrow. Do you trust the sun, and will you not trust the God who kindles its light? The tide comes up to the shore, and then recedes according to the regular motion of the moon, and everybody trusts the tide, and is prepared for its coming in, and it's outgoing. And can you trust the unstable sea, and its fickle wave, and not rest upon the immutable God? You say the thing that was shall be, and surely God was forever and ever, and has kept His promises to His people, and therefore the thing shall be. If heaven above can be measured or the earth searched out, if the ordinances of the sun and of the moon can be changed, then may God forsake His people, but it can not, shall not be while He is still the same.

I think there is one more argument here, namely, a plea to God's *love*. "You have been my help." Lord, surely if You loved me enough to help me before, You love me enough to help me still. It is the plea of a child to a father. "Father, you have always fed me, will you let me starve? You have always clothed me; will you let me be naked?" It is the argument of a spouse to her husband as she says to him, "My Husband, you have never failed me yet. Whatever I have needed, you have supplied to me. Leave me not neither forsake me." You know how the plea has power with a heart which is touched with true affection. It is with us and our God, as though He had guided us halfway through a wilderness. We did not know one inch of the road, and had no provision for it, but He has helped up to now. If, when He had brought us right into the center of the waste, He would have said to us, "Now I am going to leave you," if we were in such a plight that on desert sand, where there was no pathway and no shelter, our guide should say, "Now I must leave you to yourselves," we would clutch him by the sleeve, and say, "Leave me not. I pray you do not leave me, else why have you brought me here at all? All the kindness of the past will be but cruelty, a studied tantalizing of me, if you leave me. Why did you bring me here? All the way I have come. I have depended upon you for everything. I could not have found my way so far, alone, and will you leave me now?" Oh, I think no man would be so brutal as to resist such an argument. He would say, "If in my kindness I have undertaken the conduct of this poor ignorant creature, and brought him so far, I cannot leave him till I have landed him safely at home." Shall the Lord be less kind than man? Imagine that a child has fallen into the sea, and you are a strong swimmer and have swum from the boat and clasped the

child, and you are bearing him on your shoulders and swimming to land. Suppose you should suddenly say, "My child, I have done something for you, but will do no more. I must drop you into the sea." Would not the little one say, "Sir, you picked me up when I was sinking, I would have been dead long ago but for you. Do not throw me off, sir. Strike out again, sir. Let me still cling to you." We may reason in the same manner with God. "My God, my God, if You had meant to let me be lost, why did You not do it years ago, and let me go down to hell without hope? But now You have given me a hope of heaven. You have let me know something of the joy of holiness. Some love to You, and some longings after You have stirred my soul. Will You leave me now, O my God? It cannot, must not be." The pleading is mighty, brethren, I know of none better. "You have been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me."

III. Now, thirdly, and briefly, here is EXPERIENCE INSTRUCTING FAITH.

My venerable brothers and sisters, the first word of this instruction is to you. Experience says to faith, "Trust God, for He has been your help *so long."* How long? Fifty years for some of you. How old are you, seventy or eighty? God has been your help, then, all that time. How long do you expect to live, to be eighty? You are seventy now. All you have seen through seven-eighths of life is that He is a faithful God. Can you not trust Him for the other eighth? Your sun is going down, its shadows are lengthening, but from early dawn all through the hot noontide He has been good to you. Can you not trust Him for the last few hours of eventide? Surely, surely God deserves that such long-continued kindness should not be received with ungrateful doubts. If He had meant to be a liar to you, you would have found Him out before this. If His promises were intended to be failures, they would have been failures to you before you had gone so far. Oh, believe Him for the rest of life, and go singing into heaven, "You have been my help." May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, enable you to put down all unbelief!

The Lord has been our help *so constantly* that the fact confirms our faith. If in looking back upon our lives, we could find a point or two where God had failed us, we might then let our faith flag. I can only speak as I find, I cannot find one instance in all my life in which God was untrue or unkind to me. If we never doubt God till we have cause for it, we shall never entertain any doubts so long as we live. Yesterday, as I looked at some little birds in a cage, I thought to myself, "These poor little creatures are entirely dependent upon those who feed them. If seed and water are not supplied to them, they cannot help themselves, and must die. And yet there they sit and sing with all their might. Their state of dependence never distresses them. They have perfect confidence in their keepers." And, I thought, that is just my position. I am God's singing bird. Perhaps I wonder where I shall get my bread from, or my sermon for next Sunday, and a great many cares and troubles come to me. But why should I be troubled? Instead of mistrusting my keeper, who

has fed me these many years, had I not better sit and sing as loudly as I can? Would not that be the best thing to do? The bird does it, and why should not a man do it, who is supposed to have more brains than a bird, but who sometimes does not seem to have half as much? Come, brethren, come! The Lord has constantly been true, let us not doubt.

And then He has helped us *so singularly*. Some here present have been in very remarkable tribulations, trials the like of which have not befallen other people—at least, so they think—have fallen to their lot, and yet they have had singular rescues and helps. Well, then, when you come into the singular predicament of dying, you shall have the singular grace of being able to rejoice when you die. Or, if any other remarkable trial should waylay you between here and heaven, you shall find extraordinary deliverance from Him who has been your help.

And I might say, in closing, God up to now has helped us in such a way that *He has glorified Himself*. We could not have believed that He could have so delightfully illustrated His divine attributes as He has done in our past biography. There have been such flashes of light out of His excellent glory that we have been astounded. So it will be to the last. God will be glorified in our mortal bodies while we live, and when we come to die. He has been our help, and He will be our help till, like a scroll, this world is rolled up, and time itself expires, and we have reached eternity.

I have two or three more thoughts to utter, and I have done. To self-righteous persons, our text can have no sweetness. You have always done your best, and have been very religious. You have believed that you deserve eternal life, and you have been on very good terms with yourselves. God has not been your help, you did not want it. You have done very well without it. You do not need washing in the blood of Jesus, for you were never a very great sinner. You do not require help from the Holy Spirit. You have always been able to attend to the formalities of religion without assistance from supernatural power. This is your secret judgment of your condition. You cannot say, "You have been my help," and I dare say you do not pray, "Leave me not, neither forsake me." You do not see the need of it. Well, your fancied salvation is such a one that the sooner you are rid of it the better. It is such a one that if you can put a millstone about its neck, and sink it in the sea, you will do well. For if you do not do that, it will sink you in hell forever. That hope of salvation which is not grounded upon Christ and the power of God, but which rests in self, is nothing but counterfeit. It is damnation gilded, nothing better. Away with it! Away with it! And oh, may you be made to go as guilty, as helpless, as dependent entirely upon mercy and divine strength, and then you will be in the way of salvation, but not till then. Oh, may the Spirit of God teach you this!

I have, here, some poor trembling soul who is seeking Christ, and he says, "O sir, I could not use the plea of the text this morning." Well, beloved friend, perhaps not in the strong sense in which the Christian can, but you may still use it in a measure. For instance, you need to be for-

given; you need to be saved. You can say to your heavenly Father, "O God, You have preserved my miserable life. You have bid the sun to shine upon the evil as well as the good. You have sent the showers and the harvest for me as well as for the best of Your servants. Oh, if You have done this, do more, and send me the gifts of Your grace." Besides, poor heart, you can say, "You have given me the Sabbath. You have permitted me to go and sit with Your servants. Though the meanest of them all, You permit me to hear the voice of gospel invitation. You speak to me, and say, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.' Oh, crown these gifts by giving me faith, by granting me life, the life of Your Holy Spirit. Save me, save me with a great salvation." I think that is good pleading and especially if you can add, "O God, You have set forth Your Son Jesus to be a propitiation for sin, and declared that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. I do trust in Him, and rest my soul upon Him alone. Do not reject me! Let me know Your great salvation, or I languish, faint, and die." You shall not be long in such a case as that. If you believe, all things are yours. If your only hope is in Him who bled on the cross, your transgressions are already blotted out. Go, and sin no more! Peace be unto you! Be of good courage! The Lord has looked upon you already with an eye of love. You are His, and He will never leave you nor forsake you, world without end.

God bless you all, dear friends, and He shall have the honor and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 27, 28.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—911, 735, 734.

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THE GREAT JAIL— AND HOW TO GET OUT OF IT
NO. 1145

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 30, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But the scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."
Galatians 3:22.

IN every work which we undertake it is most important that we should act upon right principles, for if we are misled upon essential points, our efforts will be wasted since success cannot possibly be the result. A man may study the stars as long as he pleases, but he certainly will not come to right conclusions if he calculates their courses upon the theory that they daily revolve around the earth as a center. The alchemists were earnest even to enthusiasm, but the object of their pursuit was unattainable, and the theories which guided their investigations were absurd, and therefore, they exhibited a sorrowful spectacle of misapplied perseverance, and labor thrown away. In mechanics the most ingenious contriver must fail if he forgets the law of gravitation. You must proceed upon right principles, or disappointment awaits you. If a man in London believed that he would reach the city of York by traveling rapidly to the south, he would certainly fail, even though he had a special express attached to his carriage. If another should be sincerely of the opinion that by drinking a strong poison he would restore himself to health, his friends and survivors would have to regret his infatuation. The earnestness of his belief will not alter the fact. The principles which make the deadly drug so murderous will not yield because the man is sincere, and he will certainly die for his obstinacy.

Now, the greatest matter of concern for any one of us is the eternal salvation of our soul. We need to be saved, and according to the Scriptures, there is but one way of salvation. But that way does not happen to be in favor among the sons of men. The great popular principle, popular all over the world, no matter whether the people happen to be Protestant or Catholic, Jew or Muslim, Brahminist or Buddhist, is *self-salvation*—they would reach eternal life by merit. There are differences about what is to be done, but the great universal principle of unregenerate man is that he is, somehow or other, to save himself. This is his principle, and the further he goes in it, the less likely is he to be saved. My objective, this morning, is to bring before you the much despised principle which God has revealed as the only true one, namely, salvation by the grace of God, through Jesus Christ, by simple faith in Him. We preach, at God's command, the way of salvation by mercy, not by merit, by faith, not by

works, by grace, not by the efforts of men. May God help us to set forth that principle, that many may accept it. I do not care one snap of my finger about preaching so that the style shall please your ears, I long to reach your hearts. I want you to receive the only sure method of salvation, and I pray the Holy Spirit to baptize my words in His own mighty fire, and make them to burn their way into your hearts, and subdue you to the obedience of faith.

The text divides itself into two parts, but my sermon will not end there, for I shall try to enforce its great Truths. Upon two points we will speak at once. The first is *a crowded prison*—"The Scripture has confined all under sin." And the second is *a glorious jail delivery*—"that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." After that, we will try to show how excellent is that plan which God has marked out—the plan of deliverance from sin by the promise of faith in Christ Jesus.

I. Behold THE CROWDED PRISON—*"The Scripture has confined all under sin." The Jailer* is the Scripture—a *lawful* authority, for the Scripture is not the word of man, but of the Spirit of God. If any man rejects the Scripture, I have little to say to him at this moment, for I am speaking mainly to those who accept the Bible as having been written by an infallible pen. If the Scriptures then, which you admit to be written by God, confine you in sin, you are shut up by a lawful authority against which you cannot rebel. God has done it. God's own voice has declared you to be a prisoner under sin. No authority is more *powerful* than that of Scripture, for it is not only true, but it has force to support it. Where the Word of the Lord is, there is power. The Scripture, when it comes home to the heart like a hammer, breaks in pieces, and like a fire burns its way. We need not be alarmed when judged of men, but the voice of the Lord is full of terrible majesty, and awes the spirit which it condemns.

But how does the Scripture confine all men under sin? I reply, first, it has been well observed by Martin Luther that the very promises of Scripture confine all mankind under sin. To begin with the first—that morning star of promise which shone over this world when first our parents left the gates of blighted Eden—"The seed of the women shall bruise the serpent's head." Since such a promise was needed, it is clear that the blessing could only come to men through the Redeemer, the seed of the woman, and that in the case of all men, the serpent's head must be broken, or they would remain under his dominion. When a blessing is promised, there must have been a need for it. Where a deliverer is predicted, there must have been a necessity for Him. If a blessing could come to men by the way of merit, or in the course of nature, there would be no need of a promise. A promise implies a need, and the very first promise of deliverance by the woman's seed from the power of the serpent implies that men were under that evil power.

The promise of grace is clear in the covenant with Noah, in which the Lord declared that He would no more destroy the earth with a flood. Had the race of man been holy, God would not have destroyed it with a flood,

for He would have violated justice by destroying an innocent race. To a pure race there could be no necessity for a covenant of preservation, for there would be no conceivable reason for the destruction of the innocent. The very making of a covenant that the earth should not again be swept with an overwhelming flood implies that, apart from such a gracious covenant, the earth might justly be destroyed at any time. The lovely rainbow, while it comfortably reminds us of the divine faithfulness, is also a memorial of that universal depravity of our race which necessitated a covenant of grace to stand as a barrier for our protection lest the righteous wrath of God should break forth upon us.

The yet more explicit covenant which God made with Abraham plainly shows men to be shut up under sin, because it runs thus, "In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," proving that the nations were not originally in a blessed state, and could only be blessed through the promised seed. If some of them were blessed already, or could be blessed by their works, then the words of the promise would not be true. The covenant blessing comes to the nations only through Jesus Christ, the seed, and, consequently, it is clear that the nations were in need of a blessing.

The fact is that the very existence of the gospel, and its provisions of grace, pardon, and so on, the coming of a Savior, His death upon the tree, and His intercession in heaven, all prove that men were confined in sin. If they had not been so, what need of you, O Cavalry? What need of Your five wounds, O Son of God? Surely all this vast machinery for redemption is ridiculous if men are not slaves. This wondrous filling of a fountain with blood is a vain superfluity if men are not foul. So the very Scripture which is brightest with life to the sons of men carries within it convincing evidence that men, apart from the grace of God, are shut up under sin.

I have no doubt the apostle alluded more immediately to that part of Scripture which deals with *law.* Turn, I pray you, to the 20th chapter of Exodus, which I hope you carry in your memories. Let me ask you to read those Ten Commands with deep solemnity, and see whether they do not shut you up under sin. What man can read them, and then say, "I am clear of all these"? The Ten Commands surround us on all sides, and encompass all the movements of body, soul, and spirit, comprising under their jurisdiction the whole range of moral action. They hold us under fire from all points, and nowhere are we out of range. These 10 precepts are condensed into two comprehensive precepts, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself." Can you listen to those two precepts, which are the essence of the 10, without feeling that you have not loved God with all your heart and soul, and mind and strength, but very far from it? And that you have not loved your neighbor as yourself, but have gone far aside? A man who can read the law, and not tremble, if he is out of Christ, must be dead in his sin. He must be ignorant, altogether, of its meaning, or else he must have

hardened his heart against its terrible import. The awakened conscience knows that the law curses every one of us, without exception, for we have broken it.

The law as given on Sinai does that; and let us remember that the law as repeated by Mosaic command upon Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, at the time of the entrance of Israel into the Holy Land, is not less express than the thunders of the mount which might not be touched. Read the passage in Deuteronomy 27:26. Perhaps of all the verses of the Word of God, this is the most sweeping and utterly crushing to self-righteous hopes. "Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of the law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen." The apostle quotes in another form, in the New Testament—"Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." The law roars like a lion upon us in this sentence. If there is in any one of us a solitary violation of the command of God, we are cursed by Him. If we have at any time throughout life, in any measure or degree, in deed, word, or thought, by omission or commission, diverged from absolute perfection, we are cursed. Such is the statement of God, Himself, by the mouth of His servant Moses, in this Book of Deuteronomy. There is no exception made whatever. All sins are included in it, and we are, all of us, included—"Cursed is *everyone* that continues not in *all things* that are written in the book of the law to do them." Right well does our text say that the Scripture has shut all of us up under sin.

We are putting no strain upon the Scripture, for such was the understanding of the law by the saints of old. Turn to Psalm 143:2 and remember, while I quote this, that this is by no means a solitary passage, but only selected as one of many. There David says, "Enter not into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight shall no man living be justified." He stood before God, a man whose heart was sincere and true, but he did not dare to bring his works into judgment. And speaking by the Spirit of God as a prophet, he declared that in God's sight no man could be clear of guilt.

And yet further, brethren, the law of God shuts us up, not only as it was delivered from Sinai, as it was repeated at Gerizim, as it was understood by the saints, but especially as it was expounded by the Savior. He did not come to break the bars of this prison, or to remove this jailer from being its marshal. His deliverance is not by violence, but by fair legal process. He came to strengthen, rather than to weaken the law, for what does He say concerning it? He does not merely forbid adultery, but He expounds the command by saying, "He that looks upon a woman to lust after her commits adultery with her already in his heart." He shows what had been so much forgotten by the Jews, that the commandments are spiritual, and that they reach infinitely further than mere outward actions. That, for instance, "You shall not kill," does not merely mean, "You shall do no murder," but is to be understood in the sense given it by the Lord Jesus—"I say unto you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment." As Christians un-

derstand it, the law forbids our doing anything whereby the natural or spiritual life of another may be placed in jeopardy. Now, since the law is to be so understood, its commandments are exceedingly broad. Since it touches our thoughts, our imaginations, and our casual wishes, who among us can stand before it? Verily the law confines us as in a terrible Bastille, and we are each one of us, prisoners under sin.

Here will be the time for us to say that not only do the Scriptures of promise, and the Scriptures of law shut us up, but so do all the Scriptures of the old ceremonial law of the Jews. "Oh," you say, "how is that?" I reply, "When the destroying angel went through Egypt on that memorable night, not one man, woman, or child was delivered except through the sprinkling of the blood upon the doorposts and the lintel of the houses where they dwelt. What did that mean? Why, that they were all under sin. And had it not been for the blood, the same angel who smote the first-born of Egypt would have smitten every one of them, God's people, as they were, for they were all under sin. When they reached the wilderness, there were different rites and ceremonies, but it is remarkable that everything under the law was sprinkled with blood, because the people and all that they did were polluted with sin before God, and needed to be cleansed by atonement. When an Israelite came to worship God at the Tabernacle, he could not come without a sacrifice. Atonement for sin was the way to God—the altar and the slaughtered lamb were the way of approach. There must be blood to cleanse the comer because every comer was unclean. Note, also, that the Holy Place in the Tabernacle in the wilderness was closed, and into it no man went but the High Priest, and he but once every year. This was a most solemn declaration of God that no man was fit to come near to His infinite holiness, that every man, even of the chosen people, was so polluted that there must be hung up a veil between him and God. And the one man who did come near at all must approach with sprinkled blood, and smoking incense, typical of the coming sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. There was nothing about the Mosaic economy to say to man, "You are good, or you can be good, and you can save yourself." But everywhere the declaration was, "You have rebelled and have not served the Lord. You cannot come near unto Him until you are purged by the blood of the great sacrifice. God cannot accept you as you are, you are polluted and defiled." The sinfulness of all men is abundantly taught in Scripture. Indeed, it is to be found on every page of it.

I have spoken of the jailer. Now notice His prisoners. "The Scripture has concluded *all* under sin"—all, all. The heathen!? Yes, for the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans tells us, that though they have not God's written law, they have enough of it upon their consciences to accuse them if they do wrong, and every heathen has violated the law of God by sinning against the light of nature. To us who have heard that law the, "all," of the text is very emphatic. But you have been very moral, you say. Yes, but you are shut up under sin, for, outwardly moral as you have been, you dare not say that you have never thought of evil so as to long for it, that you have never indulged wrong imaginations, that you

have never a rash word, that you have never sinned in action. Surely you dare not say that you have loved God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength? Nor that you have always loved your neighbor as yourself? My friend, you, who are so fair to look upon when you look in the glass of your own self-adulation, if you could see yourself as God sees you, would discover that you are leprous from head to foot. Your sins are abundant and loathsome though you perceive them not. And this is true of the most religious of those men who are resting in outward observances. They have prayed every night and morning since they were children, they have never absented themselves from assemblies for worship, and they have attended to baptism and communion, and the like. Ah, sirs, but the law takes no account of this. If you have not kept its ten commandments perfectly, it accepts no ceremonies as recompense. God requires of His creatures that they obey His law completely, without flaw, and one sin of omission or commission will bring down that dreadful sentence which I have already quoted, "Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." Religious or irreligious, the broken law confines all men in the same prison.

Now, notice for a minute, the prison itself. It is one from which we cannot escape by any efforts of our own. Brethren, if we say, "We will never sin again," we shall sin. And our never sinning again would make no atonement for past offenses. Suppose we were to resolve, from this time forth, that we would suffer mortifications of body, and sorrow of heart, to make atonement for sin? It would be useless, for the law speaks nothing of repentance. When a man has broken the law, he must be punished for it. There is no space left for repentance under the law, and the sure result of our being shut up in the prison of the law, apart from the grace of God, is to be taken from that prison to execution, and to be destroyed forever by the wrath of God. There is the prison of the text. There is the jailer and his prisoners.

II. It is our great happiness to know that we are not shut up in this way with a view to our hopeless destruction, but in order that the grace of God may come to us, and so we have to speak of A GLORIOUS JAIL-DELIVERY. The jail-delivery which I have to speak of is evidently *of those who are shut up in the prison.* "The Scripture has concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Christ came into this world to save those who have broken the law, those whom the law curses, and those who have no means whatever, of escaping from the curse, unless Jesus opens the way. He has not come to save the righteous. If there are any among you who will not believe that you are shut up in the prison of the law, I have no gospel to preach to you. Why send a physician to a man who is not sick? And why offer alms to a man who is not poor? If you can save yourselves by your works, go and do so, fools that you are, for you might as well hope to drink dry the Atlantic. If you believe in self-salvation, I am hopeless of doing you any good till you are exhausted of your strength. When you are

weak and sick, and ready to die, then will you be willing to accept the free salvation of Christ. Remember, Christ came to save the ungodly, the guilty alone, are objects of mercy.

The Lord Jesus Christ has come to bring to all those who believe in Him a *complete deliverance* from the bondage of the law. The man who believes in Jesus is forgiven. The very moment he believes, all his transgressions are blotted out, and from that moment he is just in the sight of God. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Having believed, he becomes, at once, a child of God, a son of the Most High; and since God will never cast away His children, nor reject those whom He has loved, the man is then and there saved, and saved eternally. He was a slave before, and deserved the lash and felt it. He is a child now, and is no longer under the law, but under grace. The principle which guides him now is not, "Do this and you shall live," but this—"I am saved and now I love to serve my God." Now, he does not work for wages, and expect to win a reward by merit, he is a saved man, and he has all that he needs, for Christ is his, and Christ is all. Now a higher principle burns within his bosom than that of self-salvation, he loves God and is selfish no longer.

Observe that this jail-delivery *comes to men by promise.* It is salvation according to promise. The promise is given, says the text. Now, if any man is saved on the Bible plan of salvation, it is not the result of anything he has done, he has never deserved it, and it is not the result of a bargain between him and God. No, the Lord says freely, "I will blot out your sins; I will accept you; I will hear your prayer; I will save you." He does this because He chooses to do it of His own sovereign good will and pleasure. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." "So then, it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy."

The promise is not made to works, but only *to faith.* It is "the promise of faith by Christ Jesus." If God had made His promise to a certain measure of holiness, or a certain amount of feeling, then, brethren we might have despaired. But the promise is to faith. If you believe, you are saved. You poor harlot, if you believe, you are saved! You thief, you murderer, you vilest of wretches, however far you may have gone, if you believe in Jesus Christ, your transgressions are forgiven you, and you are a child of God. It is your believing, not your doing; your trusting, your relying upon Christ, not your prayers, tears, preaching, hearing, or anything else you can do, or be, or feel. You are saved by giving up self entirely, and resting wholly on Him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, namely, the crucified Redeemer.

Observe that the faith spoken of in the text is faith *in Christ Jesus.* It must not be faith in yourself, nor faith in a priest, nor faith in sacraments, or faith in a set of doctrines. The promise is to faith in Christ Jesus. That is to say, you must believe that Christ, the Son of God, came on earth and became a man, took your sins upon His shoulders, bore them up to the tree, and suffered what was due for your sins in His own

person on the cross. And you must trust yourself with Him, with Him fully, with Him alone, and with all your heart. And if you do, the promise is given to faith in Christ Jesus, and it will be fulfilled to you, and you shall be blessed and saved.

This promise of faith in Christ Jesus is given *to all believers,* weak as well as strong, young as well as old. Dear friend, if you have only believed in Jesus during the present service, you are as certainly forgiven as if you had been a believer 50 years. If you only believed in Jesus when the last words escaped my lips, yet still your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Faith is the vital matter.

"But there must be works," says one, "to follow." Brother, there will be works to follow. There was never a true faith which did not produce works, but the works do not save us, faith, alone, saves. How strong is the apostle Paul upon this point! Read the Epistle to the Romans carefully, and the Epistle to the Galatians, and you will see that they come down like a Nasmyth hammer upon all notion of salvation by our own doings. No reasoning could be more cogent, no expressions more plain. "Not of works, lest any man should boast," says the apostle. And he puts it over again, "If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it is of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." He will have it that we are saved as poor sinners by the sovereign grace of God, through faith in Christ Jesus, and not by works, or forms, or ceremonies, or anything whatever of our own doing.

Now, that is the plan of salvation. I put it before you, and I pray through Jesus Christ that many may receive it, for it is not a matter of human opinion, but of divine ordinance. I am not setting up the dogma of a sect; I am preaching to you the very truth of God. If there is salvation by any other way than by Jesus Christ, I am a false prophet among you, and this Bible, also, is false. But if there is salvation to believers in Jesus, I am a saved man, and all of you who have believed in Jesus are saved also, effectually and eternally saved.

Having thus spoken upon the text itself, I desire to say a few things upon the subject in general. Objections are continually raised to this plan of salvation. The world's plan of salvation is, "Do." The Bible plan of salvation is, "It is all done; accept it as a free gift." The gospel way of salvation is, Christ has saved His people, and as many as trust in Him are His people, and are saved. Just think for a minute, is not this way of salvation which we have preached to you the only one which would be suited to all sorts and conditions of men? Dear sir you may be a man of excellent disposition, and of admirable habits. I will suppose that the salvation to be preached by us was exactly such as would be suitable to such a person as you believe yourself to be, would not this be a very misfortunate thing for many others? Are there not living within your observation many persons who are far below you in moral character? Do you not know of whole swarms of your fellow creatures whose outward life is utterly defiled? Some of these are conscious of their degradation, and would gladly rise out of it. Would you have them left to despair? A way of

salvation suited to the righteous, it is clear, would not suit them. Are they to be overlooked? Would you have salvation put up to an examination like a place in the Civil Service, and only those allowed to pass who are as good as you are? Are all beneath your level, to perish? I am speaking to you on your own ground, and I feel sure that you love your fellow men enough to say, "No, let the plan of salvation be such as to save the most reprobate of men." Then, I ask you, what plan could there be but this one, that God freely forgives for Christ's sake, even the greatest offenders, if they turn to Him, and put their trust in His dear Son? We have here a gospel which reaches to the lowest depths, and saves to the uttermost.

But I shall put another argument. Would any other salvation, than that which I have preached suit any man? O excellent sir, would any other, after all, suit you? I admit, and I admire your excellences. I would that all men were such as you are, rather than dissolute and depraved. But, sir, can you really sit down in the quietude of your chamber, and as a thoughtful man weigh your own character in the scales, and say that it is so perfect that you could die with it in perfect peace and stand before your Maker without fear? I am sure it is not so. It is very remarkable that some persons who have been exceedingly moral have never seen their sinfulness till they have been on the borders of the grave, and then they have realized eternity, and have abhorred themselves in dust and ashes. I have heard of some who, in the very hour of imminent peril of death by drowning, have in the act of sinking seen the whole panorama of their lives pass before them, and they have seen, as they never saw before, the evil nature of that which they before thought so excellent. Then they have said, "I must be saved by the merits of Jesus. I cannot be saved by my own." My dear friend, whoever you may be, I am not about to condemn you, but I must believe God's Word before I believe your estimate of yourself. And as God's Word has declared that you have sinned and are condemned, I am sure that for you, as well as for the rest of your fellow men, there is no plan of salvation at all available, but that of salvation by the free mercy of God through Jesus Christ His Son.

Now, observe a few of the beauties of the plan of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. It prevents men from having low thoughts of sin, because if a man says, "I have not kept this law of God perfectly, but I still have done very well, and any mistakes I have made are little sins. God is merciful, He will wipe them out,"—he is sure to be a believer in self-salvation. It is always connected with narrow thoughts of sin. A man knows he has sinned, but he thinks little of the wrong. He cannot believe that sin is such a great evil that men should be cast into hell for it. He kicks against the doctrine of damnation, he will not believe it just, because he does not know and will not admit that sin is a great and tremendous evil. So long as the idea of self-salvation exists, sin is lightly thought of. But oh, when we see that sin could not be put away till the incarnate God Himself, did hang upon the tree and bleed to death for men, then we see sin in its true colors, and loathe it as a deadly thing. And with our joy for par-

doned guilt, we mingle abhorrence of the sin which required such an atoning sacrifice.

The plan of salvation by grace has this beauty about it, that it gives men high thoughts of God. In the other system, their idea of God is that He is very much like they are. Look at the Catholic's god. He is pleased with candles and delights in incense, he is a god who likes show and baubles, garments of blue and scarlet, and dolls dressed up and flowers on his altars. I know not what kind of god to call him. However, that is their notion of him. They try to save themselves, and they pull down their god to their standard. And every man who is a self-saver, even if he is a Protestant, lowers God in some manner. He fancies that God will accept something short of perfection. Each man has a different standard. That miserly old gentleman—his standard is that he will build a row of almshouses with his moldy leavings, and that will content the Most High. Another says, "I never open my shop on Sunday." Perhaps he cheats enough on Monday to make up for it, but Sunday's rest, that will do for his god. Another, who is living a wicked life in private, believes the doctrines of grace, and that will satisfy his god. But the man who is saved by the grace of God says, "My God is infinitely just. Nothing will content Him but a perfect righteousness. As a moral lawgiver, He will not put away sin till He has laid punishment upon one who stood in the sinner's place. He is so loving that He gave His Son. He is so just that He slew His Son on my behalf." All the divine attributes flame forth with splendor before the eyes of the man who is saved by faith, and he is led to reverence and to adore.

The way of salvation by grace, beloved, is the best promoter of holiness in the entire world! "There," says yonder gentleman, "I went to hear Spurgeon in the Tabernacle this morning, and he was crying out against salvation by good works. Of course the worst results will come of such teaching." Ah, that has been the cuckoo-cry from the very first, whereas salvation by grace promotes good works far better than the teaching of salvation by works ever will. For those who hope to be saved by their works have generally very scanty works to be saved by, and those who put works aside altogether as a ground of hope, and look to grace, alone, are the very people who are most zealous to perform good works. And I will tell you why. Who loved Christ best at the Pharisee's feast? Simon, the Pharisee, who had kept the Law? Ah, no! He was to be saved by his doings, and yet Jesus said to him, "You gave Me no kiss; you gave Me no water to wash My feet." Simon did not love the Master. He did what he did because he thought he ought to do it, and must do it. But there was a poor woman there who was a sinner; and she had had much forgiven, and she, it was, who washed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Simon shows how the self-righteous love the Savior; they do not even wash His feet or kiss His cheeks. But those who are saved by grace love Jesus, and therefore kiss His feet, and bathe them with their tears, and would willingly lay down their lives for Him.

Law! There is no power for holiness in it! Law drives our spirits to rebellion, but love has magic in it. Has God forgiven me? Did Christ die for me? Am I God's child? Has He forgiven me, not because of anything I did, but just because He would do it out of love to my poor guilty soul? O God, I love You. What would You have me to do? There speaks the man who will perform good works, I guarantee you, sir. And while he will tread under foot with the deepest detestation any idea that he can merit anything of God's, he is the man who will lay himself out, as long as he lives, for the honor of that dear Lord and Master, by whose precious blood he has been redeemed. The law does not furnish me with a constraining principle, but the gospel does. The law treats me like a mere hireling, and a hireling can never serve with the zeal which is born of love. There is a better place with double wages, and naturally enough, the servant leaves your house, but your child will not. You do not give your child wages, and you do not bind him by indentures or agreements. He loves you, and his sense of your love leads him to a tender obedience, and what he does is doubly sweet to you. Missionaries and martyrs have done and borne, for love's sake, what law could not have forced from them. Oh yes, the doctrine of salvation by grace, by teaching men to love, transforms them, and makes new creatures of them. I have seen it hundreds of times. There are some here, but I will not speak of them, but of cases parallel to theirs. They have been to a place of worship, and they have been preached to about their duty and they have read the Bible, and have thought it was all about what was required from their own efforts. But all the while they have felt no obedience of heart, no love to Christ, and no joy in God. But those same persons have heard the gospel, and found that there is nothing to do, that Jesus Christ has done it all, that sin was put away by His death, and righteousness was worked out. And they have taken what God has presented to them, and believed in Jesus, and been saved. And from that very moment the difference has been evident. They have cried, "I never felt any love to God before, but now I do. I love Him with all my soul for what He has done for me." You hear them say, "I used to go to the house of God as a matter of duty, and I might almost as well have been away, for it was no enjoyment to me. But now I go as a matter of privilege, and I take my heart with me, and sing God's praises with all my soul, because He has done so much for me." Those people will tell you that whereas they resolved to be good, and to give up vice, and to practice virtue, they never did it till they believed in Jesus. And when they believed in Him, love to Him made service easy and sin hateful, and they became new creatures in Christ Jesus by the Spirit's power.

There is the heart of it all. If you want to get rid of the guilt of sin, you must believe in Jesus. But equally, if you would be rid of the chains of sin, the tyranny of your passions, the domination of your lusts, you must believe in Him. From His side there flows not merely blood, but water—blood to take away your criminality, and water to take away your tendencies to sin—so that from now on you shall not serve sin, or live any long-

er in it. It is all there in that pierced heart. It is all there in that crimson fount, opened on Calvary's bloody tree. Look to Jesus and you shall be saved. This is it in a nutshell.

"There is life in a look at the crucified One."

I may never have an opportunity of preaching this gospel to some of you again. It may be the first time you have heard it, and perhaps the last. O sirs, I charge you accept it, and may the Spirit of God compel you to do so. We will meet in heaven, if it is so, but if you put it from you, you are like a man who flings away the only lifebelt that can keep him alive in the angry flood. You put from you the only medicine under heaven that can heal your soul, for I am holding up before you the only gospel in the world. If any man preaches any other gospel, let him be accursed. Intolerant! I am content to be as intolerant as my Master, and He bade me say, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be damned."

"But may I not be saved some other way?" No, sir, "But, may I not reject with impunity, this which you have preached?" No, sir, at your peril is it, and before God I will put it right plainly before you. You must believe in Jesus, and if you reject Him, your blood is upon your own head, for there are no other ways of salvation. The Lord grant that you may receive it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—GALATIANS 3.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84(iii.), 554, 549.

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CONSOLATION FOR THE DESPAIRING
NO. 1146

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 7, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Your eyes, nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried unto You." Psalm 31:22.

I DESIRE at this time to speak to those who are much depressed in spirit, the sons of despondency and daughters of mourning who dwell upon the dreary confines of despair. It may seem objectionable among so large an audience to address my discourse to a class so comparatively small, but I must leave it to your compassion to excuse me. No, I think I hardly need do that, but may urge as my apology the nature of my calling. When the shepherd comes in the early morning to his flock, do not his eyes single out the sick, and does he need forgiveness if, for a while, he devotes all his skill and his care to those sheep which need it? He does not reason with himself that because of the largeness of the flock, and his anxious care that all should be fed, renders it impossible for him to bind up that which is broken and heal that which is diseased. But, on the contrary, his attention to all is proved by his special interest in the particular cases which most require his tenderness. Or take another parable—the watcher on the beach, with his telescope in his hand, paces to and fro and keeps guard for his appointed time. He looks through the glass again and again, but a glance contents him so far as most of yonder gallant vessels are concerned, which are now in the offing. But by-and-by his glass remains steadily at his eye. His gaze is fixed and in a few moments he gives a signal to his fellows and they haul the boat to the sea and launch her. What has there been so peculiar about this craft that it has gained the watcher's attention and stirred him to action? He saw signals of distress, or by some other token he knew the ship's need, and therefore he bestirred himself and engaged every willing hand to lend her help. I, too, remain upon the lookout, and surely it is right that my eyes should rest most anxiously where the distress signals are visible, and where souls bound for eternity are floundering in doubt and ready to perish in despair.

I feel deeply for the mourners in Zion and I pray the Lord to cause His Word, through my ministry, to be as the oil of joy to them. Surely we may expect the divine help of the Holy Spirit in our endeavor to console them. For the special office of the Holy Spirit, under the present dispensation, is to be "the Comforter," who is to abide with us forever. While we bring forth the oil and wine from His own stores, we may hope that He will

pour them into the wounds of the afflicted, for this is His office and it would be blasphemy to imagine that He will neglect it. He comforts effectually in an all-sufficient and omnipotent manner.

I feel, too, that I have a Scriptural warrant for introducing such a subject as this into the midst of a congregation where there are many joyous hearts. Because this psalm, which is, to a large extent, sorrowful, was, nevertheless, intended for public worship, for it bears the inscription, "To the chief Musician," as do several others which are even fuller of grief—as, for instance, the 22nd which is the psalm of the Passion, and, nevertheless, is committed to the chief leader of sacred song in the house of the Lord. If, therefore, griefs which to the fullest could only be known by a few, were nevertheless to be made the subject of public psalmody, I am quite sure they ought not to be passed over in public ministry, but we ought to consider the cases of the ones and twos whose garments are sackcloth and whose drink is wormwood. It is our bounden duty to sympathize with them and speak with them for their good. Nor need we fear that the rest of the assembly will suffer, for the 99 sheep in the wilderness never come to any ill because the shepherd is seeking the one lone wanderer.

I do not intend considering the text strictly in its connection, but shall use it as a suitable expression of the mental grief of those I would benefit. Notice that it indicates *an inward sorrow,* it speaks of *a rash expression*—"I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Your eyes." It mentions *a pleading cry* and it bears witness to *a cheering result* to that cry— "nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried unto You."

I. At the outset, note that there is implied in the text a deep, bitter, INWARD SORROW.

The man who wrote the verse before us was pained in his heart. There are many in like case at this moment. Their soul faints with heaviness and their life is a burden. How came they to be so? Verily, there are many causes for melancholy. Some have their spirit pitched upon a low key constitutionally; neither will their music ever reach the highest notes till they are taught to sing the new song in another world. The windows of their house are very narrow and do not open towards Jerusalem but towards the desert. Something is wrong with their bodily frame, the tacklings are loosed, they cannot strengthen the mast, and the vessel labors terribly. When there is a leak in the vessel, it is little wonder that the waters come in even unto the soul.

With other mournful ones depression began through a great trial. As we have heard of some that their hair turned gray in a single night through grief, so doubtless many souls have aged into sorrow in a single trying hour. One blow has bruised the lily's stalk and made it wither. One touch of a rude hand has broken the crystal vase. Suns have been shaded in the midst of the brightest summer days and a morning of delight has been followed by an evening of lamentation.

In some cases, God knows how many, a secret sin, unconfessed to the Father, has festered into misery. There may have been wanton presumption, or pride of heart, or discontent, or inward rebellion against the will of God. There may have been willful negligence of the means of grace, or despising of the value of the fellowship and joy of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the Lord may have hidden Himself for a while in chastisement. Or it may be that there has been a gradual fretting of the spirit with minor vexations, long-continued and wearisome, which have worn the heart, even as constant dripping wears away stones. Incessant opposition or neglect from those we love may, at last, cause the spirit to yield. And when that takes place, life becomes bondage. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

I have also known an unwise ministry to add to the sorrower's woe. A legal ministry will do it and so also will that teaching which bids men look within for comfort, and sets up one uniform experience as the standard for all the people of God. The causes are various, but the case is always painful. O you, who are walking in the light, deal gently with your brethren whose bones are broken, for you may also suffer from the same down casting. Lay yourselves out to comfort the Lord's mourners. They are not good company and they are very apt to make you unhappy as well as themselves, but for all that, be very tender towards them, for the Lord Jesus would have you so. Remember what woes Ezekiel pronounces upon the strong that roughly push the weaker sort. God is very jealous over His little children, and if the more vigorous members of the family are not kind to them, He may take away their strength and make them even to envy the little ones whom once they despised. You can never err in being tender to the downcast. Lay yourself out as much as may be in you to bind up the broken-hearted and cheer the faint, and you will be blessed in the deed.

When the natural spirits sink in those men who have no God to go to, their depression takes its own particular shape. Any physician can tell you of instances of mental distress in which persons have surrounded themselves with imaginary ills, and made themselves martyrs to fancied disorders. We have seen cases which might almost compel an observer to laugh if they had not been so terribly serious to the patients, themselves. If a man is a Christian, it is very natural that his troubles should assume a spiritual form. The only shades which can effectually darken his day are those which arise from sacred things. The fears which haunt him are not fears about his daily bread, but fears about the bread of life, fears as to his entrance into the eternal kingdom. The disease, from the physical side, is at bottom probably the same in the Christian as in the ungodly man, but, as his main thoughts are set upon divine things, he, in his depression, naturally dwells most upon his soul's affairs. At such times the spiritually afflicted are filled with horrible apprehensions. Let me ask you, what is the most horrible apprehension that a Christian man can have? Is it not that of the text, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"?

Nothing distresses a Christian so much as the fear of being a castaway of God. You shall find no real Christian in despair because he is becoming poor. You shall not find him utterly cast down because worldly comforts are taken away. But let his Lord hide His face and he is troubled. Let him doubt his sonship and he is overwhelmed. Let him question his interest in Christ and his joy has fled. Let him fear that the life of God never was in his soul and you shall hear him mourn like a dove. How can he live without his God?

Yet this bitter sorrow has been endured by not a few of the best of men. If it could be said that only those Christians who walk at a distance from Christ, or those who are inconsistent in life, or those who are but little in prayer have felt in this way, then indeed, there would be cause for the gravest disquietude. But it is a matter of fact that some of the choicest spirits among the Lord's elect have passed through the Valley of Humiliation and even sojourned there by the months together. Saints who are now among the brightest in heaven, have yet in their day, sat weeping at the gates of despair and asked for the crumbs which the dogs eat under the master's table. Read the life of Martin Luther. You would suppose, from what is commonly known of the brave Reformer, that he was a man of iron, immovable and invulnerable. So he was when he had to fight his Master's battles against Rome. But at home, on his bed, and in his quiet chamber, he was frequently the subject of spiritual conflicts such as few have ever known. He had so much joy in believing that at times he was carried away with a tumult of boisterous exultation. But on other occasions he sank to the very deeps and was hard put to it to bear up at all. And that happened, too, even in his last moments, so that the worst battle of his life was fought upon that mysterious country which stretches towards the gates of the Celestial City. Do not condemn yourself, my dear sister, do not cast yourself away, my dear brother, because your faith endures many conflicts and your spirits sink very low. David, himself, said in his haste, "I am cut off from before Your eyes," yet there sits David in the blessed choir in heaven. And even here on earth he was a man after God's own heart.

There are great benefits to come out of these severe trials and depressions. There is a need that for a season we should be in heaviness. You cannot make great soldiers without war, or train skillful seamen upon shore. It appears necessary that if a man is to become a great believer, he must be greatly tried. If he is to be a great helper of others, he must pass through the temptations of others. If he is to be greatly instructed in the things of the kingdom, he must learn by experience. And if he is to be a loud singer to the tune of sovereign grace, he must hear deep calling unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts. The uncut diamond has but little brilliance. The unthreshed corn feeds none and so the untried professor is of small practical use or beauty. Many have a comparatively smooth pathway through life, but their position in the church is not that which the experienced believer occupies, neither could they do his work

among the afflicted. The man who is much worked and often harrowed may thank God if the result of it is a larger harvest to the praise and glory of God by Jesus Christ. The time shall come with you, whose faces are covered with sorrow, when you shall bless God for your sorrows. The day will come when you shall set much store by your losses and your crosses, your troubles and your afflictions, counting them happy which endure—

"From all your afflictions His glory shall spring,
And the deeper your sorrows the louder you'll sing."

II. I will speak no more upon this inward sorrow; a handful of bitter herbs is enough. I shall now pass on to notice THE RASH EXPRESSION of the Psalmist's aching heart, "I said in my haste." We have in the psalms other instances in which David spoke hastily. He had better have bitten his tongue. We may speak in a moment, words which we would give the world to recall. Oh, if some rash speeches could be unsaid! The price would be too dear to purchase their unsaying—unkind, provoking, cutting things towards men, and unbelieving, fretful, petulant, injurious words towards God. Better count to 10 before we speak, when we are in an agitated state of mind. It is a common sin for persons whose hearts are in bondage to allow their tongues too great a liberty. David said, "I am cut off from before Your eyes." And many have not only said this in haste, but they have continued to repeat it for a long time, which is much worse. Some have spoken in this fashion by the months together—yes, and some for years. Sorrowful is it that they should have done so, but so it has been.

Now this rash speech rests altogether on insufficient grounds. Why does a man in despondency argue that God has cast him away? He reasons, first, that his circumstances show it. He is surrounded with much difficulty and tribulation and therefore he infers that God is angry with him. But is there any force in that argument? You might as well say that God had cast away His own dear Son when He allowed Him to say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but I, the son of man have not where to lay My head." You might as well say that God had cast away the martyrs when He left them to lie in prison, or suffered them to be burned. Many of the Lord's dearest children have a rough passage to glory. After all, your circumstances are not as bad as those of far better men. It would be most unfair to argue that you are, therefore, a castaway. Is it not written, "In the world you shall have tribulation"? Do you not know that affliction is a covenant blessing? Therefore no argument derived from circumstances is worth listening to.

But others argue from their feelings. They feel as if God had cast them away. Can there be anything more uncertain to argue from than our feelings? I might be quite sure that I am safe for heaven today if I judged by my feelings. Tomorrow I might be equally as certain that I am a reprobate if I judged by the same rule. Judged by changeful feelings, one might be lost and saved a dozen times a day. The wind does not veer more fitfully

than does the current of our emotions. Draw inferences from the waves before you reason from your feelings. Do you not know that many persons who are full of very confident feelings are nevertheless deluded and deceived? “Peace, peace, where there is no peace” is a very common cry. These persons judge themselves by feelings, and consider that they are safe for heaven, but their lives show the contrary. And, on the other hand, others judge themselves to be castaways, who are true Christians. Apply these facts to your own case. Feelings are a very uncertain and erroneous gauge, indeed, and are not to be relied upon. And to build such a terrible inference as that of your being lost upon a few gloomy feelings, or even a great many of them, is absurd to the last degree. Have you ever heard the story of the man who, traveling in the dark, over a new country, suddenly came to a place where the earth crumbled under his feet and he felt sure that he was slipping over an awful precipice? Clutching at the roots of a tree which grew out of the bank, he maintained his hold in desperation, feeling that if he let go he should be dashed into a thousand pieces. There he hung till his hands were unable to bear the strain any longer, and, giving all up for lost, he fell but alighted upon a soft couch of green lawn which was just an inch or two beneath his feet. So do great dreads frequently arise from nothing at all! Fancy, with her magic wand, is busy at creating sorrows. In many and many a case, if the patient would believe the truth, or at least would cease to believe in his own unreasonable surmises, he might drop into perfect peace at once. For very many, the foundation of their mental troubles lies nowhere but in their own settled determination to be miserable. They have resolved to believe that everything is wrong with them, and that obstinate resolution stands to them instead of reason. They are deaf as adders to all comfort but are not silent as to their woes. They ask to see the minister, but they will not give him opportunity to do them good.

Did you ever have an interview with a despairing woman? If you have been able to get in six words edgeways between her incessant talk, you must have been a very clever person, for it is by no means an easy thing. They ask for advice, but do not mean to listen to it or to follow it, for they know better than their advisers. They only want the opportunity of pouring out their lamentations; they are not prepared to receive consolation. Their soul abhors all manner of meat, and they draw near to the gates of death. In vain do you argue, they cannot be reasoned with, it would be as wise to try and argue away a typhus fever, or reason a broken bone into soundness. Instead of reasoning stands their solemn decision, not to be comforted. If they saw such a resolve in other people, they would call it absurd and perhaps be vexed with them. Oh, that they would see their conduct in the same light! But while they remain in their present mind, what can we do for them? We quote a promise and they tell us it does not apply to their case, though it is as plain as the nose on their face that it is for them. You shall next remind them of a doctrine which contains a general principle applicable to them. They cannot deny the truth, but by

dexterous devices they escape from its cheering influences. It is amazing how exceedingly learned and profound, despairing people are in their own esteem. I met, the other day, with a person who insists upon it that he has committed the unpardonable sin. Now, I know as much about the Scriptures as he does, yet upon the subject of the unpardonable sin he is fully informed and I am in the dark. I can prove that, according to the Scriptures, my desponding friend has not committed the unpardonable sin. But he knows he has and is as sure of it as if he could prove it rationally. Scriptural proof he cares little about, but says over and over again that *he knows, and is quite sure,* and nobody shall ever convince him to the contrary. You might as well argue with a bottle of vinegar, in the hope of turning it into wine. It is nothing to him that all the divines in Christendom who have ever written about this sin have regarded it as a dark subject; he is wiser than seven men that can render a reason. In many instances the cause of their distress is impalpable, ghost-like, and misty. They cannot describe it, and you cannot deal with it. It is unreasonable and preposterous; else might a little calm conversation be a means of grace to them. As I have already remarked, instead of reason stands this declaration of theirs, they will not be comforted, but prefer to nestle down in hopeless melancholy. Poor souls—poor souls! What a choice they make!

Here let us say that the declaration that God has forsaken us, or forsaken any man who seeks him, is diametrically opposed to Scripture. There is not, in all the pages of inspiration, one single text which advises any man to despair of the mercy of God. I challenge the most diligent reader to find one solitary passage in which any seeking soul is bid to believe that there is no mercy for him. I shall even go further and say that there is not one solitary passage of Scripture which warrants any soul to give itself up in despair, no matter though it may be a strong passage upon election, or a terrible threat of divine wrath against sin. There is no text, nor anything like a text, which would warrant a soul in saying that there is no mercy in God for him. Further than that, there is not a text in Scripture which gives an excuse to any man to despair. If God Himself were to appear and say to the despairing, "You have dared to doubt My mercy, and to declare yourself to be finally given up, bring me a solitary Word out of my Book which can excuse you for saying this"—no such text could be brought. Indeed, the whole of Scripture condemns unbelief. Faith is the grace which Scripture commends; it never urges men to despair. It is full of promises to the most sinful. It reaches to the greatest extremity of our need and cries in generous love, "He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him." The Lord Jesus declares, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." And in summing up the testimony of Scripture it is fair to say with Dr. Watts—

"No mortal has a just pretense
To perish in despair."

"Oh, but still I know there is no hope for me." My dear friend, you know nothing of the kind. It is a dream, a horrible nightmare and there is no truth in it. This blessed Scripture sounds from the cross to you, like sweet music, "Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." As long as you breathe, the blessed lamp of grace still burns to light your joy. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

And remember, O my despairing friend, that your belief that God has cast you away is very derogatory to God, Himself. Do you know how merciful He is? Will you think harshly of Him? Did He not save Manasseh? Did He not blot out the sins of Saul of Tarsus? Has He not declared, "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, but had rather that he turn unto Me and live"? Will you snatch the pen out of the hand of mercy and write your own death warrant with it? Why be so ill-advised? Will you dishonor God rather than receive salvation through Jesus Christ? Why do you madly yield to despair? Do you not know how much you grieve the Spirit of God, and how sadly you dishonor Jesus? None of all the pangs He bore on Calvary grieve Him like that unkind, ungenerous thought that He is unwilling to forgive. What? Your hating your sin and yet Jesus hating you? Impossible! What? You with a strong desire after eternal life, yet left to perish? Impossible! What? Your casting yourself upon His mercy, hoping to touch the silver scepter of His grace, and yet driven from His presence? Impossible! Among the damned in hell there is not a soul that ever came and rested upon the blood of Christ, and there never shall be such. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but it never shall be said that seeking ones were cast off, or that those who gave themselves up to the covenant mercy of God were rejected. Do not, then, I pray you, dishonor the love and glory of the Lord of mercy.

One thing I would like to put in here by way of interjection—this giving of one's self up to despair is so very unlike what we generally do in other things that it appears all the less defensible. Yonder vessel has been broken in a collision. She will soon sink to the bottom. The sea rushes in most furiously. Let us take to one of the boats. This boat cannot be stirred, what then? We will fly to another. We will seize a lifebelt, or clasp a spar. At any rate, we will leave no means unused, if, by any possible way we may escape. A sensible man does not fling himself down on the deck and give all up for lost. His fears awaken him and he bestirs all his faculties with the utmost energy. He seizes anything which promises deliverance. Look at a person sick with a deadly disease. He has tried his family physician and he is no better. But he hears of another practitioner and he goes straight to him. Yes, and if 50 quacks were recommended to him, he would sooner try them than die. Even a forlorn hope he will pursue sooner than utterly perish. Yet here are persons who know and cannot deny that they know it, that Christ is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto Him, and yet, because they unreasonably conclude that their case is hopeless, they will not go to Jesus, but prefer to die in

their sins. Oh, madness, madness, to doubt the infinitely loving One! Insanity reaching its very height to dare to think that He who died on Calvary will repulse a coming sinner! I should like an artist to attempt to draw a picture of Jesus Christ scorning a sinner who asks mercy at His hands. How would the man proceed? He must cover the face of the Lord, for that lovely visage could not look unkindly. He must leave out the scars from the hands and the nail prints from the feet, for these could not repel a sinner. There is not a part of Jesus' body or soul which could be made to reject a lost sinner. His whole nature would revolt against being so represented. Oh, if you could but know Him as some of us know Him; you would fly into His arms. Poor guilty one, if He had two swords, one in each hand, you would sooner fly on the points of His swords than not come to Him, for you would perceive that He is such a gracious Redeemer, and so mighty to save that you must rely upon Him, and cry with the patriarch of Uz, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

I am bound to add that this despair, to a very large extent, involves sinful unbelief, and of all sins this is the most damning. It amounts to this, that Jesus says, "I can save," and the sinner says, "You cannot." And so he makes Christ a liar. God says, "Jesus is able to save to the uttermost." And the sinner denies it, point blank. Now if the sinner will make God a liar, what can he expect? When the Lord comes to judge the quick and dead, what will be the portion of the unbelieving? God save us from it! May that rash expression be withdrawn and may we say no longer, "I am cut off from before Your eyes."

III. Thirdly and briefly, we have before us the interesting topic of A PLEADING CRY. When David feared that he was cut off from God, he was wise enough to take to crying. He calls prayer, crying, and it is a very significant word. Crying is the language of pain. Pain cannot cumber itself with letters and syllables and words, and so it takes its own way and adopts a piercing mode of utterance, very telling and expressive. Crying yields great relief to suffering. Everyone knows the benefit of having a hearty good cry. You cannot help calling it, "a good cry," for though one would think crying could never be especially good, it affords a desirable relief. Red eyes often relieve breaking hearts. Madness has been prevented by the soul's finding vent. Prayer is the surest and most blessed vent for the soul. In prayer the heart runs over, as the eyes do in crying. To pray is just as simple a matter as to cry. Do not get down that book—bishops and other prayer-makers can write good prayers for people who have no particular trouble upon them, but when you really need to pray, no ready-made prayers will suit your case. You never heard of a form of common crying. I never remember seeing in my life a form of crying for a bereaved woman, a form for a babe to cry when it is hungry, and another form for a child to cry when it is put to bed in the dark. No, no! Forms are out of the question when we cry. Men and women, and children, when in trouble, cry without a book. And so when a man really needs the Savior, he does not require book-prayers. Never say, "Oh, I cannot pray!"

My dear friend, can you cry? You need to be saved—tell the Lord that. If you cannot say it in words, tell it with your tears, your groans, your sighs, your sobs.

Prayer, like crying, is a natural utterance and an utterance available on all occasions. As sure as a child is in trouble, it can cry without putting on its best frock, and so can we without gowns and capes and surplices. No child needs to be educated in Greek and Latin in order to know how to cry. Neither is learning needed in order to effectual prayer. God teaches all His little ones to pray as soon as they are born. They have but to confess their sins and plead their needs and they do really pray. Never is a child in such a bad plight that it cannot cry. It never says, "Mother, it is so dark I cannot see to cry." No, no, the child cries in the dark. And are you in the dark and in terrible doubt and trouble? Then cry away, my dear friend, cry away, cry away. Your Father will hear and deliver you.

Now, crying is by no means a pleasant sound to hear. There is no music in it, except, I suppose, it is the crying of the very little ones in their mothers' ears. A cry is a kind of music one would be glad to have ended and yet our poor prayers, which might be thought to grate in the ears of God, for He must note their imperfections, are nevertheless, regarded by Him. Though a cry is an unpleasant sound, it is very powerful. If you were walking the streets and heard or saw a poor child crying, you would be far more affected by it than by the oration of the pretended beggar who is eloquently stating his needs to the dwellers on both sides of the way. A poor child crying in the dark, under your window, in mid-winter, in the snow, would move your pity and obtain your help. Even if it were a foreigner and knew not a single word of English, you would fully feel its pleading. The eloquence of a cry is overwhelming; pity owns its power and lends her aid. There is a chord in human nature which responds to a child's cry, and there is something in the divine nature which is equally touched by prayer. The Lord will not suffer a young raven to cry in vain and much less will He suffer men who are made in His own image to cry to Him in the bitterness of their hearts and find Him deaf to their entreaties.

According to our text this cry was addressed to the Lord. David thought the Lord had cast him away, and he did not cry to anyone else. He felt that if God did not help him, nobody else could. To whom or where should I go if I should turn from You? It is important to observe that he cried to the Lord, even though he thought himself cut off from hope. "I am cut off from before Your eyes," says he, yet he cries to God. Ah, soul, if you are in despair, yet resolve to pour out your heart before your God. Do you fear He will refuse you? Cry on. Has He been angry with you long? Cry on. Has He, up to now, shut out your prayers? Cry on. Do you think He has reprobated you altogether? Nevertheless cry on. Have you said, "His mercy is clean gone forever, and He will be favorable no more"? Yet cry on. For David felt in his soul that he was cut off from before God's eyes, yet still he cried. Do so, poor heart. Yes, the sadder

you are, cry the more, for if a little child's mother were to say, "Now go along with you, I will never love you again. I will put you out of doors and you shall never be my child again," what would the little one do? Would she say, "Therefore I will not cry"? Oh no, but she would sob her little heart out and the more she believed the severe words of her parent, the more she would cry. O despairing soul, the more you despair, the more you should pray, and then it will be well with you.

The Psalmist cried to a God concerning whom he entertained unbelieving thoughts. You, poor mourner, do not believe as you should believe. Your faith, if you have any, is like a spark smoldering in the smoking flax. Yet pray on! I was about to say, when your faith seems dead, cry, "Lord enable me to believe. I am a poor, dead, lost, ruined, sinner, but do have pity upon my misery." That is good crying, and good will come of it.

IV. This is my last point, THE CHEERFUL RESULT. This poor soul in despair continued to cry and the Lord heard him. "You heard the voice of my supplication when I cried unto You." This blessing went beyond the promise. The promise is that God will hear believing prayer, but the Lord in mercy goes beyond His promises. Such is the infinite sovereignty of His grace that He meets, even with unbelieving ones. And when they are crying in their unbelief He gives them faith and saves their souls. Now, if this is not guaranteed in the promise, yet the action is quite consistent with the divine character. Indeed, it is like the God, whose name is love, to listen to the cries of the wretched! We are like lost children in the forest, all scratched by the briers, weary with having lost our way and ready to die from cold and hunger. All we can do is cry, and will God leave us to die in the dark? Oh, do not believe it! Do not let the devil make you believe it, that God will hear you cry and yet not come to your help. I will never believe of God what I would not believe of man. I cannot dishonor Him so. Do but cry, dear heart, out of your soul's despair, and the Lord's infinite goodness will constrain Him to come to you. He has taught you to cry and He will assuredly answer your prayers.

Inasmuch as David says that God heard *him,* how encouraged you ought to be, for He who has heard one will hear another. Let me tell you one thing—you are in a position, poor, despairing soul, to be made the means of honoring Christ more than anybody else. Are you the vilest sinner that ever existed? Do you think that your case is the most desperate that ever was on the face of the earth? Are you just the one person who is least likely ever to be saved? Do you think so? Oh, what a splendid specimen you will make for Christ's grace to triumph in! There is no honor to Him in washing those sinners who have only a few pale spots upon them, if there are such people. But, O you foul and altogether polluted sinner, your washing and cleansing will bring Him immortal renown! The angels tune their harps for new songs when an unusual sinner is reclaimed. You cannot conceive your own salvation to be possible, you say? Oh that you would believe it possible! Oh that you would come, now, to the foot of the cross and say, "Dear Savior, You have never saved

such a soul as I am! This day You shall have greater glory than You have ever had before, for I cast myself at Your dear feet, believing that you will save even me, for You have said, 'Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.' " Do you not see that the badness of your case gives you a glorious opportunity to glorify Christ by greater faith than other men, and by putting it in His way to do a more splendid act of grace than, to your apprehension, He has ever done before? I hope to be most persistent in prayer with God the Holy Spirit that He may bring just such cases as yours under the power of mighty grace.

One truth remember and take away with you. If you are in the dark, the only light for you is in the Sun of Righteousness. If you are lost, the only help for you is in Jesus, the Lord. If you want to see the Savior where His light is brightest and His salvation clearest, think of His cross. Look at those dear hands and feet, and bleeding side, those wounds are windows of hope for the prisoners of despair. There is no hope for you, whoever you may be, except in Jesus. Look at His thorn-crowned head and His face more marred than that of any man! Look at His emaciated body, and at the spear gash in His side! Look at Him in the agonies of death, with shame and scorn waiting upon Him! Gaze till you hear Him cry, "It is finished!" before He gives up the ghost. And I pray you believe it to be finished, so that there is nothing for you to do, since everything is done. All that is needed to render you acceptable with God is fully accomplished, and there is nothing for you to do but to accept what Christ has completed. Weave no more garments, there is the robe! Fill no more cisterns, there is the fountain! Lay no more foundations, there is the precious cornerstone! Come, you despairing! The Lord help you to come and find peace at this hour, through Jesus Christ your Lord. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 31.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—246, 70, 632.

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THE GENTLENESS OF JESUS
NO. 1147

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 14, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He sends forth judgment unto victory. And in His name shall the Gentiles trust."
Matthew 12:19, 20, 21.

EVERY single fragment of Scripture is precious. Short texts culled here and there, as subjects of meditation, are useful. At the same time the practice of discoursing upon disconnected extracts may be carried too far, and sometimes the meaning of a passage may be entirely lost by not regarding its connection. The Bible ought to be treated in the reading of it as any other book is treated, only with much more of reverential regard. Suppose that Milton's "Paradise Lost" were used as a textbook, and that its general mode of usage were to take separate lines disconnected from the rest of the great poem, and consider them as positive statements and suitable topics of meditation? It would be a dangerous experiment. The great poet might well stir in his grave at the proposal. There are grand lines in that matchless epic which would bear the process, and glow like diamonds upon a regal brow. But nobody would form any worthy idea of the glory of the "Paradise Lost" by having it presented in portions, lines and selected passages. Such a mode of study reminds me of the Grecian student, who, when he had a house to sell, carried a brick about the streets to show what kind of a house it was. The Bible ought not to be torn limb from limb, and its joints hung up like meat in the shambles. Beyond all other books it will bear dissection, for it is vital in every sentence and word. Since it is a mosaic of priceless gems, you will be enriched even if you extract a jewel here and there, but to behold its divine beauty you must contemplate the mosaic as a whole. No idea of the magnificent design of the entire Scriptures can enter the human mind by reading it in detached portions, especially if those separated passages are interpreted without reference to the run of the writer's thoughts. Let Scripture be read according to the rules of common sense and that will necessitate our reading through a book and following its train of thought. Thus shall we be likely to arrive at the mind of the Holy Spirit. I say this because I may have to disturb your idea of the meaning of a passage of Scripture this morning, for a short time. But you need not be alarmed, for after I have disturbed, I shall, most probably, confirm it. I shall pull down to build up again.

The main force of our sermon will be spent over the well-known words, "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not

quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory." We have all our own opinion of the meaning of this verse. We rejoice that the Lord Jesus will deal tenderly with the weak and the gentle in heart, in grace. And we are thankful that the text appears to us to express that consoling truth. Now we admit that the verse does teach us that. Does it teach us that directly and mainly? I think not. Read the connection and judge for yourselves. The Pharisees endeavored to discover faults in the Lord Jesus, but they could find nothing against Him except in reference to His disregard of their notions of the Sabbath. They blamed the disciples for plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath and the Lord Himself, for performing a miracle of healing on that day. Our Lord met them boldly and so utterly routed them that one almost pities them, while rejoicing over their humiliating defeat. They were beaten outright and covered with shame. Our Lord overwhelmed them with five arguments, any one of which completely swept the ground from under their feet. As, for instance, that question, "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much, then, is a man better than a sheep?" Our Lord's victory was complete and tended very much to weaken their authority. But He did not push His advantage so as to overturn the sway of these religious teachers. They were before Him as lamps so nearly blown out that nothing but a smoldering smoke remained. He did not proceed to quench them. In argument, He had proved their folly and had crumpled them up till they were like so many bruised bulrushes, but there He paused. He did not pursue the conflict further, but retired to Galilee, into the lone places and rural districts of the country, and preached the gospel. Lest a popular controversy and public tumult should arise, every time He worked a miracle He bade the healed one conceal the fact, in order that it might be fulfilled, "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He sends forth judgment unto victory." And here let me ask, do not the last words of this passage imply that the smoking flax will be quenched and the bruised reeds will be broken when He shall "send forth judgment unto victory"? How will this be true if the passage refers to feeble saints? The first meaning looks in quite another direction and points to the Lord's enemies. Now is the season of His patience, but a day of His wrath is on the way. He refrained from overthrowing His antagonists in the days of His flesh, but in the time of His second coming He will break His foes in pieces with a rod of iron. He will dash them in pieces like potters' vessels. Now His voice is not heard in the streets, but soon that voice shall be heard by all living and shall resound through the abodes of the dead. Now He strives not for the mastery, but then shall He go forth conquering and to conquer. Today, is the time of patience, gentleness and meekness, and with humble reverence let us meditate thereon.

The subject of this morning will be the *gentleness and long-suffering of the Lord Jesus; s*econdly, *the outcome of it,* "In His name shall the Gentiles trust," because they find Him so meek and tender. And, lastly, *the termination of it,* for though He is, at this present time, so merciful that

He does not break the bruised reed, yet there is a limit set to it—"till He sends forth judgment unto victory."

I. THE SAVIOR'S FORBEARANCE. The passage wonderfully sets forth the Redeemer's gentleness and we shall contemplate it, first, *in His own life on earth.* What a quiet, unobtrusive life was that of Him whom they called, "the carpenter's son"! True, it was wonderfully energetic. There is a sense in which it must not only be admitted, but gloried in, that our Lord did both strive and cry, for spiritually He fought against sin even unto agony and blood. And with thrilling eloquence and plenteous tears He did cry out against evil and warn men to escape. He lifted up His voice like a trumpet and cried and spared not so that His persuasive voice was heard in the streets and throughout all the land His gospel was made known. But the passage teaches us that while others were contentious for power, clamorous for gain and eager for notoriety, Jesus was not so. He raised no party, He fomented no strife, He sought no honor, He courted no popularity. He left the arena of this world's contests to others; His was another field of conflict. Born, as He was, amidst the acclamations of the angels, reverenced by strangers from a distant land, foretold by seers and prophets, one marvels that He did not, even in early youth, shine forth as a "bright particular star." But for 30 years He retires to the workshop of Joseph and is there patiently occupied with "His father's business." We catch a glimpse of Him in the temple, but, as in a moment, He vanishes, again, into obscurity. Had we been in His place, young men of mettle and of warm blood, would we have waited 30 years and more? What hand could have held us back from the battle? Like the war horse, we would have champed the bit and pawed the ground, eager for conflict. Jesus was meekly quiet, neither striving, nor crying, nor causing His voice to be heard in the streets. When the time is come for Him to appear in public, He goes quietly to the banks of the Jordan. John is baptizing a multitude in the river, He does not press forward and claim the baptist's immediate attention, but He waits till all the people have been baptized, and then He tells John that He desires to be baptized by him.

The deed is done and the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the river, but He does not come up out of the Jordan at once to plunge into the midst of conflict, and preach a sermon with the fiery zeal of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Neither does He at once, go up to Jerusalem and proclaim Himself the Anointed of the Lord. Instead, He is led of the Spirit into the wilderness. His zeal was intense, but He had His spirit well in hand and not a grain of self-seeking ever defiled His ardor. The zeal of God's house had eaten Him up, yet He went quietly to the wilderness and afterwards to Cana and Capernaum and the more remote spots by the sea. He did not need excitement from the outside world to maintain the fires of His zeal, there was an inexhaustible fount of fire within. Therefore He was ardent but not noisy, intense but not clamorous. His first labors were very private. His kingdom came not with observation. He did not seek to entrap men into discipleship by arts which are commonly employed. His first disciples were urged to follow Him by John, who said,

"Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world." And then the disciples asked Him, "Master, where do You dwell?" He gathered them one or two at a time. He did not raise an excitement and lead hundreds captive to enthusiasm. Instead of stirring the metropolitan city at once with His ministry, He went away to Nazareth and Cana, little paltry towns away among a rustic population. He went about healing the sick and teaching. Calling John, James, Peter, Andrew and Matthew, but not making very great headway, as we say, spending a whole day talking with a woman at a well, perfectly satisfied to be doing what violent spirits would call commonplace mission work. When He comes up to the feast at Jerusalem to preach, He stands there and declares the word. But when He is opposed He disappears and is back again, in His retirement in Galilee, still pursuing His lowly work of love. Our King came among us in meek and lowly guise, and so He continued among us. You shall not find Christ pushing His way among the politicians, crying, "I claim leadership among the sons of men."He never marches at the head of an admiring mob to assert His supremacy by their aid, and alarm His foes by terror of their numbers. But gently gliding through the world, seen by His light rather than heard by His sound, He was content to shun fame and avoid applause. He frequently forbade the grateful patients whom He had healed to mention His name or publish the cure. His modesty and love of quiet shrank from notoriety. It was abundantly true of Him, He did not strive nor cry, and neither did any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He did not break and smoking flax He did not quench.

The meaning of what I have said is this—Jesus never became a party leader. He was no place-hunter or demagogue. There arose many in His day who claimed to be great ones and drew many people after them by the pretence that they were the promised deliverers. And by-and-by their clamors created strife, for the troops of the Romans were after them, and tumult and bloodshed was the lamentable sequel. Never did our Lord bid His servants fight, for His kingdom was of another order. When, for once in His life, He rode in state as a king through the streets of Jerusalem, the shouting was only that of children who said, "Hosanna" in the temple, and of a willing, peaceful company of disciples, whose only weapons were palm branches and boughs of the trees. No war horse did He ride, He chose the lowly ass. As compared with those who clamored for place and power, He was like a mute man all His days, though able to have awed or charmed the multitude to do His bidding. He loved the lone mountain side better than the throng of the crowd. He could not help being popular—such a speaker as He was, must attract His thousands for, "Never man spoke like this Man." And such a miracle-worker as He was, how could it be but that the people would follow to witness His wonders and eat of His loaves and fishes? And such a generous spirit, so noble and so free-hearted, it was little marvel that the people would have made Him a king, but He tore Himself away. They sought Him and found Him not. He came to endure, not to enjoy—to be despised, not to be crowned. How often did He escape the congratulating crowds! He took a boat and passed over to the other side. Rough waters were more to His mind than

hot-brained mobs of transient admirers who could be bought by bread and fish. His design was not to be the idol of the populace, but to break their idols and lead their hearts back to God. Therefore He did not strive nor cry, nor run in the world's race, nor battle in her wars.

As He shunned popularity, so He made no use of the carnal forces which lay ready at His hands. No doubt the priests and scribes were sometimes afraid to oppose Him for fear of the people, but they had no need to fear that He would shelter behind the populace. He asked neither the rich nor the strong, nor the many to protect Him, but felt quite secure till His hour was come. He spoke openly before them, unguarded by His friends and with neither weapon nor armor of defense. He never appealed to human passions or egged on the people against the tyrants of the hour. No sentence of His can be construed into a desire to meet force by force. One of His followers, who loved Him much, said, "Let us call fire from heaven upon these Samaritans." But Jesus said, "You know not what spirit you are of." In the garden of Gethsemane He might have summoned legions of angels to the rescue, but He agonized alone. Not a single seraph came from the throne to drive away the son of perdition, or the bloodthirsty priests. No destroying angel smote the men who spat in His face. No devouring flame burned up those who scourged Him. The force of His life was the omnipotence of gentle goodness. He did not lay the weight of His little finger upon the minds of men to compel them to involuntary subjection. His conquests were such as led men in willing captivity.

Only think of what He might have done. Only think of what you and I would have done if we had been in His position, having such a work to do and such opponents. Have you ever felt, when you have seen the sin of this world, as if you wanted to put it down and stamp it out by force? Your indignation has been stirred within you and you have said, "I cannot bear it." When I stood in Rome and saw the idolatries of that city and its swarms of priests, I could not help exclaiming, "How is it that the eternal thunderbolts lie still? Had I one hour of the Lord's power I would sweep away the whole of this filth with the broom of destruction." But Christ, with these same thunderbolts in His hands, never used them at all. He had no curses for His foes, no blows for His enemies. The only time He did use the semblance of violence was when He took the scourge of small cords and chased the buyers and sellers out of His Father's house, a deed in which the awe inspired by His presence appears to have been the principal instrument employed. Such was His gentleness that when He might have shaken the earth and rocked the thrones of tyrants, and made every idol god totter from its bloodstained throne, He put forth no such physical power. But still He stood with melting heart and tearful eyes inviting sinners to come to Him. He used no lash but His love, no battleaxe and weapon of war but His grace.

Has it ever struck you that it was strange He should have stopped in Palestine, a little, miserable strip of country, almost too insignificant to be noticed on the map? Why did He confine Himself to Israel? Why sojourn in the remotest parts of the land?

Why did He not at once go down to Greece and there, at Athens, meet the philosophers and convince them of His superiority? They must before long, have admitted that there was majesty about His teaching and have acknowledged Him as the wisest of men. Why not march to Rome and face proud Caesar and if He must die, die in some conspicuous place where the entire world would ring with it? Ah, no, He courted no notoriety. We are always saying, "Let us push and get to the front," but when the world's march is in the wrong way, the true leader is behind. Jesus made no desperate attempts to reach leadership. He relied upon the power of His Spirit and the force of love. The power of truth would, He knew, penetrate in quietness the prepared heart. He knew that the gospel, like fire, could burn its way without noise of drum or sound of trumpet. He was satisfied to pick out His few fishermen and His other disciples in whom His grace would be placed like a sacred deposit, and let the work go on like the silent growing of the corn in the ground which springs up, man knows not how.

I leave the question of His whole life; for I do not think it is necessary to say more to make you see how exactly the prophet has pictured Him here.

Now, secondly, the same has been true with regard to *the spread of the gospel.* The passage does not refer merely to Christ personally, but to Christ's entire work. And it is still true of Him, "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets." No violence has been employed in the spread of the gospel. No carnal weapon has been lifted to promote Messiah's reign. He does not strive nor cry. When Mohamed would spread his religion, he would bade his disciples arm themselves, and then go and cry aloud in every street and offer to men the alternative to become believers in the prophet or to die. Mohamed's was a mighty voice, which spoke with the edge of the scimitar. He delighted to quench the smoking flax and break the bruised reed, but the religion of Jesus has advanced upon quite a different plan. Other forces, more mighty but not so visible, have been employed to promote the sway of Jesus. Never has He invoked the secular arm, He has left that to Antichrist and the seed thereof. No demand has been made by Him upon human governments to patronize or enforce Christianity. On the contrary, wherever governments have patronized Christianity at all, they have either killed it or else the infinite mercy of God alone, has preserved it from extinction. Jesus would not have the unbeliever fined, or imprisoned, or cut off from the rights of citizenship. He would not allow any one of His disciples to lift a finger to harm the vilest blasphemer or touch one hair of an atheist's head. He would have men won to Himself by no sword but that of the Spirit, and bound to Him by no bands but those of love. Never, never, in the church of God has a true conversion been worked by the use of carnal means. The Lord will not so approve of the power of the flesh. You do not find the Lord calling in the pomp and prestige of worldly men to promote His kingdom, or see Him arguing with philosophers that they might sanction His teaching. I know that Christian ministers do this and I am sorry they do. I see them taking their places in the Hall

of Science to debate with the men of boastful wisdom. They claim to have achieved great mental victories there and I will not question their claim, but spiritual triumphs I fear they will never win in this way. They have answered one set of arguments, and another set has been invented the next day. The task is endless. To answer the allegations of infidelity is as fruitless as to reason with the waves of the sea, so far as soul-saving is concerned. This is not the way of quickening, converting and sanctifying the souls of men. Not as a book of science will you triumph, O Bible, though your every word is wisdom itself! Not as a great philosopher will You conquer, O Man of Nazareth, though You are indeed, the possessor of all knowledge! But as the Savior of men and the Son of God shall Your kingdom come!

The power which Christ uses for the spread of His kingdom is exercised in conversion and is as different as possible from compulsion or clamor. Conversion is the mysterious work of the Spirit upon the soul. That great change could not be produced by the fear of imprisonment, the authority of law, the charms of bribery, the clamor of excitement, or the glitter of eloquence. Men have pretended to conversion because they hoped that a religious profession would benefit their trade or raise their social position, but from such conversions may God deliver us. Men have been startled into thoughtfulness by the excitement which arises out of Christian zeal, but any real spiritual benefit they may have received has come to them from another source. For the Lord is not in the wind or the tempest, but in the still small voice. That which is worked by noise will subside when quiet reigns, as the bubble dies with the wave which bore it. Hearts are won to Jesus by the silent conviction which irresistibly subdues the conscience to a sense of guilt and by the love which is displayed in the Redeemer's becoming the great substitutionary sacrifice for us, that our sins might be removed. In this way conversions are worked, not by displays of human zeal, wisdom, or force. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord."

Nor, beloved, has Christ caused His gospel to spread by any manifestation of the terrors of His deity. Oh, if today this guilty land of ours were bruised beneath the feet of a destroying angel, or we ourselves, were made to sit in darkness that might be felt, or found our chambers filled with frogs and loathsome insects and our fields devastated by devouring locusts, then we dream that our countrymen would be struck down in terror at the power of Jesus, but such is not His mode of warfare. Plagues are more suited for the armory of the law than for the hospital of the gospel. He might, if He pleased, send down upon the worshippers of false gods, such terrible judgments that they would cry to the rocks to hide them and to the hills to cover them. While they are bowing before their demon gods, He might cause the earth to open and swallow them up. Or He could smite every priest at this hour with the leprosy, and richly would they deserve the doom. At this hour every deceiver of the people might suddenly be torn in pieces and appointed his portion with the tormentors, and divine justice would exonerate the deed. But the Son of Man does not so determine. With wonderful patience He sits still and

bears the insults of succeeding generations. Were He not almighty, He could not so restrain Himself. He allows men still, to chant hymns to gods of wood and stone. He still allows priests to insult Him by pretending to manufacture the flesh and blood of His Humanity. He allows this blinded nation to follow its wicked priests and to forsake Himself, the only Priest. And all this He does while His saints are crying daily, "O Lord, how long?" and the souls under the altar are day and night petitioning for justice. He pauses in pity, waiting to be gracious, not willing that any should perish, unwilling to destroy. This smoking flax of heathendom, abominable as it is in His nostrils, He will not yet quench. And those broken reeds of ritualistic confidence on which men rely, He will not as yet break, for He is magnifying His patience and long-suffering. By-and-by He will "send forth judgment unto victory" and men shall see that the patient Lamb is also the mighty Lion of the Tribe of Judah. And He who was omnipotent to bear offenses will also be omnipotent to recompense His foes, and to ease Him of His adversaries.

We will now note another illustration of the same truth. We have observed His life and the spread of the gospel. Now note that the same truth appears in *the experience of every unconverted man*. I may be addressing one who has denied the existence of God. Wonder, O man, that, you still live, since you deny the existence of your Maker. You are to Him, no better than smoking flax or a bruised reed, but despite your insolence, He neither quenches nor crushes you. You enjoy the bounties of providence! You are permitted to inhale the air which afterwards you send forth in blasphemy! Is it not a marvel that you are not destroyed? Perhaps you have become openly profane as well as a secret doubter. You have insulted God to His face and dared Him to destroy your body and your soul. Why did He not at once, accept your profane challenge? Why? Because He is too great to be in haste to quench such smoking flax as you are, too kind to deal hastily with you. Justice will close her accounts with you by-and-by, but for the present the Lord lets such a bruised reed as you are, alone. Crush you? Yes, that He could. One word from Him, one look from His eyes and you would lie a corpse, and your putrid carcass would need to be hidden away in the dust. He spares you, not in indifference but in wonderful patience. He will not quench nor crush you. The Socinian says that Christ is not the Son of God and so robs Him of His greatest glory. But Jesus does not smite him. Hard and cruel things are said against the Lord and His great sacrifice, but He hurls no flames of fire upon the synagogues of the heretics. He suffers men to live in ease and comfort, even to old age, though every day they have insulted His majesty and rebelled against His throne. Nothing provokes Jesus more than injuries done to His people. There was a time when He saw Saul persecuting His church and He chided him from heaven. His eyes flashed fire upon the apostle and he fell to the ground, but even then mercy had moved the Savior, and not fury. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the pricks," was a reproof such as only the gentle Jesus could have given.

But, oh, how is it that He endures to see His people despised, rejected, slandered? How could the Lord Jesus sit still while the Papists were murdering the Vaudois in the valleys of the Alps? How could He be still on St. Bartholomew's Eve while the alarm was sounding and His own dear sheep were being slaughtered? How could He be quiet when Smithfield was black with the ashes of His saints? In His forbearance we find the answer. His long-suffering is intended for the salvation of men, and it is amazing. I put it to any here present, who have been provoking Christ for years, could you have borne with your fellow creatures as Christ has borne with you? You, especially, who hear the gospel from day to day and yet put off obedience to its commands and indulge in private sins, and partake in evil lusts, in defiance of your conscience and the rebukes of the Spirit of God—I ask you, do you not wonder how Jesus bears with you? Why, I know men who, if but half a word is spoken to provoke them, will fall to blows. And I know very few who would quietly bear six or seven provocations. But yet here is the Lord Jesus Christ able to destroy you, His adversary, and yet, for the space of 30, 40, 50, perhaps 60 or 70 years, still does His patience wait. Oh, the mercy of the Lord! The mercy of the Lord!! He will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax!

One more remark should be made here. Our present view of the text proves beyond question, *His compassion to those who are weak and feeble, but are of a right spirit.* We generally understand the passage to mean that wherever there is a spark of grace, Christ will not quench it, and wherever there is any brokenness of heart Christ will not destroy it. Now, observe that instead of denying that this is the meaning of the passage, while I do assert that it is not the first meaning, I have helped you to see how forcibly this truth may be inferred from the text. For if Christ would not quench those Pharisees and Sadducees, who were so obnoxious, if He does not put down cruel kings and great potentates, if He bears with infidels and skeptics, and with persecutors and profane persons, how much more will He deal gently with those who are truly seeking Him, but whose spiritual life is feeble, so that they are comparable to bruised reeds and smoking flax? Instead of setting aside, we have rather confirmed and brought into clearer light the meaning which is usually given to the text. O poor heart, are you seeking Jesus! Is it a poor, trembling search as yet? Are you afraid that He will reject you? Have you begun to pray, but does that prayer seem too feeble to enter the gates of heaven? Be of good courage. He who has patience with His proudest foe will not be hard and censorious to a trembling penitent. It cannot be that He who is too tender to destroy the howling beast which snarls at Him, should be so severe as to slay the lamb which pines at His feet. Weak and trembling one, be of good courage.

As for you who are converted to Him and can say that all your hope is placed in Him, it may be you are depressed because you do not grow in grace as you would wish to do. And there are times when your anxiety to be right leads you to make rigid self-examination. And then you are grieved because there does not appear to be more grace in you than fire

in a dying candlewick, nor more true life in you than there is of strength in a bruised reed. Well, never mind. Jesus has a special care for the weak and is tender to the utmost degree towards such as need to be gently handled. Has He not said, "He carries the lambs in His bosom, and does gently lead those that are with young"? Only let your faith be sincere and if it is but as a grain of mustard seed it shall bring you into the kingdom. Though you can but look with a bleared eye at the cross and scarcely see it by reason of the tears of your sorrow, yet, if you do but trust in the great sacrifice, you are saved. For Jesus is no rough taskmaster towards seeking souls. He is no stern judge or heartless driver of the weak. He is very pitiful and full of compassion.

And you, backslider, where are you? Your light, once so brilliant, has waned into a mere spark and your only sign of possessing the heavenly fire is the smoke of your desire. You are saying, "Would God I had the life of grace in my soul! I cannot be happy in the world and yet I fear I have no share in the world to come." Backslider, you have been broken and rendered useless by sin, you have fallen from your steadfastness. You are not fit to be a pillar in the house of your God, but only to be thrown on the dunghill like a broken bulrush. Yet Jesus, when men reject you, will receive you. And when your conscience reprobates you, His love will not discard you. Be of good cheer. He who affords His direst foes a thousand opportunities to repent will not, in His fierce anger, cast out those who crave mercy at His hands.

II. THE OUTCOME OF THE GENTLENESS OF CHRIST. "In His name shall the Gentiles trust." What does this mean? Why, power, violence, harshness, severity are never to be trusted. You cannot win men's hearts by such means. The Parisians wrote upon the wall of the Imperial Palace, "Infantry, cavalry, artillery"—these were the basis of the imperial power. But an empire founded upon such things melted away like snow in summer. If there had been loyal affection between the ruler and the ruled, a thousand German invasions could not have dissolved the tie. When the old Napoleon was on the rock of St. Helena, he said gloomily to one of his attendants, "My empire has passed away, because it rested upon force, but the empire of Jesus still lasts, and will last forever, because it is based upon love." What has Jesus done for His subjects but loved them better than anyone else could have done, suffered for them beyond all and conferred greater blessings upon them than the entire universe besides could have bestowed? By such things He has captured their hearts. You may tempt away Christ's followers from Him when you can find them a better master, or a more loving friend—but not till then. You shall win us to a new leader when you can show us a better. But you cannot even imagine one who could compare for an instant with the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely. We who are descendants of the Gentiles trust Him, and trust Him implicitly, because He is so divinely gentle, so omnipotently tender. Savior, You are no tyrant! You do not trample on the poor and needy, or oppress the weak and trembling! You are mercy itself, love embodied, grace incarnate—therefore do the people flock to You and in Your name do the Gentiles trust.

The power of Jesus over men lies in the fact that He has taught them to trust Him. The firm faith of His followers consolidates His kingdom. When His Word comes home to us in its own soft and gentle manner, and He manifests Himself to us as He does not unto the world, and when He permits us to put our finger into the print of the nails and our hand into His side, and when He says, "You are Mine and I am yours." Oh, then we feel burning in our soul like coals of juniper, that grand enthusiasm which is the terror of the adversaries of Christ, and the power of the church. More potent than the edge of the sword is the intense love of saints. As the might of the north wind when it chases away the mist, such is the divine force of love for Jesus when it fills the heart. It chases away all lethargy and sin. When we truly trust our Lord we feel that we can do anything for Him. Impossibilities have ceased and miracles have returned. When we trust Christ, self-sacrifice becomes a joy and holy daring is but a natural impulse. By trust in Christ the weakest have been made strong, feeble women have routed their persecutors and humble men have confronted the proudest despots without fear. O Lord Jesus, the Gentiles trust You because You are meek and lowly, and their trustful love is the strength of Your growing dominion.

III. The last thing is this, THE TERMINATION OF THIS GENTLENESS. Our jaded spirits think the end long in coming. Read an account of the Popish Confessional, or stand, as I have done, by the confessional box and read, printed before your eyes, the subjects which are to be matters of question between the priests and the young girls who confess to him. And if you do not feel as if you could invoke a curse upon each shaven head, you are something more or less than man. It makes one's blood boil to think that such wretches should be in a position to insult and corrupt the modesty of maidenhood. Why does not the Lord's anger flash forth against them and consume them as stubble? So would our hasty justice deal out righteousness, but the Lord is slow to anger and gives His patience room. Yet, if men will not alter, if they will not be won by love, if even the wounds of Christ cannot wean them from their lusts, if reason is lost upon them and they make beasts of themselves, there must come an end of it. A God who is all mercy and no justice would, in the long run be a dreadful calamity, just as a judge who never punished crime would be the worst possible magistrate for any nation. Ah, yes, the very instincts of our nature make us feel that sin must be punished in due time. The best emotions of the most saintly spirit coincide with the belief in future retribution. There must come a time when the foes of God shall not rule and error shall not dominate over men. It must be so. Jesus, the friend of man, will "send forth judgment unto victory." He will do this in a certain sense at the death of every ungodly man and woman. With what surprise will they open their eyes in the next state and see the Christ, whom they despised, sitting upon His throne. With what unutterable dismay have some been seized, even before they have been quite dead. While the curtain was just rising and was not fully drawn up, they have howled with horror. And, ah, their dreadful doom! Those who denied that Jesus was God shall see Him as divine. Those who persecuted

His people shall see His people glorified at His side. Those who opposed the truth He taught shall feel how sure that truth is and shall learn how dreadful a thing it is to neglect the great salvation and fall into the hands of the living God.

But this is not all. There is a day appointed, an hour of which no man knows, when the Lord Jesus shall descend from heaven with a shout. Yes, He who was nailed to the cross, who died and rose, and ascended, leaving the last print of His feet upon Olivet, He shall descend to earth again. He shall come, not to suffer, but to judge. And with Him, as co-assessors, shall come His own beloved followers. Then shall the dead rise from their graves, and sea and land yield up the trophies of the grave. Then shall stern justice take the place of gentleness and pity. For as He Himself repeats the words, "I was hungry and you gave Me no meat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink; sick and in prison, and you visited Me not"—His Words shall roll like thunder and smite like lightning, "Depart you cursed into everlasting fire in hell, prepared for the devil and his angels." You rejected mercy, and mercy will plead with you no more. You challenged power, and power shall break you like potters' vessels. You despised love, and love grown angry now despises you. You rejected the truth, and now truth shall bind you in chains of fire forever. You would have none of God, and God will have none of you. You would not have the Savior, and He shall say, "I never knew you: depart from Me you workers of iniquity." He will not, today break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, but He will by-and-by, when He "sends forth judgment unto victory." He will sweep out of His kingdom every offensive thing. God grant that we may not be obnoxious to His anger when He shall be among the sons of men as a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
MATTHEW 12:1-30.**

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—72 (Song ii.), 910, 266.

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THE PARENT'S AND PASTOR'S JOY
NO. 1148

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 21 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."
3 John, 4.

JOHN speaks of himself as though he was a father, and therefore, we concede to parents the right to use the language of the text. Sure am I that many of you here present, both mothers and fathers, can truly say, "We have no greater joy than to hear that our children walk in truth." But John was not after the flesh, the father of those of whom he was writing, he was their spiritual father. It was through his ministry that they had been brought into the new life. His relationship to them was that he had been the instrument of their conversion and had afterwards displayed a father's care in supplying them with heavenly food and gracious teaching. Therefore, this morning, after we have used the words as the expression of parents, we must take them back again and use them as the truthful utterance of all real pastors, "We have no greater joy than to hear that our children walk in the truth."

I. First, then, one of THE PARENT'S highest joys is his children are walking in the truth. He has no greater joy. And here we must begin with the remark that it is *a joy peculiar to Christian fathers and mothers.* No parents can say from their hearts, "We have no greater joy than to hear that our children walk in the truth," unless they are themselves, walking in truth. No wolf prays for its offspring to become a sheep. The ungodly man sets small store by the godliness of his children, since he thinks nothing of it for himself. He who does not value his own soul is not likely to value the souls of his descendants. He who rejects Christ on his own account is not likely to be enamored of Him on his children's behalf. Abraham prayed for Ishmael, but I never read that Ishmael prayed for his son Nebajoth. I fear that many, even among professors of religion, could not truthfully repeat my text, they look for other joy in their children and care little whether they are walking in the truth or not. They joy in them if they are healthy in body, but they are not saddened if the leprosy of sin remains upon them. They joy in their comely looks but do not inquire whether they have found favor in the sight of the Lord. Put the girl's feet in silver slippers, and many heads of families would never raise the question as to whether she walked the broad or the narrow road. It is very grievous to see how some professedly Christian parents are satisfied so long as their children display cleverness in learning, or sharpness in business, although they show no signs of a renewed nature. If they pass their examinations with credit, and promise to be well-fitted for the

world's battle, their parents forget that there is a superior calling, involving a higher crown, for which the child will need to be fitted by divine grace and armed with the whole armor of God.

Alas, if our children lose the crown of life, it will be but a small consolation that they have won the laurels of literature or art. Many who ought to know better think themselves superlatively blessed in their children if they become rich, if they marry well, if they strike out into profitable enterprises in trade, or if they attain eminence in the profession which they have espoused. Their parents will go to their beds rejoicing and awake perfectly satisfied, though their boys are hastening down to hell, if they are also making money by the bushel. They have no greater joy than that their children are having their portion in this life and laying up treasure where rust corrupts it. Though neither their sons nor daughters show any signs of the new birth; give no evidence of being rich towards God, manifest no traces of electing love or redeeming grace, or the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, yet there are parents who are content with their condition. Now I can only say of such professing parents that they have need to question whether they are Christians at all. And if they will not question it themselves, they must give some of us leave to hold it in serious debate. When a man's heart is really right with God and he himself, has been saved from the wrath to come and is living in the light of his heavenly Father's countenance, it is certain that he is anxious about his children's souls, prizes their immortal natures and feels that nothing could give him greater joy than to hear that his children walk in the truth. Judge yourselves, then, beloved, this morning, by the gentle but searching test of the text. If you are professing Christians, but cannot say that you have no greater joy than the conversion of your children, you have reason to question whether you ought to have made such a profession at all.

Let us then remark, in the next place, that the joy which is mentioned in the text is *special in its object.* The expression is a thoughtful one. John did not write those words in a hurry, but he compressed a great deal into them. He says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Now, beloved parents, it is a very great joy to us if our children learn the truth. I hope you will not suffer one of them to grow up and leave your roof without knowing the doctrines of the gospel, without knowing the life of Christ and the great precepts of Scripture, without having as clear an understanding as it is possible for you to give them of the great principles and plan of salvation. When we perceive that our children, when we question them, thoroughly understand the gospel and are well rooted and grounded in its doctrines, it is a great joy to us, and well it may be. It is, however, far more a joy when those same children feel the truth, for alas, we may know it and perish unless we have felt its power within. Parent, was not your heart glad when you first saw the tears of repentance in your daughter's eyes? Did you not rejoice when your son could say, "Father, I trust I have believed and am saved by the grace of God"? Yes, it is a greater joy that they should feel the power of

the truth, than that they should know the letter of it. Such a joy, I hope, none of you are content to forego. It should be the holy ambition of every parent that his entire house should be renewed by the Holy Spirit.

It is a great joy when our children avow their sense of the truth, when, knowing it and feeling it, they at last have the courage to say, "We would join with the people of God, for we trust we belong to them." Oh, happy as a marriage day is that day in which the parent sees his child surrendered to the people of God, having first given his heart to the Christ of God! The baptism of our believing children is always a joyous occasion to us and so it ought to be. Our parents before us magnified the Lord when they heard us say, "We are on the Lord's side," and we cannot but give thanks abundantly when the same privilege falls to us in the persons of our children.

But, beloved, there is anxiety about all this. When you teach your children, there is the fear that perhaps they will not learn to profit. When they feel, there is still the fear lest it should be mere feeling and should be the work of nature and not the work of the Spirit of God. And even when they profess to be the Lord's, there yet remains the grave question, will this profession last? Will they be able to stand to it and be true to the faith until life's last hour? But the joy of the text is higher than these three, though these have to come before it, and it grows out of them. "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children *walk* in truth." That is the point, their practical religion, their actual exemplification of the power of the gospel upon their lives. This proves that the teaching was well received, that the feeling was not mere excitement, that the profession was not a falsehood or a mistake, but was done in the truth. What bliss it would be to us to see our sons grow up, and with integrity, prudence, uprightness and grace, walk in the truth. And to behold our daughters springing up in all their beauty, lovely with the adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, becoming in their homes while with us, or in the new homes which speedily grow up around them, patterns of everything that is tender, gracious, kind and true. "I have no greater joy than this," says John. And all of you to whom such joy as this has been allotted can say, "Amen. Amen. It is even so." The joy before us has, therefore, a special possessor and a special object.

It is a healthful joy, beloved, in which we may indulge to the fullest without the slightest fear, for it is superior in its character to all earthly joys. "Not too much," is a good rule for everything which has to do with time. But this joy in our children's walking in the truth we may indulge in as much as we will, for, first, it is a spiritual joy and therefore of a superior order. We do not joy to the fullest in the things which are seen of the eyes and heard of the ears, for these are things of the flesh which will decay, such as the garment which is eaten by the moth and the metal which is devoured by rust. We rejoice in the work of the Spirit of God, a work which will abide when this world shall have passed away. Hannah had some joy in the new coat which she made for young Samuel, but a far higher delight in the new heart which early showed itself in his ac-

tions. Our son promoted to be a king might cause us some delight, but to see our children made "princes in all the earth," according to that ancient promise, would be a greater delight by far. Rejoice in it then, without trembling, for spiritual joy will never intoxicate. Such joy arises from love to God, and is therefore commendable. We love to see our children converted because we love God. Out of love to Him, by His grace, we gave ourselves to Him and now, in later years, the same love prompts us to present our children. As Barzillai in his old age prayed David to accept the personal service of his son, Chimham, so would we, when our own strength declines, present our offspring to the Lord, that they may supply our lack of service. We have said—

"Had I ten thousand thousand tongues,
Not one should silent be.
Had I ten thousand thousand hearts,
I'd give them all to Thee."

Now as we have only one tongue of our own, we are intensely earnest that our children's tongues should sound forth the praises of the Savior. We have not another life on earth to call our own, but here are lives which the Lord has given us, and we are delighted that He should have them for Himself. We cry, "Lord, take this child's life and let it all be spent to Your service, from his earliest days till gray hairs shall adorn his brow." It is like the old soldier coming up to his king and saying, "I am worn out in your service, but you are so good a monarch that I have brought my son that he may serve you from his youth up. Let him take his father's place, and may he excel him in valor and in capacity to serve his king and country." Now, when our children walk in truth and love to God, it makes us rejoice that another heart is consecrated to His service. We may well rejoice in the salvation and in the sanctification of our sons and daughters, because this is the way in which the kingdom of Christ is to be extended in the world. The hand which has held the standard aloft in the midst of the fury of war is at last palsied in death. Happy is that standard-bearer who, with expiring eyes, can see his own son springing forward to grasp that staff and keep the banner still floating above the host. Happy Abraham to be followed by an Isaac! Happy David to be succeeded by a Solomon! Happy Lois, to have Eunice for a daughter, and happy Eunice to have Timothy for a son! This is the apostolic succession in which we believe and for which we pray. How, in years to come, are we to see a seed of piety flourishing in the land and the world conquered to Christ? How, indeed, but by means of the young men of Israel? We shall be sleeping beneath the green lawn of the cemetery in peace, other voices will be heard in the midst of the assemblies of the saints, and other shoulders will bear the ark of the Lord through the wilderness. Where are our successors? From where shall come these succeeding voices, and from where those needed shoulders of strength? We believe they will come from among our children. And if God grants it shall be so, we shall need no greater joy.

I will tell you why this is peculiarly the great joy of some Christian parents—it is because they have made it *a subject of persistent prayer*. That which comes to us by the gate of prayer comes into the house with music and rallying. If you have asked for it with tears, you will receive it with smiles. The joy of an answer to prayer is very much in proportion to the wrestling which went with the prayer. If you have felt, sometimes, as though your heart could break for your offspring unless they were soon converted to God, then, I will tell you, when they are converted you will feel as though your heart would break the other way out of joy to think that they have been saved. Your eyes, which have been red with weeping over their youthful follies, will one day become bright with rejoicing over holy actions which will mark the work of the grace of God in their hearts. No wonder that Hannah sang so sweetly, for she had prayed so earnestly. The Lord had heard her and the joy of the answer was increased by the former anguish of her prayer. We have no greater joy than this that our children walk in the truth. And it is a right and allowable joy. It springs from good sources and we need not be afraid to indulge it.

This joy is quickening in its effect. All who have ever felt it know what an energy it puts into them. Those of you who have never yet received it, but desire it, will, I trust, be quickened by the desire. This is what it means. Is one son in the family converted to God? In that fact we rejoice. But we cannot linger over joy for one; we are compelled to think of the others. If God has been pleased to call half a household to salvation, there is a hunger and thirst in the parent's heart after this luscious delight, and that parent cries, "Lord, let them all be brought in, let not one be left behind." Are some of you, this morning, so happy as to see all your children converted? I know some of you are. Oh how holy and how heavenly ought your families to be when God has so favored you above many of His own people. Be very grateful and while you are joyous, lay the crown of your joy at your Savior's feet. And if you have now a church in your house, maintain the ordinance of family worship with the greater zeal and holiness, and pray for others that the Lord, in like manner, may also visit them.

Beloved, have you some of your children converted while others remain unsaved? Then I charge you; let what the Lord has done for some encourage you concerning the rest. When you are on your knees in prayer, say to your heavenly Father, "Lord, You have heard me for a part of my house, I beseech You therefore, to look in favor upon it all, for I cannot bear that any of my dear children should choose to remain Your enemies and pursue the road which leads to hell. You have made me very glad with the full belief that a portion of my dear ones walk in the truth, but I am sad because I can see from the conduct of others that they have not yet been changed in heart, and therefore do not keep Your statutes. Lord, let my whole household eat of the Paschal Lamb and with me come out of Egypt, through Your grace." I am sure, beloved, this is how you feel, for every true Christian longs to see all his children the called of the Lord. Suppose it could be put to us that one child of our family must be

lost and that we should be bound to make the dreadful choice of the one to be cast away? We should never bring ourselves to it; it would be too terrible a task. God will never appoint us such a misery. We have heard of a poor Irish family on shipboard, very numerous and very needy. A kind friend proposed to the father to give up entirely one of the little ones to be adopted and provided for. It was to be entirely given up, never to be seen again or in any way claimed as theirs and the parents were to make the selection. It is a long story, but you know how the discussion between the parents would proceed. Of course they could not give up the eldest, for the simple reason that he was the first-born. The second was so like the mother. The third was too weak and sickly to be without a mother's care. So the excuses went on throughout the whole family, till they came to the last, but no one dared even to hint that the mother should be deprived of her darling. No child could be parted with; they would sooner starve together than renounce one. Now, I am sure if the bare giving up a child to be adopted by a kind friend would be a painful thing, and we could not come to a decision as to which to hand over, we could far less be able to surrender one beloved child to eternal destruction. God forbid we should dream of such a thing. We would cry day and night, "No, Lord, we cannot see them die. Spare them, we pray You!" We could almost rival the spirit of Moses, "Blot my name out of the book of life sooner than my children should be castaways. Save them, Lord! Save every one of them without exception, for Your mercy's sake!" We should make no differences in our prayers between one child and another.

Now, I am sure that we should be quite right in such desires and emotions and very wrong if we were able to sit down and contemplate the eternal ruin of our own offspring with calm indifference. God has made you parents and He does not expect you to act otherwise than as a parent's relations require you to act. That which would be unnatural cannot be right. As a Father, Himself, the Lord yearns over His erring children and He can never be grieved with us if we do the same. Nowhere do you meet with rebukes of natural parental love unless it unwisely winks at sin. Even David's bitter lamentation, "O Absalom, my son, my son, would God I had died for you! O Absalom, my son, my son!" is not censured by the Lord. Neither do we find Him rebuking Abraham for saying, "O that Ishmael might live before You!" These desires are so consistent with the natural instincts which He has, Himself, implanted, that, even if they are not always granted, they are never reprehended. Even if our child should turn out to be an Esau, or an Ishmael, or an Absalom, yet the prayers of the father for him are not forbidden. How could they be? Do not be afraid at any time when pleading for the souls of your children. Be persistent, be eager, be earnest not for the child's life, that you must leave with God. Not for the child's health, that also, you may make a secondary matter, but for the child's soul. Stint not yourself in this, but wrestle as hard as you will, and say, "I will not let go except You bless my children, every one of them! Their unregenerate state is my deepest sorrow. O Lord, be pleased to recover them from it."

Once more, this high joy of which we have spoken is *very solemn in its surroundings,* for it involves this alternative—"What if my children should not walk in the truth?" Well, that means for us, during this life, many sorrows, nights of sleeplessness and days of anxiety. I have seen good men and great men crushed beneath the daily trouble caused by their children. "Children," said one, "are doubtful blessings," and he was near the truth. Blessings they are, and they can be made by God the choicest of blessings. But if they shall grow up to be dissolute, impure, ungodly, they will make our hearts ache—

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child."

No cross is so heavy to carry as a living cross. Next to a woman who is bound to an ungodly husband, or a man who is unequally yoked with a graceless wife, I pity the father whose children are not walking in the truth, who is yet, himself, an earnest Christian. Must it always be so, that the father shall go to the House of God and his son to the alehouse? Shall the father sing the songs of Zion, and the son and daughter pour forth the ballads of Belial? Must we come to the communion table alone, and our children be separated from us? Must we go on the road to holiness and the way of peace, and behold our dearest ones traveling with the multitude the broad way, despising what we prize, and rebelling against Him whom we adore? God grant it may not be so, but it is a very solemn reflection. More solemn, still, is the vision before us if we cast our eyes across the river of death into the eternity beyond. What if our children should not walk in the truth and should die unsaved? There cannot be tears in heaven, but if there might, the celestials would look over the bulwarks of the new Jerusalem and weep their fill at the sight of their children in the flames of hell, forever condemned, forever shut out from hope. What if those to whom we gave being should be weeping and gnashing their teeth in torment while we are beholding the face of our Father in heaven! Remember the separation time must come. O you thoughtless youths! Between you and your parents there must come an eternal parting! Can you endure the thought of it? Perhaps your parents will first leave this world. Oh, that their departure might touch your consciences and lead you to follow them to heaven! But if you go first, unforgiven, impenitent sinners, your parents will have a double woe in their hour. How sadly have I marked the difference, when I have gone to the funeral of different young people. I have been met by the mother who told me some sweet story about the girl and what she did in life and what she said in death. And we have talked together before we have gone to the grave with a subdued sorrow which was near akin to joy. I have not known whether to console or to congratulate. But in other cases, when I have entered the house, my mouth has been closed. I have asked few questions and very little has been communicated to me. I have scarcely dared to touch upon the matter. By-and-by the father has whispered to me, "The worst of all is, sir, we had no evidence of conversion. We would have gladly parted with the dear one might we have had some token for

good. It breaks my wife's heart, sir. Comfort her if you can." I have felt that I was a poor comforter, for to sorrow without hope is to sorrow indeed. I pray it may never be the lot of any one of us to weep over our grown-up sons and daughters dead and twice dead. Better were it that they had never been born. Better that they had perished like untimely fruit, than that they should live to dishonor their father's God and their mother's Savior, and then should die to receive, "Depart, you cursed," from those very lips which to their parents will say, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Proportionate to the greatness of the joy before us is the terror of the contrast. I pray devoutly that such an overwhelming calamity may never happen to anyone connected with any of our families.

So far I have conceded the text to parents. Now I am going to take it for myself and my brethren.

II. You may view, dear friends, the text as specifying the PASTOR'S greatest reward. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." The minister who is sent of God has spiritual children. They are as much his children as if they had literally been born in his house, for to their immortal nature he stands under God in the relationship of father. It would seem we shall have but faint memories in heaven of earthly relationships, seeing they are there neither married nor given in marriage, but are as the angels of God. Therefore, the relationship of son and father will not exist in heaven, though I cannot but think that spirits which were grouped on earth will be associated in glory. But the duties and bonds of relationship will be ended. Relationships which relate to soul and spirit will last on. I may not look upon my sons in heaven as my children, but I shall recognize many of you as such, for it is through your soul, or rather your new-born spirit, I am related to you. No minister ought to be at rest unless he sees that his ministry brings forth fruit, and men and women are born unto God by the preaching of the word. To this end we are sent to you, not to help you to spend your Sundays respectably, nor to quiet your conscience by conducting worship on your behalf. No, sirs, ministers are sent into the world for a higher purpose. And if your souls are not saved, we have labored in vain as far as you are concerned. If in the hands of God we are not made the means of your new birth, our sermons and instructions have been a mere waste of effort and your hearing has been a mere waste of time to you, if not something worse. To see children born unto God, that is the grand thing. Therefore every preacher longs to be able to talk about his spiritual sons and daughters. John did so.

Those who are the preacher's children are often known to him. They were to John or else he could not have spoken of them as, "my children," and could not have had joy in them as his children. From this I draw the inference that it is the duty of everyone who receives spiritual benefit, and especially conversion, from any of God's servants, to let them know of it. John speaks about his children, but supposing there had been persons converted and John had never heard of it? Suppose they had never

made any profession, never joined the church? John might have lived and died without the comfort of knowing them, and without the joy of hearing that they walked in truth. Therefore, permit me to remind some of you who, I trust, know the Lord, but have never confessed His name, that you do us grievous wrong. We have sought your good and God has blessed us to you. But you deny us the fruit of our labor, which is that we should hear that God has owned our ministry in your consciences. Do not continue to defraud the laborer of his hire. You know how refreshing it is to the preacher, information that he has won a soul for Jesus. As cold water to a thirsty soul in a parching desert is such good news to us. I have had many such cups of water, but I am growing thirsty for more. I am grateful when the Lord works as He did only the other day, and I hear of it. I preached to you, one morning, a sermon to despairing souls [#1146 *Consolation for the Despairing*.] I said there might be few, then present, to whom it would apply. It was very grateful to me to find, a day or so after, that a friend from a considerable distance had been moved to come here that morning, and, after many years of despair, was brought into light and liberty through the sermon. Oh, how glad I felt! You cannot help preaching when you know that saving results follow. If God's Holy Spirit has blessed our word to you, do not refrain from acknowledging the blessing. Put on Christ publicly in baptism, according to His command—unite yourself with His church and commune with the people among whom you have been born unto God.

It seems from our text that John was in the habit of hearing about his spiritual children—"I have no greater joy than *to hear*"—mark that—"than *to hear* that my children walk in the truth." That implies that if you make a profession of your faith, people will talk about you. John could not have heard if others had not spoken. The man, who makes a profession of religion, especially in a church like this, will be watched by all the world's eyes, and not by very friendly critics, either. There are those at home, who know not the Savior, who, if they can find any fault in your character, will throw it at you, and say, "That is your religion, is it!" You will be men much spoken of, and reports of you will come to us, bad or good, we shall be sure to hear of them. We practice no spy system among the members of our church and yet somehow or other in this large church of 4,500 members, it very rarely happens that a gross act of inconsistency is long concealed. Birds of the air tell the matter. The eagle-eyed world acts as policeman for the church and with no good intent becomes a watchdog over the sheep, barking furiously as soon as one goes astray. I assure you, I have no greater joy than when I hear that the members of the church are walking in truth. When, for instance, a young Christian man dies, and his master writes to me, saying, "Have you got another member in your church like so-and-so? I never had such a servant before. I deplore his loss, and only wish I might find another of equally excellent character." Very different is our feeling when we hear it said, as we do sometimes, "I would sooner live with an ungodly man than with a professor of religion, for these professing Christians are a great deal

worse tempered and more cantankerous than mere worldly people." Shame, shame on anybody, who makes the world justly bring up so evil a report. Our joy is that there are others against whom no accusation can justly be brought.

You notice that the apostle speaks of their "walk." The world could not report their private prayers and inward emotions. The world can only speak of what it sees and understands. So John heard of their "walk," their public character and deportment. Be careful, be careful of your private lives, my brethren, and I believe your public lives will be sure to be right. Remember that it is upon your public life that the verdict of the world will very much depend, therefore watch every step, action, and word lest you err in any measure from the truth.

What is it to "walk in the truth"? It is not walking in *the* truth, or else some would suppose it meant that John was overjoyed because they were sound in doctrine and cared little for anything else. His joyous survey did include their orthodoxy in creed, but it reached far beyond. We will begin at that point and grant that it is a great joy to see our converts standing fast in the truth, and, brethren, I am glad, indeed, when I hear that you hold fast the essential, fundamental, cardinal truths of our holy faith. I rejoice that the nonsense of the so-called "modern thought" has no charms for you. You have not turned aside to doubt the deity of Christ, or the fall of man, or the substitutionary sacrifice, or the authenticity and inspiration of Scripture, or the prevalence of prayer. I am thankful that you hold fast the grand old doctrines of grace and refuse to exchange them for the intellectual moonshine so much in vogue just now. It is a great thing to hear of our people that they are abiding in the truth as they have been taught. But to *walk in truth* means something more, it signifies action in consistency with truth. If you believe that you are fallen, walk in consistency with that truth by watching your fallen nature and walking humbly with God. Do you believe that there is one God? Walk in that truth and reverence Him and none beside. Do you believe in election? Prove that you are elect, walk in truth as the chosen, peculiar people of God, zealous for good works. Do you believe in redemption? Is that a fundamental truth with you? Walk in it, for "you are not your own, you are bought with a price." Do you believe in effectual calling and regeneration as the work of the Spirit of God? Then walk in the power of God and let your holy lives prove that you have, indeed, been renewed by the supernatural work of God's grace. Walk in consistency with what you believe.

But walking in truth means yet more, it signifies "be real." Much of the walking to be seen in the world is a vain show, the masquerade of religion, the mimicry of godliness. In too many instances the man wears two faces under one hat and possesses a duplicate manhood. He is not real in anything good, he is a clever actor and no more. Alas, that one should have to say it; very much of the religiousness of this present age is nothing more than playing at religion. Why, look at the Christian year of the Ritualistic party in our national church, look at it, and tell me, what is

it? It is a kind of practical charade, of which a sort of Passion-play is one act. The life of Christ is supposed to be acted over again, and we are asked to sing carols as if Jesus were just born, eat salt fish because He is fasting, carry palms because He is riding through Jerusalem, and actually to hear a bell toll His funeral knell as if He were dying. One day He is born and another day He is circumcised, so that the year is spent in a solemn make-believe, for none of these things are happening. But the Lord Jesus sits in heaven, indignant to be made a play of. Have nothing do with such things. Leave the shadows and pursue the substance. Worship Christ as He is and then you will regard Him as "the same yesterday, today, and forever." When men see you, let them see that what you believe, you believe in downright earnest, and that there is no sham about you. Then they might call you a bigot, for which be thankful. Take the word home, keep it as an honorable title, far too good to be flung back upon your foe. They may call you a wild enthusiast. In return pray God to make them enthusiastic too, for in such a cause one cannot be too much in earnest. Do not go through the world like respectable shades, haunting the tomb of a dead Christ, but be alive with the life of God, alive from head to foot to divine realities, so will you walk in truth. See how truly the apostles bore themselves. They were ready to die for the truth they held, and all their lives they were making sacrifices for it. Let your truthfulness be so powerful a force that others can see that you are carried away by its force and governed by its impulses. "I have no greater joy than this."

Why, when a preacher sees men thus walk in truth, does he make it his great joy? Because this is the purpose of our ministry, it is this we aim at. We do not live to convert people to this sect or that, but to holy living before God and honest dealing with men. This is the grand thing and when we see this achieved, we have no greater joy. This is the designs of the gospel, itself. Christ loved His church and gave Himself for it, that He may present it to Himself, a perfect church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. A holy people are the reward of the Redeemer's passion. Well may they be the joy of those friends of the Bridegroom, who stand and rejoice greatly because the Bridegroom's joy is fulfilled. The holiness of Christians is the great means of spreading the gospel. Beyond all other missions I commend the mission of holiness. They preach best for Christ, who preach at the fireside, who preach in the shop, whose lives are sermons, who are themselves priests unto God, whose garments are vestments and whose ordinary meals are sacraments. Give us a holy, consecrated people, and we will win, for these are the omnipotent legions with which the world shall be conquered to Christ. We joy in a holy people because they bring glory to God. Mere professors do not do so. Inconsistent professors dishonor God, of whom I tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ! A people walking in truth, crown the head of Jesus. They compel even blasphemers to hold their tongues. For when they see these holy men and women, they cannot say anything against the gospel, which has produced such characters. Be-

loved, if you love your pastor, if you love the Bible, if you love the gospel, if you love Christ, if you love God, be a holy people. You, who profess to be saved, be true, be watchful. If you would not grieve us, if you would not dishonor the gospel, if you would not crucify Christ afresh and put Him to an open shame, walk as Christ would have you walk. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be in your speech and in your temper, in your business transactions with your fellow men and in your communications in the family circle, men approved of God, such as you will wish to have been when your Lord shall come. For He is at the door and blessed are those servants who are ready for His coming.

If you are not what you ought to be, I beseech you do not make a profession. And if you have made a profession, and have dishonored it, humble yourselves in the sight of God and go once more to the fountain filled with blood, for there is still forgiveness and mercy for you. Jesus will willingly receive you, even though you have done Him such despite. Return as a prodigal son to the Father's house and you shall find the fatlings killed for you, and the best robe put upon you. As we are getting near the close of the year, earnestly pray that if anything in the time past has been evil, it may suffice us to have worked the will of the flesh. And now, from now on, in the new year may we live in newness of life and enjoy together the sweet privilege of hearing that our children walk in truth, while we ourselves, through grace, are walking in it too, and the church is built up and multiplied by the Spirit of truth. May the Lord bless you all, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN'S 2ND AND 3RD EPISTLES.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—257, 45, 138.

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MY RESTORER
NO. 1149

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 28, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He restores my soul."
Psalm 23:3.

THIS sweetest of the Psalms sings of many mercies which the happy soul of the believer receives. And it traces all those benefits to one source, namely to the Good Shepherd Himself. "I shall not want." Why? Because the Lord is my Shepherd. I lie down in delicious repose in green pastures. Why? Because *"He* makes me." I march onward making holy progress beside the still waters. Why? Because *"He* leads me." In the prospect of death I am calm and free from fear. Why? Because *He* is with me, His rod and staff they comfort me. The crown is composed of many costly things. Gold, pearls and rare gems from the land beyond the river, are all blended in one diadem and that diadem is, without a question, joyfully placed upon the head of the Great Shepherd of Israel. The poet laureate of Scripture sings surpassingly in this Psalm, and every line is dedicated to the Beloved of his soul, in who were all his fresh springs. My object, while handling a part of one of his verses, shall be the same as his own. I also would speak of "things which I have made touching the King," with the view of extolling His name. I desire to glorify Him from one particular point of view, namely, as The Restorer who Himself, brings back our wandering spirits when we forsake His ways. I would just now write the first word of the text in capitals, capitals as large as you can find. "HE restores my soul." He, He alone, He and not another. Unto Him be praise!

I. The text is full of lessons and reminders, and reminds us, in the first place of OUR TRUE POSITION as believers. Let us dwell upon it in that light. What is the true position of every believer? It is that of a sheep abiding close to its Shepherd. The text suggests that the sheep has gone astray and the shepherd brings it back in order to put it into the position which it ought never to have left. The fittest condition of a believer is in communion with Christ. It ought not to be a privilege occasionally enjoyed. It should be the everyday life of the soul. We are to abide in Jesus, walk with Him and live in Him. Paul did not say, "For me to specially rejoice is Christ," or, "For me to feast on holydays is Christ;" but, "For me to live is Christ." Christ is the ordinary bread of the common meal as well as the fat things full of marrow for the banquet. He is water from the rock as well as wine on the lees well-refined. To us, His name is the

watchword of earth as we expect it to be our passport into heaven. We need fellowship with Jesus, not as a luxury for red-letter days and Sabbaths, but as the necessary provision of every day of our lives. "Abide in Me" is His Word to us for all seasons. And we ought to strive to realize it, so that always, by night and by day, on the Sabbath and equally on the weekdays, in our joys and in our cares, we should abide in Him. Christ is not merely a harbor of refuge, but a port for all weathers. Do not think, beloved, that I am setting up too high a standard, when I say this. I am so sure I am not that I will repeat what I have said, the proper condition of a child of God at all times is that he should sit with Mary at the Master's feet, or with John, should lean his head upon the beloved Redeemer's bosom.

I think this will be clear, first, if we *remember our obligations to Jesus.* When we were newly converted and first knew our sins to be blotted out, if we had been asked how we should, in the future, act towards our Lord, we should have set up a very high standard. "Did He die for me, bearing all my sins in His own body? Then I will forever view His death as the grandest miracle of love. And my grateful heart shall have communion with Him by love and praise. Has Jesus really forgiven me? Am I clean through being washed in His most precious blood, clean every whit, and made a child of God, and accepted in the Beloved? Oh, then, I will praise Him and bless Him, and magnify Him, and live to Him all my days. As to ever being weary of Him, impossible! As to ever growing cold and indifferent towards Him, better my heart should cease to beat than that it should ever be." Do I not accurately describe what you thought at the first? Have I not truthfully described the ardor of your espousal love? You have not realized your ideal, but that is what you rightly judged to be, and, beloved, it is what you ought to have been. It is not a higher condition than your solemn obligations to Christ really demand. If an angel had never heard of men before, and should suddenly alight upon this earth and meet with one of our race, and hold talks with him, he would be filled with wonder at what he discovered. Suppose that we should tell him that we fell into sin and were condemned to die, but that the great Maker of heaven and earth condescended to take upon Himself our nature, and died in our place? Can you imagine the angel's astonishment at the condescension of the Son of God? After his first amazement had passed away, he would say to us, "And do you not love Him infinitely? Are you able, within the limits of your little heart, to hold all the love you feel for such unutterable grace? How do you live? Do you not feel that you cannot do half enough for Him? You certainly will never fail in obedience to Him! In trust of Him! In zeal for Him, that would be quite impossible!" How deeply would we blush and strive to cover our faces as we confessed to our angelic questioner that for such surprising love we have made but a poor return. I am quite sure, however, that we should quite agree with the angel as to what was due to our Lord, our conscience and our heart awarding Him the highest affection and the most constant ser-

vice. Such deeds of love as Jesus has performed for us can never be adequately requited, but at the very least they ought not to be insulted by lukewarm and casual communion. They demand our heart, our soul, our all. With Him who has healed us we desire evermore to remain. With our Ransomer we would live in lifelong discipleship and be His servants, to go no more out forever.

Moreover, *our relationships to the Lord Jesus* require perpetual communion with Him. Know you not that you are the friends of Christ? And if you are friends, will you not show yourselves friendly? But how can you be friendly if by the space of a week you have no converse with Him in the house, or in the field, or by the way? Is this your kindness to your Friend? You are more than friends, you are His brethren. "The same is my brother, and sister, and mother," said He, and can you treat a brother so indifferently as to walk towards Him as if He were a stranger and a foreigner, and scarcely exchange a token of affection by the months together? Is this brotherly? Did David treat his Jonathan thus? More than that, in wondrous love Jesus has called Himself your husband and taken you to be His spouse. Is not that strange love, or the lack of it, which would allow a married pair to walk together week by week without the fellowship or affection? Surely, their marriage bands would be bonds, and their unity would be misery. I can conceive of scarcely any worse torment than conjugal union without affectionate communion. Shall I be the bride of Jesus and my love never be displayed in converse with Him? Shame upon me, a thousand times shame, if I allow a day to pass unblest with thoughts, and words, and deeds of love. Yet more, the Lord has been pleased to call us members of His body. Now, every member of the body must carry on vital fellowship with the head. It must exercise inevitable, though not always conscious, fellowship. In the spiritual body communion should be consciously enjoyed at all times. Shall the hand, become indifferent to the head or the foot refuse commerce with the brain? If we are in good health, no such schism in the body will ever occur, but with the head all the members will abide in affectionate, unbroken communion. We may suspect paralysis if life ceases to flow through the entire corporate body, and so communion is suspended. It is clear to all who are taught of God that our relationships certainly require of us that we abide in the Lord Jesus.

Moreover, beloved, this case ought to need no pleading, for if *we would have happiness,* where is happiness to be found but in walking near to Jesus? I speak what I know, and the common testimony of all the saints is with me, when I say that out of heaven there is no heaven but nearness to Christ. Fellowship with Him is Paradise without a serpent in it. It is Canaan itself, without the Canaanite foe. Communion with Jesus is the porch of glory. It is the Saturday night of the eternal Sabbath, the dawn of the heavenly day. Communion with Christ, if it is not actually heaven, is certainly the choicest suburb of the new Jerusalem. Did not our poet cry—

"Where can such sweetness be,
As I have tasted in Your love,
As I have found in Thee?"

Now, men do not ordinarily need to be stirred up to that which is their delight. Their spirits fly after their joys as eagles to the spoil. Where their heart moves with pleasure, it draws all their powers after it. And if, indeed, it is so, (and who shall contradict it?), that fellowship with Christ is the richest of all joys, the most intense of all delights, why are we so hard to move? Oh, how sluggish are our hearts, how dull our spirits, that we do not fly after Jesus with rapture of desire and do not labor perpetually to abide in Him.

While this should draw us, another consideration should drive us, namely, that *our daily necessities* demand that we should live in fellowship with Him. If we are foolish and ignorant, where should we dwell, but with the Teacher? If always weak, to whom should we resort but to the strong for strength? Let the child abide by its parent, the scholar with the master, the patient by his physician, the poor man with his helper. To whom should we go in our hourly needs but to Him who has, up to now, been our all in all? Israel could not afford to be a single day without the manna, nor can we be satisfied for an hour without the bread of life. "Without Me, you can do nothing," says our Lord, and we have proven His words to be true. Do we need more humiliating evidence? Are we willing to fall into a condition in which we can do nothing else but sin? I hope not. We ought never to be satisfied, except when abiding in Jesus, we are clothed with His power and are bringing forth much fruit to His praise.

Remember, yet further, that when out of fellowship with Christ *our perils are infinite.* When unfaithful to His love we are readily seduced by every temptation. Without His love in our hearts we become victims to other loves, which lead us into idolatry, plunge us into hurtful lusts and poison the wells of our joy. We must either be enthralled by the surpassing love of Jesus, or we shall be fascinated by the world's deceits. One of the two masters must rule us, either the Prince of the power of the air, or the King of Kings. When Christ is with us we are safe, for what wolf can rend a sheep when it is close to the shepherd's hand? When we are away from Jesus, we are not only in peril, but are already despoiled. To lose fellowship with Jesus is loss enough, in itself, even if no further calamity occurs. Ships without a pilot, cities without watchmen, babes without a nurse, are we without Jesus. We cannot do without Him. The less we attempt it the better. Samson without his locks is the sad type of a believer out of fellowship. How dare we go forth to business on any day without the presence of the Lord? As well might the warrior go to battle without shield and buckler. Should we not daily pray, "If Your presence go not with me, carry me not up there"? How can we go to our beds till He has kissed us with the kisses of His mouth? May not even the dreams and visions of the night prove our downfall if our souls are not committed to

His keeping? For my part, I love to murmur to myself, as I place my head on my pillow, those charming lines—

"Sprinkled afresh with pardoning blood,
I lay me down to rest,
As in the embraces of my God,
Or on my Savior's breast."

The benefits of fellowship with Christ should constrain us to abide in it. If any man would grow in grace, if he would be filled with the Spirit, if he would know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, especially if he would be made like to Him in all things, who is the Head, he must abide in Christ. The whole compass of a Christian's permissible ambition is to be realized in fellowship with Jesus and nowhere else. All that I ought to be, or can desire to be, when I am in a right state, I can enjoy in my Lord, by walking near to Him. Nothing good can any believer obtain by forsaking his Master. Following Christ afar off is evil, only evil. And that continually abiding in Him is peace, joy, holiness, heaven. Therefore, beloved, I say again, let us strive after that which ought to be the habitual position of every Christian, namely, abiding in Christ. This is for babes in grace as well as men in Christ Jesus, for the obscure as well as the famous.

II. Our text, in the second place, reminds us of OUR FREQUENT SIN. "He restores my soul"—He often does it. He is doing it now. Now, the Lord would not do what is unnecessary and therefore, this shows me that I often wander from Him, or else I would not need to be brought back. Beloved, I grieve to say that with man's professions of godliness, suspended communion is the chronic state of things. I must confess my inability to comprehend the Christian life of many who are called Christians. It is not for us to judge their real condition before God, nor will we attempt to do so, but we cannot help observing the inconsistency of their acts. They have believed in Christ, let us hope. Let us hope, also, that their faith produces enough good works to prove itself to be a living faith. But, for all that, their religion is cold, joyless, and passionless. There are thousands of Christian people whose religion seems to lie entirely in attending religious services on Sunday, and occasionally, perhaps, coming out on a weekday to a lecture. They observe private devotions of a very stereotyped order and keep a Bible somewhere or other, and this is about it. To them prayer is a formality, praise is forgotten, the reading of the Bible is a drudgery, meditation a mere memory and their whole Christianity more like a mummy than a thing of life. With them the complaint that they are out of communion with Jesus is superseded by the question, "Were they ever in it?" I am afraid we have in this church and in all churches, scores and hundreds of members whose highest emotions in reference to love to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ reaches no higher than the inquiry—

"Do I love the Lord or not?
Am I His, or am I not?"

Conscious enjoyment of the love of Jesus and familiar communion with Him they know nothing of, and indeed, they look upon such things as the luxuries of a high class of saints, very pleasant to read of in biographies, but not matters of daily possession. They heartily admire the good people who can attain to such eminent positions, but to dwell there themselves, has never occurred to them as at all possible. Beloved, this is a sad state of things. It is a condition of life in which I tremble for you, because you are starved in the midst of plenty, you are willfully pinching yourselves with poverty while infinite wealth is all around you. You live as hired servants and not as sons. You get the duty of religion without the enjoyment of religion. You wear its yoke but do not feed in its pasture. You seem to me to forego all the cream of our holy faith and to partake of nothing but its skimmed milk. You leave the sunny plains of communion for the frozen regions of negligent living and therefore you shiver with fear while others exult with gladness. You have chosen your position in the outer courts of the temple. You never enter into the holy of holies. You do not pass within the veil to behold the glory of the Lord. You are sailing to heaven, but you are stowed away in the hold in the dark. You appear to me in your religion to live like the beggars who come round to our back doors for the bones and the stale crusts. And therefore I am not very much surprised when I hear that some of you feel a craving for amusements and say that you are very dull, and need lively company and gaiety to make life bearable. If my child were to say that he must go continually to the confectioner's or to the eating-house, I should say to myself, "Surely the food on my table is sufficient for him." But if upon inquiry I found that he did not eat at my table except occasionally, and that he always made choice of the barest bones and driest crusts, I should be at no loss to comprehend why he was so frequently seen at other places of supply. If you are not living upon Jesus, and rejoicing in the measureless bliss which He is capable of bestowing upon you, I do not marvel if you go off to the world for your sweetmeats and feel a leaning towards the leeks and the garlic and the onions of Egypt. Oh, dear brothers and sisters, if you are, indeed, His people, may the Holy Spirit save you from the dull religion in which you live and bring you into that condition in which you shall see your Lord, abide in Him, and rejoice in Him. A miner who lives the most of his days underground is not doing his country justice when he speaks of it as dark, close, and suffocating. It is so down below, but it is not so up above. Religion wears but a grim aspect to those who know nothing of its secret joys, its sacred banquets, its ecstasies, and its calm satisfactions. There is a bleak side and a sunny side to every hill. Those who are careless in their fellowship will know the worst side of things. The bright-eyed dweller in the sunny south is a very different man from the Eskimo who drive their dogs among the ice fields and hide away through long months of winter, in which the sun never sends forth a glimmer to cheer the earth. Who cares to be one of

the Eskimos of Christianity, or the Laps and Fins of the church? Yet, alas, these abound on all sides.

We have to confess that others of us, in whom this departure from Christ is not chronic, are nevertheless, subject to acute attacks of declension, and there are seasons, when it is indeed, well for us that He restores our souls. How soon are we turned out of the way! How little a thing may mar our joyful fellowship with Christ! Have you been in worldly company in the evening? Did you marvel that you could not enjoy communion at evening prayer? Have you become fond of your possessions, or have you been eager to increase them? Then your idols have grieved your Lord. Have you been unreconciled to your losses and fretted against God for His dark providences? "If you walk contrary to Me," He says, "I will walk contrary to you." When our proud spirits chafe and fret against our heavenly Father, we cannot expect smiles and caresses from Him. We may easily lose fellowship with Christ by pride and self-esteem. If He indulges us with happy hours of sacred joy, we are very apt to think that we are somebody, and straightway we hold our heads very high. And whenever that happens we are very likely to fall into the mire and be there until our own garments abhor us and we cry for help like the sinners we are. Christ delights to meet us on terms of grace. He is to be fullness and we emptiness, He the mighty Helper and we the fainting sinner, He the Savior and we the lost ones. While we say that we are rich and increased in goods, He knows that we are false and He leaves us. But when we see that He has the gold and the white raiment, and we the nakedness and the beggary, then are we arrived at terms which befit both Him and us. Vain is it to boast, for we have no beauty. His are the eyes which are as a flame of fire, His countenance goodly as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His is the crown of light and the mantle of glory. Unto Him must all honor be ascribed. Those who honor Him, He will honor. Humility sits at Jesus' feet and that is the chosen place of loving fellowship.

We may lose the presence of Christ by forgetfulness of duty or of truth. We may, on the other hand, lose it by evil thoughts and absorption in fleeting cares. We may lose the company of Christ by inconsistent actions or by idle conversations. "Oh," some of you say, "is that so? Will Jesus be gone from us so soon?" It is even so. Those who know Him best have found out that He is like His Father and there is a trait in His Father's character which is very conspicuous in the Son. It is written, "The Lord your God is a jealous God," and Jesus is a jealous lover. He will not cast away His people. He is faithful to the worst of them. But if we do not walk with Him in holiness, He will withdraw Himself from us. Can two walk together unless they are agreed? If we grieve Him He will make us grieve. Cold, unloving, irreverent walking will soon cause the beams of the Sun of righteousness to glance no more upon us. Blessed be the name of our Beloved, He comes back before long, and He says, "For a small moment have I forsaken you, but with great mercy will I gather

you." But even the small moments of His forsaking are all too long. A little of His absence is painful for a true spirit to bear. But I leave this mournful point for something more consoling.

III. The text reminds us also, of OUR LORD'S FAITHFUL LOVE. "He restores my soul." This is not what He might have done, or would have done had He been changeable as we are. There are some who teach that Jesus leaves His roaming sheep to perish. As a punishment for their wanderings He gives them up to the wolf. I hope that very few believe that doctrine now. It is so dishonoring to the good Shepherd that I hope all God's people will give it up once and for all. Yet such was the belief of many at one time. Ah, I do not wonder that some believed it, for I have often been hard pressed with the fear that it would turn out to be so in my own case. But I am here this morning to say concerning my Lord, "He restores my soul." He has not cast me off, or left me to myself, or abandoned me to my own devices. But in love to my soul He has plucked my feet out of the net, drawn me up from the horrible pit and set my feet upon the rock of His immutable love. To leave His sheep to perish is not like our Savior. The heart refuses credence to such an idea, it so unlike Him. My witness is that, "He restores my soul." He has done this so often that He may well be described as always doing it. The Psalmist puts it in the present tense, as if the Lord was in the habit of doing so, and was even at this moment in the act of restoring his soul. Truly I must confess that I wander and He restores me. Child of God, as numerous as your sins have been, so numerous have His restorations been. After a hundred times erring, you might have provoked Him to say, "He is given unto his idols, let him alone. My Spirit shall no longer strive with him." But no, He turns His hand again upon you and once more leads you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. The mother forgets not her suckling, though it is often fretful and peevish. She still has compassion upon the son of her womb, and even thus it is with Jesus. We are too deeply engraved on the palms of His hands to be at last, left to die. We have cost Him too dearly for Him to relinquish us. Having restored our soul a hundred times, He still restores it. It is the way of Him. It is the habit of His love. The text lovingly insinuates that He is ready to restore us now. He is at His old work again. Even now, "He restores my soul." Where are you, dear brother? Dear sister? Have you grown very dull and cold of late? Jesus is waiting to make your heart burn within you. Do you feel half-dead spiritually? Your Lord and Master is even now, ready to quicken you by His Word and to restore unto you the joy of His salvation.

If you ask me why the Lord is thus quick to restore His people, I can find no answer in them or their merits, but a little further on the psalmist gives you the reason why Christ thus acts in faithfulness and tenderness. "He leads me in the paths of righteousness *for His name's sake*." He would not restore us for our sakes. There is nothing in us which could be pointed out to the eye of justice as a claim for restoration, though much might be remembered which, on the footing of the law,

would ensure our ruin. Here is our safety. The Lord Jesus has willed to save us, and He stands to His purpose and decree. He has put forward His own veracity and immutability as guarantees of the covenant. His own honor would be in jeopardy should one of His people be lost. Therefore for His own name's sake He restores the wanderer, lest His enemies should say, "God has forsaken His people," and lest the hosts of hell should boast, saying, "The Lord began to save them, but He was not able to finish the work." "For His name's sake." Deep and blessed reason! Immutable, immovable foundation of comfort! For His name's sake He restores our souls when we wander from His way. Strange are the means He uses. Sometimes it is a most heavy rod. At other times a sweetly fascinating love call. Singular are the modes of dealing with His people. He will break them in pieces and crush them beneath His feet, apparently in hot displeasure, but all with the view of making them sick of sin and eager after Himself. He will tear them as a lion tears his prey, and this not to destroy, but to save them. Is it not written, "I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal"? Often by dispensations of terror He leads us into ways of grace and frequently that which appears to be our utter destruction ends in our complete restoration, according to His grace. Let the text stand as a type and testimony of His immutable love. "He restores my soul."

IV. During the short time which remains for me to discourse to you, I want to throw my whole strength into the last consideration. Our text, emphasized as I have emphasized it, reminds us of HIS SUPREME POWER. "HE restores my soul." HE, HE, HE alone restores my soul. From first to last my revivals and refreshing come from Him. He Himself first made my soul to live—yes, He was life itself to me. You had no life, beloved, till Jesus passed by and saw you lying dead in sin and said to you, "Live." You were like Lazarus in the tomb. You were beginning to stink with corruption and sin, and His voice, when it said, "Lazarus, come forth," was life to you. You did not help the Savior in your quickening, how could you? You exercised no concurrent action. He took the first step and quickened you when you were dead in sin. He began to save you because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. You owe your regeneration entirely to Him and it is not surprising that your revival should come from the same source. Surely He who regenerated can restore. He who created can renew. Restoration is not a more difficult work—no, it is but a secondary work compared with the new creating of the soul. The Lord, even Jesus Christ, who did at the first give you life, can revive you again, and He can do it by Himself, being to your soul her medicine as well as her physician. All the evils under which a Christian smarts arise from the absence of Jesus, or else obtain their power to injure from the fact of the Lord's being away. There are corruptions which dwell always in us, but these do not dare to show their faces when Jesus reigns within in revealed glory. The traitors lurk in their holes when the

king is in the city, they will not venture forth till they hear that He is offended and is gone. While the flag flies on the castle to mark that my lord is at home, His enemies are on their best behavior, for they have a dread of His sword. When our fellowship with Jesus is active, sin lies dormant, or is so thoroughly subdued that it makes but a struggling gasp for life. So, then, if at this time I have become proud, or petulant, or idle, or cannot pray, or will not submit to the divine will, or have fallen into spiritual sickness—it is quite certain that all the mischief is occasioned by the loss of my Lord's company, and it is clear that His coming back to me will restore my soul. If His absence has developed all this evil, then His presence can surely put it away.

Should it happen that the temptation is outward, still no outward temptation has any force when Christ is present. Let all the world's charms attempt to seduce us, they are horrible distortions when contrasted with the loveliness of Jesus. Only let us see His face and all earthly witcheries have lost their enchantment. Suppose that we were tempted to skepticism? Christ is the antidote for that venom. No man doubts when Christ is present with him. At the sight of Him even Thomas cries, "My Lord and my God." Can we despond while He consoles? Can the children of the bride chamber mourn while the Bridegroom is with them? On the other hand, pride cannot live where Jesus is seen. "When I saw Him I fell at His feet as dead," said the beloved apostle. His presence is the death of every sin, the life of every grace. Therefore it is that the text says, "He restores my soul." The hunger, famine, and disease of war need but one cure, and that is peace. The woes of the believer's soul need but one remedy, and that lies in the words, "Abide in Me." The presence of Christ has everything in it that the soul can possibly need. I see the green leaves of a plant most dear to all who love the woods in spring. It is now nestling under a hedge upon a shelving bank, just above a trickling stream. I ask it why it does not bloom and it whispers to me that it will bloom by-and-by. "But, sweet primrose, why not put forth your lovely flower at once and gladden us with your beauty?" She answers, "I am waiting for Him." For whom do you tarry, you herald of spring?—

"All love on you to rest their weary eyes,
Reading therein a history of dearest ties."

She meekly answers, "I am waiting for my lord, the sun." Do you not need other friends and helpers? "No," she says, "the coming of my lord will be enough, and when he puts forth his strength I shall put on my beauty." But will you not need soft, pearly drops of dew to glisten on the leaves? Are not your blossoms most frail to gaze upon when all around keeps time and tune therewith, when the violet and harebell are in your company, when the buds are swelling and "the green-winged linnet sings"? To which she replies, *"He* will bring them, *he* will bring them all." But are you not afraid of the killing frosts and the dreary snowstorms? *"He* will chase them all away," says the little plant. "I shall be safe enough when he brings on the spring." Believer, you are that plant and

Jesus is your sun. He will bring you healing beneath His wings and joy in the light of His countenance.

He restores our entire manhood. Every regenerated faculty grows strong when He is near. Every grace drinks in new life from communion with Christ. Faith triumphs, love burns, hope prophesies, patience becomes strong for endurance and courage is bold for conflict. Christ is such fare that all the graces can feed on Him, and all grow strong upon the sacred morsels.

The best of all is that He is a restoration which is available now, available at once. I felt, the other day, heavy at heart, dull, dead. I thought of myself as though I were a branch of a tree cut off and so I meditated thus with myself—"If I am a branch of the vine, and have been removed from my stem, my only hope is to get back into the place from where I came and be grafted in again, and begin to suck the sap again, and feel the life flowing through me," Then was it sweet to remember that there is no possible state into which a believer could fall, even if it were the most desperate that could be conceived, but what Christ can restore him perfectly and at once. Then for my own comfort and renewal I began with my Lord thus—I looked at Him upon the cross. I stood before Him as a sinner and wondered at Him that He should die for sinners. And I trusted Him and I said to Him, "Lord, You know I trust You. I have no hope but in You and I cling to You as a limpet clings to the rock. With all my heart and soul I cling." I began to feel the sap flow from the stem into my branch at once. Directly I had got into contact with my Lord, by a simple faith, I felt that virtue went out of Him to heal my soul. Once having established the flow of the sap, it flowed more, and more, and more. For as I thought about my salvation through Him, being myself guilty, and He my righteousness, I began to love Him, and my soul began to glow with a passion towards Him. And I wanted to be telling others what a dear, good Savior He was, and in a few moments after I had bemoaned myself as dead to Him and a castaway, I felt as much warmth of love to Him as ever I had done in all my life, and could say in the language of the spouse, "Or ever I was aware, my Soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib". Now, I believe that this is the natural process to go through for the restoring of your soul. Some of you professors may be feeling, "I do not know how it is, but I am not what I ought to be. I am out of gear with Christ. I wish to get into a better state of heart, to be more pleasing to God then I am, by walking nearer to Him." If such is your state, mind what you do. Try what I have described or, unless you are wide awake, there will come to you Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, and tell you there are other ways of getting your souls restored. First, he says, you should repent bitterly of all this wandering of heart. That is correct enough, but who is to give you this repentance? And then, says he, you must be more attentive to the outward means of grace, you must set aside longer times for prayer and be more diligent in searching the Scriptures privately. That also is all correct. Whatever he bids you that observe and do, as Christ said of

the Pharisees, but that is not the way to obtain restoration of soul. The way to heaven is never round by Sinai. Always be afraid of directors who lead you in that direction. All our healing lies in Christ, Christ is the Physician and Christ is the Medicine, too.

The way to get your soul restored is not to try to restore it yourself, nor to undergo any processes by which it may work itself right. But go straight away to Christ and lay hold on Him, just as you are whatever your condition may be. Coming into contact with Him, you shall soon have to sing in the words of the text, "He restores my soul." Let others talk of their sacraments, "He restores my soul." Let men boast and glory of special ways of raising their souls to heaven, "He restores my soul." Let some rejoice because their souls need no restoring, but are always strong, I cannot say that, but I can say, "He restores my soul." I hope this morning I shall have many beloved brothers and sisters of like mind, who will go out of this house saying not only, "I knew He could restore my soul," but, "He restores my soul. I was very cold when I came in here, as cold as the weather itself, but Jesus has thawed the ice of my heart." Perhaps you have to confess that you were in a very bad state of mind, ugly-tempered and I do not know what besides, worried out of anything like peace and rest. Now, then, is the time to try the great Restorer, before you leave your seat, labor to get into contact with Christ, by the power of His Holy Spirit. Do, I pray, return to Him as at the first. O branch, come back to the stem. Let the sap flow again. "But I am not in a fit condition," you say. What! Have you gone back to that old Sinai idea of fitness? Have you gone back to that legal demand? Come as you are. Come as you are to Jesus. I mean you saints. Are you going to play the fool as sinners do? Sinners say they are to get ready for Christ, and fools they are for saying it. Are you about to say the same? You will be worse fools still. Come just now. Whatever you have been, let the connection between you and Christ be consciously felt and quickened by an immediate application to Him by simple faith, and you shall yet say, as you rise into more than your former vigor, "He restores my soul."

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END OF VOLUME 19.